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Scaffolding students' comprehension of text

Classroom teachers looking to improve students' comprehension should consider three general types of scaffolding.

In a first-grade classroom, the teacher carefully monitors students' responses as the class reads Ruth Krauss's *The Carrot Seed* (1945), an informational storybook about a boy planting a carrot seed. The teacher realizes that the children don't understand what the green, fern-like plant they see in the picture has to do with the orange carrots they sometimes have for dinner. She immediately intervenes and, through a series of skillfully chosen questions, leads students to a basic understanding of what growing carrots look like. In another classroom, a group of sixth-grade students is beginning to read Michael Cooper's *Indian School* (1999) as part of a social studies unit. The teacher recognizes that *Indian School* will be a challenge for some of her students and wants to be sure that they all get off to a good start with it. As students begin the first chapter, she provides them with a carefully crafted set of prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities to support their initial understanding of the book. In a third classroom, a fourth-grade teacher is using direct explanation to teach the comprehension strategy of predicting. In doing so, he describes the strategy and how it should be used, models its use and has some students model it, works with students as they begin using the strategy, gradually gives students more and more responsibility for using the strategy independently, and reminds and prompts students to use the strategy over time.

The assistance the teachers provide to aid students' comprehension in these three instances is in some ways quite different. Yet in each case, the teacher relies heavily on the use of instructional scaffolding, one of the most recommended, versatile, and powerful instructional techniques of constructivist teaching. Recent studies of classroom reading instruction have found that, although scaffolding is widely used by some of the best teachers (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998), it is not characteristic of most teachers (Taylor et al.) and that, when employed, it is typically in support of word recognition (Clark, 2000). Comprehension instruction of any sort is much less frequent than it needs to be (Pressley, 2002a; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002), and agreement about just what we can do to best foster students' comprehension is far from complete (Institute of Education Sciences, 2003). However, there is virtually universal agreement that scaffolding plays an essential and vital role in fostering comprehension (Duffy, 2002; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Palincsar, 2003; Pressley, 2002b). We believe that, because scaffolding is a complex instructional concept and takes many forms, gathering together examples and explanations of various sorts of scaffolding will help to foster its more widespread use. Our purpose here is to give readers a broader perspective of the different roles they can play in using various forms of scaffolding by providing carefully selected examples and descriptions of the forms that scaffolding can take. By so doing, we hope to help teachers construct a deeper understanding of scaffolding, use it more frequently in their classrooms, and thereby improve students' comprehension.

We begin by considering several definitions of scaffolding, noting the foundations for it, and highlighting reasons why it is effective. Next, we

describe three general types of scaffolding and teachers' roles therein and provide examples of each type. Finally, we offer some considerations for making decisions about scaffolding.

What is scaffolding?

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term *scaffolding* in its educational sense. They described scaffolding as a "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Since this initial work, scaffolding has been described as "supported situations in which children can extend current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 93), "what teachers say and do to enable children to complete complex mental tasks they could not complete without assistance" (Pearson & Fielding, 1991, p. 842), "a process whereby a teacher monitors students' learning carefully and steps in to provide assistance on an as-needed basis" (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998, p. 116), and as "a temporary supportive structure that teachers create to assist a student or a group of students to accomplish a task that they could not complete alone" (Graves, Watts, & Graves, 1994, p. 44). One of us (Graves & Graves, 2003) has expanded that definition, noting that

> in addition to helping children complete tasks they could not otherwise complete, scaffolding can aid students by helping them to better complete a task, to complete a task with less stress or in less time, or to learn more fully than they would have otherwise. (p. 30)

Pressley (2002b) has provided a particularly rich description, explaining both the metaphor entailed in the term and its educational meaning.

