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 Listen to Deborah Short share more information on scaffolding instruction.

# Extend Your Students' *Reach* and Move Them Toward Independence. *by Deborah Short*

When we get in our cars and drive away, we usually have a destination in mind. Furthermore, we have a route planned for getting there.

Consider your students and your instruction. What is the destination you would like your students to reach at the end of their year with you? How far do they need to go to get there? How will you guide them along the way?

In the best of all possible worlds, our students would be proficient readers, writers and speakers of English after their time with us. That is rarely the case, unless we begin the school year with advanced learners. However, we can ensure that students make significant progress towards proficiency if we scaffold our instruction appropriately. And what is scaffolding? Simply put, it is meeting students where they are and leading them to where you want them to go.

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that students' language learning is promoted through social interaction and contextualized communication. Teachers can guide students to construct meaning from texts and classroom discourse and to understand complex content concepts by scaffolding instruction. When scaffolding, teachers pay careful attention to students' capacity for working in English. Teachers begin instruction at the current level of student understanding and move students to higher levels through tailored support.

Scaffolding strategies vary. One way they do so is by adjusting their speech (e.g., paraphrasing, giving examples, elaborating student responses) to help students comprehend and participate in discussions (Bruner, 1978). Another way teachers scaffold is by adjusting instructional tasks so they are incrementally more

and more challenging (e.g., preteach vocabulary before a reading selection, have students draft an outline before writing an essay) and students learn the skills necessary to complete tasks on their own

(Applebee & Langer, 1983). The acquisition of academic vocabulary also needs to be scaffolded. Many academic words are used infrequently, so teachers need to create motivating contexts in which students can use and become familiar with academic language (Corson, 1997). Teachers also scaffold by using visuals, context, gestures, and other ways of conveying information.

Without such teacher assistance, English language learners (ELLs) may fail to acquire fully their new language. It is important for teachers of ELLs to employ both verbal and instructional scaffolds to extend communication opportunities for students. Teachers need to be aware of students' proficiency and skill levels and plan instruction that provides comprehensible input yet moves the students further along the

second language acquisition path. Effective scaffolding can increase the students' independence in performing a task or learning a new concept through the gradual release of responsibility (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Teachers using *National Geographic Reach* have a wide array of scaffolding features to support students at their level of proficiency and to move them to higher levels of language use. These features enable teachers to:

- Adjust teacher speech to help students comprehend
- Support students in using language at increasingly higher levels
- Adjust instructional tasks so students are successfully challenged at their levels

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## 1 Adjust teacher speech to help students comprehend

Teachers play a critical role in language acquisition for students because they provide models of appropriate speech, word choice, intonation, and fluency. With *National Geographic Reach*, teachers use a variety of verbal scaffolds to help students understand new information and to advance students' English language use, comprehension, and thinking skills. They also regulate their speech according to the proficiency levels of their students, even when they have multiple levels in a class.

- **Think-alouds** By modeling and articulating their thought processes, teachers make their thinking apparent to children. They can explain the steps they go through to solve a problem, the reactions they have to a plot twist in a story, and the judgments they make to reject or accept possible answers to a question. Think-alouds are provided throughout the instructional plan; teachers can use them as provided or refer to them in developing their own think-alouds.

Think Aloud	Wr
1. Plan	
I will make a RAFT to plan my writing. I will take the role of myself.	Role
Who is my audience? I will share my captions about sea turtles with the class.	Aud
Repeat the think aloud for audience (class) and form (captions). I'd like to draw a picture of a sea turtle. I will write a caption to go with about the picture.	

- **Rate and Amount of Speech** Teachers adjust their rate of speech to the students' proficiency levels—speaking more slowly to beginners and at a more normal pace to advanced and transitional learners. They also moderate how much they say at any one time, speaking in phrases with pauses as needed.
- **Sophistication of Speech** For beginning level students, teachers use simple sentences and repeated terms. For more proficient learners, they use complex sentences, more synonyms, and more pronoun referents.
- **Repetition** By repeating what he or she has said, the teacher adds processing time for the students and a chance to double check what they heard. By repeating for the class what a student has said, the teacher can project the comment or response more clearly, and model correct pronunciation.
- **Restatement and Paraphrase** Restating and paraphrasing utterances by the teacher or other students also has value. It is a way to confirm or clarify what has been said, for example, appending a definition of a term or explanation of a statement, or rephrasing a statement using better known words.
- **Elaboration** When teachers elaborate and extend student responses, they model more sophisticated language use and how to connect ideas through conjunctions, comparisons, causation, and the like. Elaboration promotes rich discussion among students.

## 2 Support students in using language at increasingly higher levels

Students also learn through interaction with one another and with their teachers. Students need extensive oral language practice to deepen content and vocabulary knowledge and to practice academic language functions, such as clarifying information, negotiating meaning, and evaluating opinions. *National Geographic Reach* provides a rich array of verbal prompts, language frames, and other scaffolds that support students in generating academic talk. These include:

- **Providing models of good speech** Students using *National Geographic Reach* have access to a wide variety of good speech models in the Language of the Day, read alouds, songs and chants, and many other listening activities.
- **Elaborating responses** Teachers too often accept a brief answer and then add to it themselves. *National Geographic Reach* encourages students to extend their thoughts with prompts like:
  - *Tell me more.*
  - *What do you mean by that?*
  - *Who can add on?*
  - *Who has a different idea?*
- **Providing sentence starters and academic language frames** Language frames help students organize their thoughts and use academic vocabulary in meaningful ways. They provide the support for students to articulate their ideas and can be differentiated with more structure (or less) as needed. Examples include:
  - Phrases to agree or disagree (e.g., I agree with you but. . . , I disagree with you and think that. . . )
  - Phrases to report on findings or evidence (e.g., We discovered that. . . , Our group found that. . . , The article explains that. . . )
  - Phrases to use to ask for clarification (e.g., Could you say that again?, Could you say that another way?)

