

Scaffolding as an Effective Teaching Strategy

The following article is a compilation of educational resources on the teaching strategy defined as Scaffolding. Some of the references cited are listed at the end of the article.

In order to be effective, all teaching assistants need to gain the ability to actively help students bridge the gap between what may be called "prior knowledge" and the academic outcomes intended by their teachers. Through the use of an instructional strategy known as Scaffolding, teachers from all disciplines can provide the support some learners need when new content and assignments are presented.

Scaffolding instruction originates from Lev Vygotsky's Constructivist theory and his concept of individualized support based on the learner's need. In Scaffolding instruction, the learner's development is facilitated by an instructor or "more knowledgeable other." The scaffolds support a student's ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. The activities provided in scaffolding instruction are just beyond the level of what the learner can do alone (Olson & Pratt, 2000).

An important aspect of Scaffolding instruction is that the supports are temporary, and as the learner's abilities increase, the supports should be slowly withdrawn. When the learner is able to complete the task independently, the goal of the educator is achieved. The student has become an independent, self-directed learner and problem solver.

The characteristics of this teaching strategy were clarified by Jamie McKenzie, a well-known educator and researcher. His visual image analogy uses the task of workers cleaning the face of the Washington Monument and their critical need to focus not on the Scaffolding, which is secondary to their job, but the building. McKenzie likens this analogy to the following aspects of Scaffolding instruction:

1. Provides clear directions
2. Clarifies purpose
3. Keeps students on task
4. Offers assessment to clarify expectations
5. Points students to worthy sources
6. Reduces uncertainty, surprise and disappointment
7. Delivers efficiency

8. Creates momentum

One example of how instructors might implement this strategy in their classroom teaching is by inserting a series of brief thinking tasks (such as completing sentence starters or comparing or contrasting two items) into their lectures so that students can think about important content as the lesson unfolds.



Although there are some drawbacks to the use of Scaffolding as a teaching strategy the positive impact it can have on students' learning and development can be far more beneficial.

Adapted from the following sources:

Johnston, S. and Cooper, J. "Supporting Student Success Through Scaffolding." *Cooperative Learning and College Teaching*, 1999, 9(3).

McKenzie, J. "Scaffolding for Success." *From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal*. 1999, 9(4).

Walker, G. "Critical Thinking in Asynchronous Discussions." *International Journal of Instructional Technology & Distance Learning*, 2005, 2(6).

Olson, J. and Platt, J. (2000). *The Instructional Cycle. Teaching Children and Adolescents with Special Needs* (pp. 170-197). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.