> The scaffolding of a building under construction provides support when the new building cannot stand on its own. As the new structure is completed and becomes freestanding, the scaffolding is removed. So it is with scaffolded adult-child academic interactions. The adult carefully monitors when enough instructional input has been provided to permit the child to make progress toward an academic goal, and thus the adult provides support only when the child needs it. If the child catches on quickly, the adult's responsive in-

struction will be less detailed than if the child experiences difficulties with the task. (pp. 97-98)
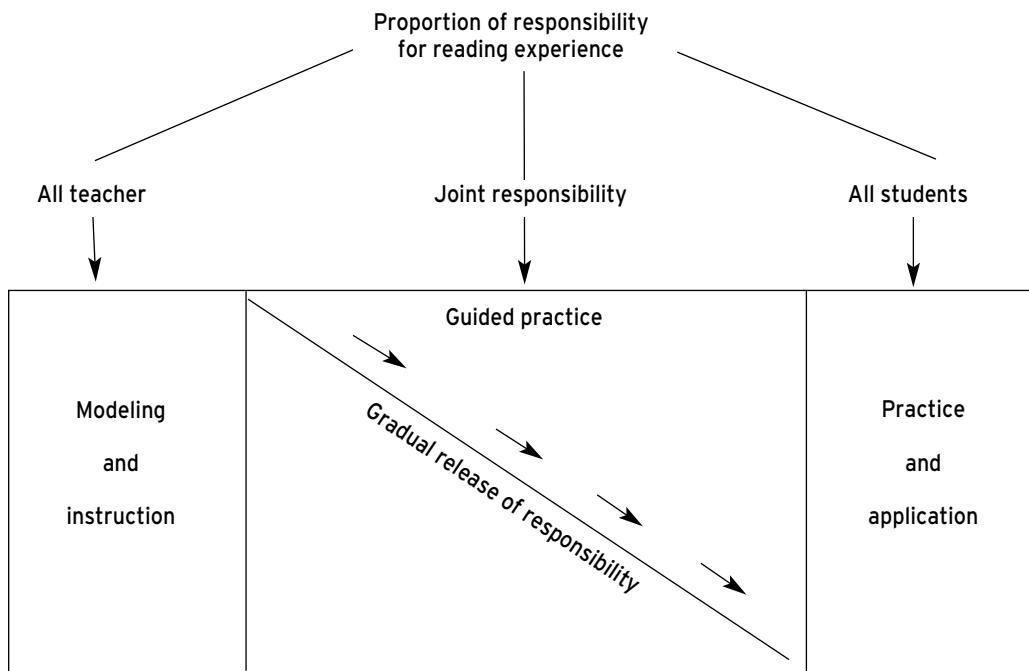
Foundations of scaffolding

The concept of scaffolding is grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist view of learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), every mental function in a child's development first appears in collaboration with an adult. The collaboration occurs in what Vygotsky referred to as the zone of proximal development. This is the area between what children can do independently and what they can do with assistance. Over time, given repeated experiences, a child internalizes the collaborative form of the mental processes and is able to engage in them alone or in new contexts.

A related construct that is very helpful in understanding scaffolding is the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Fielding, 1991), a version of which is shown in Figure 1. The model depicts a temporal sequence in which students gradually progress from situations in which the teacher takes the majority of the responsibility for successfully completing a reading task, to situations in which students assume increasing responsibility for reading tasks, and finally to situations in which students take all or nearly all the responsibility for reading tasks. At any point in time, teachers should scaffold students enough so that they do not give up on the task or fail at it but not scaffold them so much that they do not have the opportunity to actively work on the problem themselves.

An effective technique

What makes scaffolding so effective is that it enables a teacher to keep a task whole, while students learn to understand and manage the parts, and presents the learner with just the right challenge. Scaffolding integrates multiple aspects of a task into a manageable chunk and permits students to see how they interrelate (Rogoff, 1990). In so doing, it helps students to cope with the complexity of tasks in an authentic manner (Pearson, 1996). Of course, the way that scaffolding is implemented in the classroom depends on students' abilities. Varying levels of support are possible, and the

Proportion of responsibility
for reading experience

All teacher   Joint responsibility   All students

Guided practice

Modeling
and
instruction

Gradual release of responsibility

Practice
and
application

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more complex a task is, the more support students will need to accomplish it.

To provide some concrete examples of scaffolding that support students' comprehension and to illustrate the various types, we next describe three types of scaffolding and give two examples of each. These three types are moment-to-moment verbal scaffolding, instructional frameworks that foster content learning, and instructional procedures for teaching reading comprehension strategies.

