

Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads



Scaffolding: Looking through learners' eyes.

A forum about learner development facilitated by Deryn Verity, introduced and reported by Ellen Head

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This paper reports on a workshop about making links between socio-cultural theory and our teaching practice, using the concept of scaffolding. The workshop activities, devised and led by Deryn Verity, are briefly introduced and then seven different projects are reported. Various threads emerge from each paper to clarify and broaden our understanding of scaffolding and mediation. Bradley relates how her students responded to scaffolding through empathetic listening; Harada shows how Venn diagrams were a tool for clarifying her understanding of cultural factors in textbooks; Head reflects on learning Japanese *keigo* and draws lessons for her teaching; Kojima outlines a program for teaching strategies for scaffolding cooperative learning; Ozawa gives details of scaffolding speed reading strategies for TOEIC; Shimo discusses the importance of expressing ideas in one's own words while dialoguing with others; and Stewart discusses scaffolding writing skills during her training as an online writing teacher.

本稿は足場組みという概念を利用して、社会文化理論と教授実践を結びつけたワークショップの報告である。ワークショップでは、デリン・ヴェリティが考案した活動が、ヴェリティの指示のもと簡単に紹介された後、7つのプロジェクトについての報告がなされた。それぞれの報告は、足場組みと仲裁という概念をより明確に理解し、さらに理解を深める糸口となった。ブラッドリーは共感的リスニングを通して学生が足場組みにどのような反応を示したかを報告、原田は教科書に出てくる文化的要因の理解を深めるためのベン図の利用法を示し、ヘッドは日本語の敬語の学びを振り返り、自分の教授に対する教訓を導く。小嶋は足場組みのある協力的学習を利用した教授方略のためのプログラムを紹介、小沢はTOEICのための、足場組みを提供したスピードリーディング方略の詳細を説明、下は他者と対話する中で自分の考えを言葉にすることの重要性を議論する。そして、スチュワートは、オンライン上のライティング教師対象の研修中におけるライティングスキルの足場組みについて議論する。

I think scaffolding is important for our learning. For example, we can't understand words without someone's scaffolding at the beginning. We need scaffolding to develop. Also, helping others will be helpful for us. We will learn to help.

Student of Education, University of Miyazaki

“Scaffolding” as a metaphor for helping—the help an expert offers to a novice, a teacher to a student, or two students to each other—has been a useful and much-used term since its first use by Bruner in 1976 to refer to adult-child interaction (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). The term is grounded in a socio-cultural understanding of learning, according to which all learning occurs between people first, and all learning is to do with the mediation of raw experience by various kinds of tools and strategies.

Deryn Verity opened the forum with a suggestion that “scaffolding” is a word that has been so much used that it has become empty, citing Lantolf’s recent reservations about it. Lantolf (2007) suggests that scaffolding is sometimes misunderstood as being narrowly focused on the achievement of a particular task, as when an adult helps a child to dress. Instead, we should see scaffolding as a means whereby the learner’s way of thinking about the task is transformed. Verity challenged forum participants to infuse “scaffolding” with meaning again by recalling and reflecting upon their own narratives about learning. At the heart of this paper are seven stories about learning and teaching, relating how seven different teachers made connections between their experiences of learning and their experiences of teaching, using “scaffolding” as a guiding framework for their interpretations. Verity created a workshop designed to lead to a deeper understanding of scaffolding and associated ideas such as how all learning is contextual and “how help can be helpful”. To set the stories in context, a brief account of the workshop activities is given below.

The stories were presented as posters during the forum. This was the culmination of a process which started several months earlier with discussions at two informal get-togethers in Tokyo, readings posted on the Learner Development website (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Yu, 2004; Larkin, 2002), and a call for posters from potential speakers. During the forum all participants were asked to think of their own learning stories using a template designed to elicit a contrast between positive and negative learning experiences:

In my life I have learned two very different things: [a] _____ and [b] _____. The way I was taught to do those things was very different too. For [a] the early stages of learning consisted of _____ while for [b] it consisted mostly of _____. Overall I prefer the way I learned _____ because _____. If I had learned both things that way, now I might be able to _____.