**Differentiate**

**Academic Language Frames**

**Make Inferences**

■ I read \_\_\_\_\_  
I know \_\_\_\_\_  
And so \_\_\_\_\_

■ I read \_\_\_\_\_  
Because I know \_\_\_\_\_, I can infer \_\_\_\_\_

■ The text says \_\_\_\_\_  
That relates to what I know about \_\_\_\_\_  
I can infer \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

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◀ Academic Language Frames provide multilevel support to help students express their ideas using academic vocabulary.

- **Cooperative learning** Proven cooperative learning techniques are embedded in lesson activities so students can discuss topics, accomplish roles, and apply their new knowledge collaboratively.

- **Providing extended speech activities** The amount of talking a student does can be adjusted by his or her proficiency level. Activities such as oral presentations, multi-day projects, and cooperative learning tasks generate richer, elaborated speech.

### 3 Adjust instructional tasks so students are successfully challenged at their levels

Instructional scaffolds help teachers make information accessible to students and teach procedures students can use to accomplish tasks.

- **Visuals** One of the easiest ways to convey information is through a visual format. *National Geographic Reach* makes extensive use of visuals including videos, whiteboard presentations, photographs, illustrations, tables and charts, and other graphics. This visual approach helps students with limited language proficiency to quickly assimilate new vocabulary, concepts, and processes.

**Academic Vocabulary**

**More Key Words**

Use these words to talk about "Two Old Potatoes and Me" and "America's Sproutings."

<p><b>characteristic</b> (kahr-ik-ri-eh-tik) noun</p> <p>A <b>characteristic</b> is how something looks or what something does. A <b>characteristic</b> of this plant is white flowers.</p>	<p><b>conditions</b> (kohn-dih-shuhn) noun</p> <p>When <b>conditions</b> are right, good things happen. Clear skies and wind are good <b>conditions</b> for sailing.</p>	<p><b>depend</b> (di-pend) verb</p> <p>To <b>depend</b> means to need something or someone for support. A baby <b>depends</b> on its mother.</p>
<p><b>growth</b> (gruhth) noun</p> <p>The <b>growth</b> of something is how much bigger it gets.</p>	<p><b>produce</b> (pruh-doo) verb</p> <p>To <b>produce</b> means to make something. This factory <b>produces</b> cars.</p>	<p><b>Talk Together</b></p> <p>Use a <b>Key Word</b> to ask a question. A partner uses a <b>Key Word</b> to answer.</p> <p>What is a <b>characteristic</b> of some plants?</p> <p>Some plants <b>produce</b> fruit.</p>

Add words to My Vocabulary Notebook  
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◀ Visuals support instruction

- **Process writing and writing frames** The writing process exemplifies scaffolded instruction (Rogers & Graham, 2008). In each unit of *National Geographic Reach*, students are assisted in creating their own texts. In the prewriting phase they generate ideas and talk them through with partners. When drafting, they begin to connect those ideas and often use writing frames for structured support. In the editing phase they receive feedback to strengthen their writing and they learn to give targeted feedback as well.
- **Peer tutoring** *National Geographic Reach* includes many opportunities for peer collaboration and tutoring. Students who have background knowledge about a topic can share their knowledge with classmates, explaining the content and modeling the language used to convey information. Students who have stronger literacy skills can assist others in reading and writing activities, explaining procedures or modeling tasks.
- **Cooperative learning** Cooperative activities are extremely useful for scaffolding instruction. Students support one another as they are learning the subject matter, and they practice their oral language skills as they interact verbally. *National Geographic Reach* provides many opportunities for students to interact using research-based Cooperative Learning Routines.

## Conclusion

For students to have full access to the core curriculum, they need to be proficient in the language of schooling. Yet, the development of academic English is a complicated endeavor that involves more than just additional vocabulary development and grammar practice. Academic language is used in different ways in different contexts. The writing of a scientific lab report is not the same as the writing and delivery of a persuasive speech. The reading process used to follow steps in solving a math problem is not the same as those used to interpret a poem. Students need semantic and syntactic knowledge and facility with language functions. In their various classes, English learners must join their emerging understandings of the English language with the content they are studying in order to complete assigned academic tasks.

Regardless of proficiency level, all students can make progress in their language development. To achieve this, classroom communication and instruction need to be scaffolded so that tasks and discussions consistently move students along the pathway to second language acquisition and literacy knowledge. Teachers who scaffold appropriately shift responsibility for using new skills and strategies to students as quickly as they are able. However, students are not expected to leap to a new level of understanding and language use. Instead they are supported and guided along the way, reaching forward one step at a time towards their destination.

- **Graphic organizers** Graphic organizers are used extensively as tools for comprehending text, learning new vocabulary and concepts, and identifying important information and key points.
- **Comprehension strategy instruction** *National Geographic Reach* provides explicit instruction, modeling, and practice in learning strategies with authentic text. Teachers should capitalize on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that students already use in their first language because these strategies will transfer to the new language (August & Shanahan, 2006) and students will use more effective strategies as they become more proficient in their second language (Riches & Genesee, 2006).