Moment-to-moment verbal scaffolding

The teacher's role here is to prompt students, ask probing questions, and elaborate student responses in the course of instruction. To effectively scaffold in this way, teachers must call to mind their knowledge of students' instructional histories and ability to apply reading processes (Clark, 2004). In addition, they must consider two things: how their instructional talk moves students closer

to the goal and how they can use students' responses to make them more aware of the mental processes in which they are engaged (Gaskins et al., 1997).

The Carrot Seed. In this example, we analyze the instructional scaffolding that a very accomplished teacher one of us observed (Clark, 2000) used with her first-grade students as they worked to make meaning when reading Ruth Krauss's *The Carrot Seed*. The teacher—we'll call her Mrs. Fry—monitors and prompts her students' thought processes and fosters their understanding as they proceed through the text, an informational storybook that complements the class's study of plants in the week's science curriculum. The story revolves around a young boy who plants a carrot seed. Family members repeatedly tell him that it will not come up. Nonetheless, the boy waters it daily. The story concludes with "And then one day a carrot came up." The accompanying illustration,

however, is of a green, fern-like plant. There is no sign of a carrot as the students know it. In light of this, the students are understandably confused about what's coming up. Mrs. Fry scaffolds their construction of meaning through careful questioning, and the students come to understand that the part of the carrot plant with which they are familiar, and that they eat, is the root that grows below the ground. In this dialogue, all names are pseudonyms.

Kim:	[Reads] And then one day a carrot came up.
Mrs. Fry:	[Holding up the picture] Where's the carrot?
Anna:	Up?
David:	I don't know.
Mrs. Fry:	Where's the carrot? Do you see it? [Holds the picture up and points to the plant's sprouting leaves]
Anna:	That's the big root.
Mrs. Fry:	What's a carrot?
Students:	[No response]
Mrs. Fry:	Where's the carrot? [Points to the picture]
Pete:	In the ground?
Mrs. Fry:	So would a carrot be a root?
David:	[Shakes head negative]
Mrs. Fry:	Aren't roots in the ground?
Students:	[Shake heads affirmative]
Mrs. Fry:	So do we eat some roots?
Students:	[Emphatically] No!
Mrs. Fry:	Do we eat carrots?
Students:	Yes…yeah.
Mrs. Fry:	Is a carrot a root?
Students:	Yeah…yeah. [Heads nod affirmative]
Mrs. Fry:	We must. The carrot came up.

In the dialogue, Mrs. Fry prompts students to think about the carrot in relation to what they see in the illustration. The first graders experience some confusion as they try to reconcile what they know about a carrot (that it is an orange vegetable) and what they see (the leafy shoots emerging from the ground). Mrs. Fry uses questions to engage their thought processes ("Where's the carrot? Do you see it?"). One child introduces the concept of a root. Building on this connection, Mrs. Fry poses the question "What's a carrot?" The students do not respond, so she points to the picture and refines her question: "Where's the carrot?" One child ten-tatively offers, "In the ground?" Mrs. Fry affirms this information and poses another question, one that connects the concept of root with that of carrot: "So would a carrot be a root?" One child voices hearty disagreement. Mrs. Fry asks, "Aren't roots in the ground?" The students respond affirmatively, and she pushes their thinking a step further: "So do we eat some roots?" In response to their emphatic negative response, Mrs. Fry asks whether they eat carrots and whether carrots are roots. In this way, through a series of carefully graded questions, students come to refine their understanding of how carrots grow.

The Popcorn Book. In this second example of moment-to-moment scaffolding, Carol Donovan, another very accomplished teacher, scaffolds first graders' efforts as they proceed through Tomie dePaola's *The Popcorn Book* (1978). As Smolkin and Donovan (2002) explained in the chapter from which the following example is taken, the scaffolding Donovan provides demonstrates a procedure they term an *Interactive Read-Aloud*. As they also explain, *The Popcorn Book* is a "dual-purpose book," one that presents two different texts:

> The first, a simple story displayed through cartoon-like characters with speech balloons, is about two brothers who decided to make popcorn. The second is informational; one of the boys wonders why their mother keeps popcorn in the refrigerator, and he reads aloud to his brother from a hefty, encyclopedic tome to find his answer. (p. 145)

Our example begins with the text, which the teacher reads aloud, and is followed by comments from the teacher and several students.