This template evoked a wide variety of learning experiences, from learning to cook, to playing soccer, to speaking Japanese and Korean. Verity then offered brief definitions of scaffolding as follows:

- Definition A: Scaffolding is often defined as help that changes the learner's understanding of what the task can be.
- Definition B: Scaffolding can be defined as help that the learner can actually use.
- Definition C: Scaffolding has been defined as any help that is orientated towards the learner's cognition and not towards the correct answer.

To stimulate further thinking about the role of context in learning, Verity introduced a board game. Participants rolled dice to select a square containing a brief description of a piece of information or a learning activity. The group had to decide whether the given example constituted an example of scaffolding. For example, is a packet of cigarettes bearing a warning logo an example of scaffolding? How about an umbrella used as a walking stick? It became clear that almost anything could be a mediational tool depending on the context and attitude of the learner. A final game asked participants to imagine associations between a learning goal and a mediational tool picked at random. For example "How green onions helped me to learn hula dancing". Although many of the examples were humorous, the discussion led to a serious point: matching mediational tools to goals is a key of successful scaffolding. Forum participants were asked to read various posters depicting various learning experiences, and decide which definition of scaffolding fitted best with each story. The reader may like to play the same game.

In our first story, Bradley explains how she came to teach empathetic listening as a way of helping students understand the importance of the listener's role in co-constructing a conversation.

Grace and serenity, a story about in-depth listening, by Amanda Bradley

The practice of non-judgmental listening and the related skills of paraphrasing and empathetic responding can help students to develop better listening skills. My story explains the connection between my experience of in-depth listening (Curran, 1977) during the course of my teacher-

development, and my current practice in the classroom. I would like to illustrate this with a story about a teacher-learner I will call “Gracia”.

The scene was a conference. Jenny, an experienced listener, explained the skills of in-depth listening to a conference audience, and Gracia, in English “Grace”, volunteered to talk for ten minutes on a topic she had chosen, while Jenny listened. Jenny established rapport with Gracia through her facilitating manner and voice. Gracia talked and Jenny periodically showed her understanding, paraphrased or synthesized Gracia’s account with phrases such as, “So you...,” “You...?”, “You sound as though...”, etc.

The empathic listening entailed Jenny’s putting herself and any preconceptions about Gracia or what she might be about to say aside and opening herself up totally to what she heard, using just the right language and just the right amount of it to provide Gracia with “a Hub statement to catch all ramifications, examples and analogies that she might use.” (Curran, p. 4). Jenny’s words and delivery created an aura of perfect congruence, together with understanding and trust.

Jenny put the following attributes into practice:

- Genuineness
- Acceptance, trust and validation (Validation in this context meant, showing through behavior or words that the listener accepted and valued the speaker and what she was saying.)
- Empathic understanding

These attributes reflect Rogers’ description of empathetic listening (Rogers, 1969). The effect on Gracia was dramatic.

Gracia, up to then a hyperactive attention-seeker, with poor concentration and listening skill, was transformed, becoming serene, focused and productive. She was observed listening attentively to colleagues for the rest of the conference, something never before seen.

For myself as observer, witnessing the encounter between Jenny and Gracia was a numinous experience, but I did not realize how deeply it had affected me until ten years later, a former colleague returned as my MA teaching supervisor and remarked that my teaching was strongly influenced by Jenny’s approach. Gracia’s transformation and my subsequent experience of being listened to in depth had led me to commit to humanistic teaching, (Stevick, 1990), of which in-depth listening is an essential tool. For that reason, I introduce it to my Education students at Miyazaki University. Our listening class is based on the practical experience of students listening to various sources, paraphrasing, then adding subjective comments. I also present the assumptions underlying humanistic pedagogy, including scaffolding.

I have noticed the perceptiveness of my students, both in class and in their reflective journals. Establishing an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance has enabled them to trust and open up to me and produce work reflecting their interest and critical thinking. It has, in turn, greatly motivated me as their teacher.

Students’ comments

The following journal extracts illustrated the poster and presented first year students’ perceptions of listening scaffolding:

- I think scaffolding is instrument for us to understand. For example, when elementary school teacher teaches math to students, teacher uses objects or draws pictures like apples or cats.
- The word “scaffolding” in learning and teaching is a metaphor for support.
- I think scaffolding is help for someone’s growth.
- Listening is a technique not only of our ears, but of our whole body and heart. I use my eyes, hands and feelings. This new idea was very curious for me because I thought I had only to use my ears.
- I think practising scaffolding is something that can make listeners get good condition and even change their attitude to listening permanently.
- I think scaffolding is important for our learning. For example, we can’t understand words without someone’s scaffolding at the beginning. We need scaffolding to develop. Also helping others will be helpful for us. We will learn to help.

The comments show how students have a broad understanding of scaffolding as anything that facilitates interaction. They show a profound awareness that scaffolding involves mutuality (“helping others will be helpful for us”) and interaction at various levels (“eyes, hands and feelings”). In our next story we will see how a conceptual tool — in this case a Venn diagram — was used by Naoko Harada to solve an abstract problem involving concepts of ethnicity and identity.

Venn diagram: Vehicle for my learner development, by Naoko Harada

Scaffolding is not limited to an interpersonal reaction where a parent or teacher supports a child to develop a higher level of development. An adult as a learner can also self-teach with the help of vehicles that guide them to a new intellectual outlook. In my case, one of the vehicles for scaffolding was the Venn diagram, a geometric figure devised by the logician John Venn in 1881 to represent the relationships between members of a given set.

Traditionally, Wood, et al. (1976) remarked that scaffolding involves a “process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal” by the assistance of the adult (p. 90). More recently, Reiser (2004) emphasizes that scaffolding has two aspects, “(a) accomplishing the task and (b) learning from one’s efforts, that is, improving one’s performance on the future tasks in the process” (p. 275). It indicates that achieving the goal by scaffolding is undeniably significant but learning from such a process could be instrumental in accomplishing future tasks.

My first encounter with Venn diagram was in a mathematics class at the elementary school level, while grouping common factors into sets. As an adult, Venn diagrams helped me create a better model illustrating the identities of English-speaking characters in junior high school English textbooks. In 2006, I published an article with a figure to illustrate the identities of English-speaking characters in some common textbooks. In the figure, I drew small circles, representing each character according to his or her ethnic background. The circles were scattered around an oval table-like sphere, representing the common ground for

speaking English. However two other elements of identity, the perspective of male-female coexistence and perspective of multiple roles of one character, could not be technically included in the figure.

To solve this problem, the Venn diagram acted as a vehicle to group the ethnic circles and integrate all three elements. Starting with the four sets of Venn diagrams as in Figure 1, I added more sets which extended to sunflower-like petals with the common core.

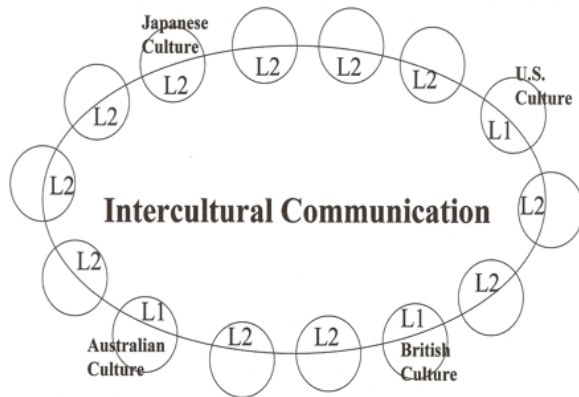


Figure 1. English-speaking culture and the identities of the main characters analyzed in the English textbooks for Japanese junior high schools in Harada (2004)

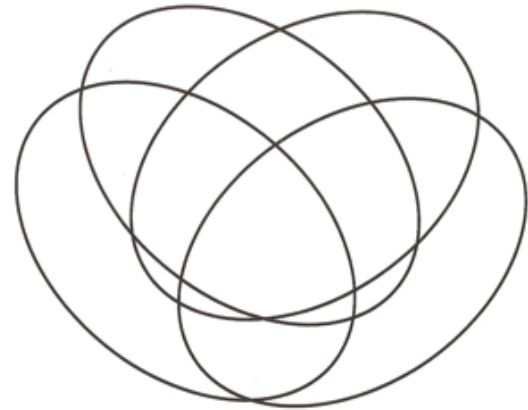


Figure 2. Venn diagram for four sets adopted from Edwards (2004)

While adding ethnic petals, I noticed that the addition of those petals would lead to a circle. It would make a new sphere if combined with Kachru's three concentric circles that I was preparing to use for the presentation (Kachru, 2005). It was the moment of birth of the dynamic figure in Harada (2007).