Teacher:	[Reads] In 1612, French explorers saw some Iroquois people popping corn in clay pots. They would fill the pots with hot sand, throw in some popcorn and stir it with a stick. When the corn popped, it came to the top of the sand and made it easy to get.
Child:	Look at the bowl.
Teacher:	[Providing an oral commentary on the "story"] Okay, now it's hot enough [for the brothers] to add a few kernels.
Child:	What's a kernel?
Child:	Like what you pop.
Teacher:	It's a seed.

Child: What if you, like, would you think [of] a pop-corn seed? Like a popcorn seed. Could you grow popcorn?

Teacher: Oh, excellent, excellent question. Let's read and we'll see if this [book] answers that question, and if not, we'll talk about it at the end.

(Excerpt reprinted from Smolkin & Donovan, pp. 145–146, with permission of Guilford Press. Book quote, © 1978 by Tomie dePaola, reprinted from *The Popcorn Book* by permission of Holiday House, Inc.)

As you can see by comparing the two examples, Donovan's responses here are somewhat different from those of Mrs. Fry, whose scaffolding prompts were all questions. In this example of moment-to-moment verbal scaffolding, Donovan has just finished reading a segment of text in which the Iroquois procedure for popping corn is described. As the picture is displayed, a child directs the group's attention to the bowl. Donovan comments in a way that focuses readers' attention on a critical element of the popping procedure, the temperature of the sand: "Okay, now it's hot enough to add a few kernels." Then, a child asks the meaning of *kernel*, a word Donovan has used but the child does not understand. Donovan provides the meaning. Given that a kernel is a seed, another student asks if one could grow popcorn. Rather than answer the question, Donovan affirms the question and uses it to set a purpose for reading the next segment of text. Finally, she identifies discussion as a strategy for meaning making following reading. Donovan's instructional actions, focusing attention on salient information, providing relevant information, and identifying a comprehension strategy, scaffold students' comprehension.

Instructional frameworks that foster content learning

Instructional frameworks that foster content learning are used to guide and improve students' understanding and learning as they read individual texts. The frameworks may or may not include moment-to-moment verbal scaffolding. In scaffolding of this sort, the teacher's role is to structure and orchestrate the reading experience so that students can optimally profit from it. Questioning the Author, or QtA (Beck, McKeown, Worthy, Sandora, & Kucan, 1996), the first framework we discuss, focuses on verbal scaffolding, while the Scaffolded Reading Experience, or SRE (Graves & Graves, 2003), the second framework we consider, includes a variety of types of scaffolding.

Questioning the Author. The intent of QtA is to help students to understand, interpret, and elaborate an author's meaning as they read the text. QtA enables teachers to guide and facilitate students' online or during-reading comprehension as they progress through successive sections of text. Teachers do so by posing certain sorts of questions, called queries. In contrast to more traditional questions that check for understanding of story elements (e.g., Who was involved? What happened first, next, last? How was the problem resolved?), queries enable students to cooperatively construct meaning as they read and reflect on ideas in text. Further, queries are open-ended, permitting multiple, divergent responses and allowing students to participate at their evolving levels of understanding. For example, teachers might ask the following questions:

- What do you think the author means by that?
- How does that connect with what the author has already told us?
- How did the author work that out for us?
- Did the author explain it clearly?
- What's missing?
- What do we need to find out?

Teachers begin their use of QtA by explaining to students that texts are written by ordinary people who are not perfect and who create texts that are not perfect. Consequently, readers need to work hard to figure out what the authors are trying to say. Then members of the class read a text together, with the teacher stopping at critical points to pose queries that invite students to explore and grapple with the meaning of what is written.

The following QtA dialogue shows a fifth-grade social studies class studying U.S. history. The class had been working with QtA for some time and is quite skilled in grappling with text ideas. The class is discussing a text segment about the presidency of James Buchanan, a Pennsylvania native. The text indicated that many people believed that Buchanan liked the South better than the

North because he believed that it was a person's choice whether or not to have slaves.