In modern adult life, people often face challenges which stimulate autonomous learning. Vehicles for scaffolding are options that could carry you forward to new discoveries in the unknown intellectual territory.

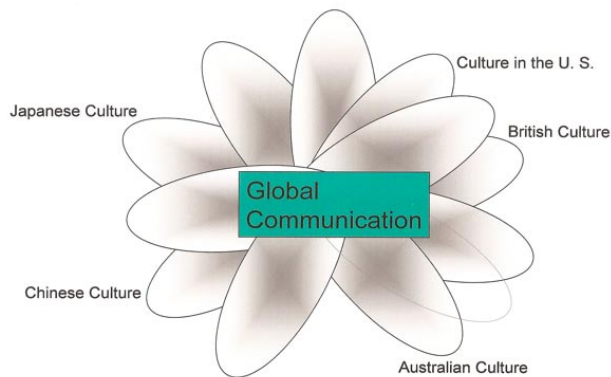


Figure 3. Early prototype of Harada (2007)

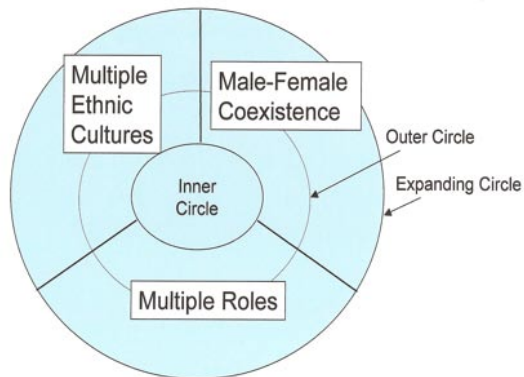


Figure 4. The image of English-speaking identities of Harada (2007) based on Kachru's Three Circles in 1985

Naoko Harada's story illustrates the use of visual media for scaffolding, reminding us that scaffolding can often result from searching for a new perspective. In addition we can see from her story how scaffolding dialogues can take place at the level of "inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 228, p. 249). If we can teach students to search for tools to scaffold their own mental process we will indeed help them to become autonomous learners. Now we move to a story showing the predicament of the distance learner. In distance learning, most of the interaction is on the mental level, between learner and learning materials. Ellen Head explains how she responded to certain tasks which demanded that she take a more active role by searching for a real world interlocutor.

Springboarding versus scaffolding: A story about learning Japanese, by Ellen Head

As a student of Japanese, I prefer activities which have little formal scaffolding, for example, "go out and interview someone". This led me to ask if such "springboard" type tasks, which offer a challenge, are better for some learners than "scaffolded" tasks.

I studied the Sheffield MA in Japanese Language and Society by Distance Learning from 2003-6. Each unit has a dialogue, translation and grammar exercises and finally my favourite, the "go out and do it" task, to interview someone about their gift-giving habits or about a time they were punished as a child. Sometimes the grammatical forms and vocabulary in the expected answers were predictable, so the interview was "pre-scaffolded" by the study in the unit. However one of the tasks was very daunting: "go and interview someone you don't know very well, using polite language."

This was challenging not only because of the complexity of “keigo” (polite language) but also because using “keigo” seemed to require me to adopt a new identity with aspects of femininity and humility which were not really “me”. I put off the “keigo” interview until several months after I had taken my exam, and finally did it because I needed information for my dissertation. During the interview I was conscious of using Japanese to learn something real about schools and government policy. However, after about an hour, my interviewee started to speak in English, rather hesitantly. The change into his L2 seemed to be an acknowledgment of my efforts, so it did not feel like failure. Subsequently, I have joined a department where I need to use Japanese, but over three years, I have forged a workable persona without “keigo”. It seems too high a risk to change it. The actual exponents of “keigo” are tricky because if you mix them up you might be ruder than if you didn’t try to use “keigo”. However, I have noticed that I can use a few polite forms in certain situations. For example, receiving an envelope of money from the president of the university after my mother died, I said “Kansha shite orimasu”. (I am grateful) using the polite form. The words seemed to arise naturally from the solemnity of my interlocutor. Other exponents I can respond to passively, but I feel pretentious when using them.

As I reflected on this experience I started to wonder if some kinds of language inherently difficult to scaffold? There is a major difficulty with scaffolding “keigo” because it is asymmetrical – what you hear is not what you should say, because you are using language to elevate the other person, and they might not need to use it to you – so it is difficult to scaffold in the course of a normal conversation.

As a “reality check” I asked a volunteer teacher (one of my students) to help me with “keigo” again. We worked through a couple of exercises from my course, and then we prepared questions together which I could use to interview her, using polite language. When I interviewed her I noticed that I was able to use one or two more polite phrases which made me feel that I had taken possession of the language. I was able to extend the use of “nasaru”, and the particles “go” and “o” to sentences I had not prepared:

Go sanka nasatte arigatou gozaimasu! (Thank you for participating.)

Eigo o benkyou nasaru toki ni iro iro rikai dekiru you ni natta? (When you studied English [overseas] did you become able to understand various things?)

Ashita, go seiko o inori shite orimasu! (I wish you success for tomorrow.)

I noticed difficulties in pronunciation and phrasing of the questions I had written. But during this session I managed to move beyond the feeling that being polite is inherently traumatic and “not me”. It was much easier to do the activity as a role play with a student rather than interviewing someone who was my “senior” in status. When I think of my future as a Japanese speaker I am not sure if I will ever really acquire polite language, not least because for women “keigo” requires positioning oneself in a submissive role which Western women and Japanese women with overseas experience sometimes resist. (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 173).

This experience led me to reflect on aspects of cognitive style and on the need for a teacher’s use of scaffolding to fit with students’ cognitive style. I have come to realize that my

cognitive style may be different from that of many of my students. As a risk-taker, and as someone who prefers to start with the big picture and fill the details in later, I was drawn to the “springboard” type task as a learner, and I have had a tendency to impose on my students with tasks which were not adequately scaffolded from their point of view. We could generalize that different types of learner will want different degrees of scaffolding at different times. I am becoming aware that many of my students feel more comfortable with a “details first”, “big picture later” style of learning. The tasks that I set for them need to reflect this, and the way that I help them needs to take account of it too.

In the foregoing account, Ellen Head notes how thinking about scaffolding helped her to identify a mismatch between her learning style and that of her students, but she stops short of investigating measures to close that gap by teaching students new strategies. The author of our next story, Hideo Kojima, shows himself to be a teacher deeply committed to helping students to develop new learning styles and strategies. Hideo Kojima has created a sustained program to guide students to co-construct interactions through cooperative learning, thus rehearsing their ability to scaffold their communication in the outside world.

Scaffolding learning strategies instruction, by Hideo Kojima

About fifteen years ago, I took part in Georgetown University's TESOL Graduate Certificate Program and learned how to scaffold learning strategies instruction from

Anna Uhl Chamot. She taught us participants the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA): a model of content-based language learning which includes training in learning strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The CALLA model includes a generalized lesson plan, divided into five phases: Preparation (activate background knowledge), Presentation (explain, model), Practice (prompt strategies, give feedback), Evaluation (assess strategies), and Follow-Up Expansion (support, transfer). In the program, following the CALLA model, I designed a strategies-based instructional plan in order to promote learner autonomy through cooperative and reflective group work, where I emphasized the integration of *autonomy*, *cooperation*, and *reflection*. I expected individual students to develop their autonomy through human interdependence and their metacognitive abilities through planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating.