Teacher:	All right. This paragraph that Tracy just read is really full of important information. What has the author told us in this important paragraph?
Laura:	Um, they um think that Buchanan liked the South better because they, he said that it is a person's choice if they want to have slaves or not, so they thought um that he liked the South better than the North.
Teacher:	Okay. And what kind of problem then did this cause President Buchanan when they thought that he liked the South better? What kind of problem did that cause?
Janet:	Well, maybe um like less people would vote for him because like if he ran for President again, maybe less people would vote for him because like in Pennsylvania we were against slavery and we might have voted for him because he was in Pennsylvania, because he was from Pennsylvania. That may be why they voted for him, but now since we knew that he was for the South, we might not vote for him again.
Teacher:	Okay, a little bit of knowledge, then, might change people's minds.
Jamie:	I have something to add on to Janet's 'cause I completely agree with her, but I just want to add something on. Um, we might have voted for him because he was from Pennsylvania so we might have thought that since he was from Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania was an antislavery state, that he was also against slavery. But it turns out he wasn't.
Angelica:	I agree with the rest of them, except for one that um, like all of a sudden, like someone who would be in Pennsylvania you want to vote for them but then they, wouldn't they be going for the South and then you wouldn't want to vote for them after that.

(McKeown, Beck, & Sandora, 1996, pp. 112–113. Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Graves et al., *The First R: Every Child's Right to Read*, New York: Teachers College Press, © 1996 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.)

In this example, the teacher opens the discussion with the query "What has the author told us in this important paragraph?" Laura responds, and the teacher poses another query that furthers the discussion: "What kind of problem did that cause?" Janet contributes her developing understanding, and the teacher synthesizes her point: "Okay, a little bit of

knowledge, then, might change people's minds." This scenario illustrates well the sort of scaffolding that takes place during a QtA discussion. The students are focused on the meaning of the text. In keeping with her role of structuring the reading experience, the teacher adroitly directs the discussion but does not dominate it. She leaves plenty of room for student input; the students are the ones who do most of the talking and thinking, and they respond at some length. Finally, they listen to one another and build on one another's responses as they jointly construct meaning for the text.

The Scaffolded Reading Experience. The SRE (Graves & Graves, 2003) is a flexible framework that teachers can use to assist students in understanding, learning from, and enjoying both narrative and expository texts. As in QtA, the teacher's role is to structure and orchestrate the reading experience so that students may optimally comprehend. The SRE has two phases: planning and implementation. During the planning phase, the teacher considers the students who will be doing the reading, the reading selection itself, and the purpose(s) of the reading. On the basis of these considerations, the teacher then creates a set of prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities designed to assist this particular group of students in reaching those purposes. Possible pre-, during-, and postreading activities to consider in creating an SRE are shown in Table 1 on the following page.

It is important to note that this is a list of *possible* components of an SRE. No single SRE includes all of these activities. As in all scaffolding, SREs should provide enough support that students succeed but not so much support that they do not put in the cognitive effort it takes to learn and grow as readers. SREs vary considerably, depending on the students, reading selections, and their purpose.

Consider as one example an SRE for Robert Coles's *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995). This picture-book biography tells the dramatic story of the first black student to attend Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana. The book is appropriate for many third graders and will certainly interest them, but some students will need more assistance in understanding it than others. We show a list of possible activities for the book in Figure 2.

Following are two more sets of activities that illustrate the range of options SREs provide. The

TABLE 1		
Possible activities in a Scaffolded Reading Experience		
Prereading	During reading	Postreading
Relating the reading to students' lives	Silent reading	Questioning
Motivating	Reading to students	Discussion
Activating and building background knowledge	Supported reading	Writing
	Oral reading by students	Drama
Providing text-specific knowledge	Modifying the text	Artistic and nonverbal activities
Preteaching vocabulary		Application and outreach activities
Preteaching concepts		Building connections
Prequestioning, predicting, and direction setting		Reteaching
Suggesting strategies		

first, a substantial SRE, was created for sixth graders studying the first chapter of Michael Cooper's *Indian School* as part of their social studies work and is designed to help them thoroughly understand the important information presented in the chapter.

SRE activities for *Indian School*

Prereading	Motivating
	Preteaching vocabulary
	Questioning
During reading	Reading to students
	Silent reading
Postreading	Small-group discussion
	Answering questions
	Large-group discussion

The second, a much less substantial SRE, might be used with these same sixth graders reading *Frindle* by Andrew Clements (1998) and is designed to help them enjoy this fast-paced and humorous tale.