Since I finished the program, I have implemented strategies-based instruction in my classes. *Cooperation*, which is a social affective strategy for learner autonomy, is the main strategy which I have often employed. I think of cooperative learning (CL) as a culture-sensitive approach to English language teaching (ELT) in Japan, which is often considered to be a collectivist society. CL “is an excellent way to scaffold instruction because it provides instructional support while increasing student responsibility for learning” (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999, p. 41). I have helped my students to foster autonomy by promoting their consciousness-raising of the key elements of CL: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills, and group

processing (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). Assigning roles to group members could perhaps help all members to participate and make contributions to the group work. For a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of CL, I have taken into consideration a utilization of various data collection methods, such as learning or teaching portfolios, questionnaires for self- or peer evaluation, group or class discussion, field-notes, and student or teacher reflection.

The main point of scaffolding that was raised during group discussion in the forum or when some participants came to look at my poster was: teachers should try to identify how much support students need and to provide just enough support while still working towards the eventual goal of learner autonomy. Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as “the distance between a child’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). As Bio (2004) suggests, this guidance or collaboration may be scaffolding in Vygotskian social interactionist constructivism. When teaching learning strategies, a challenge of mine is determining when and how to scaffold instruction to provide the appropriate amount of support. Scaffolding is “a teaching/learning strategy where the teacher and learners engage in a collaborative problem-solving activity with the teacher providing demonstrations, support, guidance, and input and gradually withdrawing these as the learner becomes increasingly independent” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 466).

In addition to the significance of scaffolding, I gained from the forum some new perspectives on ELT as a whole: teachers and students help and foster each other in the co-constructions of the learning and teaching environment; knowledge is jointly constructed by teachers and students; teachers make efforts to develop students’ competencies and talents; to teach is to make an assumption about what and how students learn; good teaching implies learning about students’ learning; learning and teaching are constantly interchanging activities; teaching is a complex application of theory and research; teaching requires considerable teacher training and continuous refinement of skills and procedures; and reflection on teaching promotes professional competence and autonomy.

Hideo Kojima articulates very clearly the point which came up repeatedly during the forum discussions, of how teachers can decide when to help students, what kind of help to give and how much help is needed. Kayo Ozawa’s story concerns the provision of scaffolding for reading skills in TOEIC. It is a well-known problem that TOEIC preparation programs often focus narrowly on test practice rather than on extensive language practice which might enhance their skills more. Kayo Ozawa relates how she took a bold step in abandoning test practice for a few lessons to focus on strategies. She also conveys the flavor of our talk during the forum by relating some early personal experiences of scaffolding.

Scaffolding speed reading strategies for TOEIC, by Kayo Ozawa

My poster was about tying in the teaching of TOEIC with other skills that may be helpful to students, like speed-reading, skimming, and predicting in listening. I see the activities as building scaffolding for richer interactions in the class. This is based on my own experience 30 years ago, taking a speed-reading course at the Horace-Mann School in New York.

At my school I am expected to stick to the textbook for the TOEIC course, but I have noticed that many of my students have taken the course to get their credits and not necessarily because they planned to take TOEIC. So a needs analysis for this particular TOEIC class I teach is an issue. How can I teach students something that they will be able to use? I decided to use a speed-reading activity by Nation and Malarcher (2007) to “scaffold” these students in developing reading skills. The passage was on “Learning and Unlearning Fear”. The activity was a success in that students were motivated and seemed to find the connection with TOEIC for reading ahead. Whereas native speakers have a comfortable reading speed of 250 words per minute, the students in my class had a reading speed of 106 to 109 w.p.m. There was no correlation between reading speed and accuracy for my students. From this, they may realize that they can read fast and still be accurate. Hopefully they will remember the experience of speed-reading even though the activity was a “one-off” due to the requirements of the class.

The prediction skills activity gave students a taste of a skill that they might be able to use in any context for scaffolding their own listening. Overall I felt that I would like to have

more time for alternative activities so that broader skills training could be integrated into the TOEIC course, making it richer and more meaningful overall. I was worried that “one-off” sessions might not give students time to really learn the skills. But at least I introduced the concepts underlying the skills.

The forum reminded me of my own learning experiences. First was my “failed” scaffolding experience, where my mother sent me to learn how to cook a full course meal after college. In reality, I do not cook most of the recipes I learned there. The course was not something I had chosen to do, and the things I learned did not stay with me. In contrast, in the summer English camp that my daughter attended, the needs of the students were met when the instructor taught them some English lyrics created to go with a popular song from the Japanese animated movie “Ponyo on the Cliff”. The children seemed very motivated to sing the song in English when it was also popular in Japanese. These are my two personal anecdotes concerning successful and failed scaffolding. They illustrate how scaffolding can only work if the learners’ motivation and interests are taken into account.

A new perspective I gained from the forum was the three definitions of scaffolding. It was very interesting trying to analyze which definition fit with each poster, and it also made me wonder about my own. It can be B, “something learners can actually use”, since learners can actually use speed-reading; however, it also seems to fit C, “something that transforms the learners’ thinking”, as the learner’s cognition is hopefully changed as she/he ties in the activity with reading ahead in the TOEIC.

Kayo Ozawa describes the tensions between her sense of what students need, and institutional requirements. Etsuko Shimo encountered a similar problem teaching a TOEIC class, as she relates below. However, she is optimistic about students' potential for learning how to scaffold. She sees great power in the practice of reformulating learned information in the learner's own words, and in dialogue with others.

The power of dialogues in learning, by Etsuko Shimo

Swain (2008) proposed that “*linguaging*” (i.e., cooperative dialogue, private speech) or “the use of language to mediate cognitively complex acts of thinking” is a key in learning. She claimed that language use and language learning co-occur in “*linguaging*” activities (Swain, 2000). Similarly, I would also like to suggest that expressing what we have learned in our own words helps us to further deepen our understanding.

In my poster, I shared some of my own learning and teaching experiences. For example, I had to study statistics in order to analyze data which was collected for a group research project last year. I had taken a statistics course at graduate school several years ago, but that was not enough to enable me to feel confident using statistics. I had to read more books and ask my more experienced colleagues for advice. The next critical step was that I myself had to explain what I had learned to the research group members. I went through this “*read-listen-explain about it*” cycle more than a few times, and it greatly helped me understand the nature and process of statistical analysis.

In my own classrooms, I try to implement many cooperative learning activities in which students are encouraged to review, recycle, and reuse what they have learned, during their own dialoguing (or “*linguaging*” in Swain's word). For example, students made power point presentations or created newsletters in groups, or shared reading journal entries with classmates. Tim Murphey's workshops and presentations have given me a lot of insights about such classroom activities (e.g., Murphey, 1998). In one workshop, Murphey asked participants to summarize what they had explained and to explain in their own words to their partners. Likewise, having students actually say what they know in their own words is a good way not only to check their understanding but also to help them understand it even better.

When I was sharing group activities and presentation guidelines from my classes, a person in my poster audience said, “So you are providing scaffolding for students by using these class activities.” I was happy to hear that; in fact, I was trying to encourage students to provide scaffolding to each other, rather than giving scaffolding to them myself. Helping students to become autonomous and responsible for their own learning has been one of my major teaching goals. In order to do so, it is important for the teacher to create an organized structure, which can facilitate autonomy. This structure is called scaffolding. However, the student-student scaffolding, within the scaffolding structure provided by the teacher, does not always function well. In one of my classes, titled “TOEIC,” many students preferred a teacher-centered approach as well as TOEIC-type question exercises. I had to compromise my teaching style, as I thought it important

to first build a cooperative, mutually respectful relationship between the teacher and students.

Deryn Verity pointed out in the Forum that anything can be scaffolding, depending on the context. That is relieving in a way; maybe I am building up small steps of the scaffolding in my “compromised” class, too. My exploration into teaching will continue through dialoging with my colleagues and students. The interactive poster presentation in combination with Deryn’s activities facilitated a great amount of dialoging among the participants, and was enjoyable and insightful, as is always the case with her workshops.

In the final exploration of scaffolding by Alison Stewart, we are back in an on-line environment. Alison Stewart tells how she was trained as an online writing coach. During this process, her provision of scaffolding for a student was subjected to feedback from a trainer. Interestingly, the issues that emerge are very similar to the issues in the classroom context, in particular the pacing and amount of help given, and the need for an empathetic climate.

Becoming an online writing coach, by Alison Stewart

In March 2006, I started working for a company that offered online business writing coaching to executives in finance and commerce. Before starting to coach, I had to go through an induction process which involved (1) taking the basic business writing course as a ‘student’; (2) giving feedback on course assignments by former students that had already

received feedback from the coaching team; (3) giving feedback to actual students with monitoring and guidance from expert coaches; and (4) becoming a full member of the coaching team.

My poster showed the process of giving practice feedback in stage (2) as an example of scaffolded learning. My task was to give feedback on a worksheet completed by “Mae”. The goal of the assignment was to raise the student’s awareness of the reader’s priorities when composing a business email. The poster replicated the feedback process as it developed:

- (1) Mae’s answers to questions about her purpose and the reader’s priorities, and her email.
- (2) Mae’s answers and email, plus my feedback. My aim was to achieve a positive and encouraging tone, while at the same time clearly pointing out weaknesses in organization of information, as well as language errors.
- (3) Mae’s answers and email, plus the feedback given by the original coach.
- (4) My reflections on the differences between my feedback and that of the original coach, and comments on my reflections by my coaching mentor.

A major difference was that I had given much longer, more detailed feedback than the original coach. It was pointed out that in the context of a real coaching situation, it would be better to focus on one key point. Other points could be taken up in future modules of the course.

I concluded the poster by highlighting what I felt to be the main points of scaffolding:

- All the induction activities were conducted in a wholly supportive environment. The coaches gave kind, thoughtful, and constructive feedback, making it easier and more motivating for me to reflect more deeply into my current practices and try out new ways of writing or giving feedback.
- Comparing my own work with that of expert coaches was a revelation! This independent reflection led to a very focused and critical examination of the practices of the community I was aspiring to join.
- The induction process—from undertaking the course as a student to giving feedback to actual students—gave me increasing amounts of freedom and responsibility. There was a clear end-goal—becoming a full member of the team of writing tutors.

Working on my own poster, viewing the posters of the other participants, and discussing the activities provided by Deryn Verity at the LD Forum, all made me think more deeply about autonomy and end goals in language learning/teaching. In many ways, my experience was very non-autonomous - the purpose of the induction course was to ensure that I adhered to the standards of practice and quality laid down by the company. But the reason I drew on this example was because it gave me support and space to see how I could develop and change my own practices. My goal as a teacher is to try and find ways to give my own students support and space so that they can develop and change too.

Conclusion

We can see how the various stories reflect diverse experiences yet all explore ways of helping learners to use language more effectively, whether learning through conversational interaction in a classroom environment (as in Bradley's, Kojima's, and Shimo's stories) or focusing on a specific skill or language area (as in Ozawa's and Head's stories) or dialoguing in a different medium (as in Harada's and Stewart's stories).

Deryn Verity's concluding comments in the forum were brief because through various stories and thought-provoking games, participants had come to an experiential understanding of the nature of mediational tools, of scaffolding as different kinds of help between interlocutors and of communication as interaction. The forum was animated by Deryn Verity's energy and commitment to social constructivism and the idea that reality is co-constructed between people. She studied and wrote her dissertation with Lantolf and remains a personal friend, which somehow adds energy to the message that interaction is how we live. My prior understanding of scaffolding was that learning materials were scaffolding. While reading for the forum I (Ellen Head) encountered a paper by Richard Donato that clarified how teacher-learner dialogues were also scaffolding (Donato, 2000). I began to see that scaffolding could include some of the messy, sometimes frustrating negotiation of meaning, which I engage in every day with students. At the forum one particularly salient point for me was Etsuko Shimo's reminder that teachers should aim to facilitate scaffolding between students rather than only between

teacher and student. Looking at the three definitions of scaffolding introduced by Deryn Verity above (A, B, and C), we can see that they are not mutually exclusive definitions, but characteristics of scaffolding. The definitions were in fact a tool which could be discarded as we progressed to a more sophisticated understanding of scaffolding through reading and discussing the stories. If we had to attempt a re-definition now, we could combine all three: scaffolding is any kind of help that is cognitively useful to and usable by a particular learner in a particular context, even if the result of the scaffolded interaction is different from the predicted outcome of a particular learning task.

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