SRE activities for *Frindle*

Prereading	Motivating
During reading	Silent reading
Postreading	Optional small-group discussion

Again, it should be stressed that these are possible SREs. The scaffolding needed in one situation—what will be most helpful for a particular group of students, a particular text, and a particular purpose or purposes—will often be quite different from the scaffolding needed in another.

Instructional procedures for teaching reading comprehension strategies

In addition to guiding their reading of individual texts, it is important to help students become independent readers by providing strategies for use as they read various texts over time. Scaffolding also plays a crucial role in these efforts: The teacher explicitly teaches strategies that foster reading independence, engages students in supported practice with multiple texts, and gradually transfers responsibility for strategy use as students become increasingly able. Here we consider two approaches to teaching comprehension strategies that are strongly supported by research and widely recommended: Direct Explanation of Comprehension Strategies (DECS) and Reciprocal Teaching (RT).

Direct Explanation of Comprehension Strategies. DECS (Duffy, 2002; Duffy et al., 1987) teaches individual strategies in an explicit and very straightforward way. Duke and Pearson (2002) listed the following five components of the procedure and gave a concrete example of the teacher's talk in scaffolding students' learning of the predicting strategy. We include parts of the teacher talk. At some points we have shortened and paraphrased, and, following the example of each

FIGURE 2
Scaffolded Reading Experience activities for *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995)

Activities in regular type are for students who will find the book relatively easy; those in **bold italic** are additional or alternative activities for students who will find the book more of a challenge.

Prereading	Motivating
	Building background knowledge
	Building text-specific knowledge
	Direction setting
During reading	***Reading to students***
	Silent reading
Postreading	Questioning and small-group discussion
	Writing
	Working with art

Prereading

• Motivate students by encouraging them to talk about problems they have encountered and how they solved them. They might also talk about some of the obstacles they encountered and what kept them going.

• Build relevant background knowledge by asking students to think about books they have read in which the characters faced a challenge they thought was difficult or impossible but were able to triumph in the end. Then, have students talk about the problems the characters encountered and how they overcame them. If necessary, you can share a few books that exemplify this theme.

• ***Build text-specific knowledge*** for students who need more assistance by previewing the biography. Begin by explaining what a biography is, emphasizing that this is a true story about something that happened to a real person. Introduce the setting, the main characters, and enough of the story line to whet students' appetite for the biography.

• ***Direction setting*** for stronger readers might consist of simply telling students to look for the challenges Ruby faces and how she handles them. ***Direction setting*** for less skilled readers might consist of asking them to look for *one* problem Ruby faces and her solution to that problem.

During reading

• ***Reading some of the story aloud*** can get less skilled readers off to a good start and leave them with a manageable amount of reading to do.

• Silent reading is appropriate for students who can successfully read the book on their own.

Postreading

• Answering questions that get at the essence of the biography in small groups will give all students an opportunity to review the book's important events and issues.

• Writing gives students an opportunity to solidify their understanding of the biography or to respond to it. You will probably want to suggest some topics—tell about the most challenging problem Ruby faced, tell what you admire most about Ruby, or tell how you would have reacted in Ruby's place.

• ***Working with art*** gives students who struggle with writing another way to solidify their understanding of the story or respond to it. Students might draw pictures illustrating significant events in the biography or make collages suggesting their responses to significant events. Of course, artistic activities are often appropriate alternatives for good writers, too.

component, we have added our comments in brackets.

1. An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.

"Predicting is making guesses about what will come next in the text you are reading. You should make predictions a lot when you read. For now, you should stop every two pages that you read and make some predictions."

[Note how the teacher greatly simplifies the initial task by telling students to make a prediction every two pages.]

2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action.

"I am going to make predictions while I read this book. I will start with just the cover here. Hum...I see a picture of an owl. It looks like he—I think it is a he—is wearing pajamas, and he is carrying a candle. I *predict* that this is going to be a make-believe story because owls do not really wear pajamas and carry candles. I *predict* it is going to be about this owl, and it is going to take place at nighttime."

[Here the teacher strives to reveal the thought processes that he or she uses in predicting so that students can later use similar processes.]

3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action.

"So far, I've been doing all the predicting. Now, I want you to make predictions with me. Each of us should stop and think aloud about what might happen next.... Okay, let's hear what you think and why."

[At this point, the students begin to do some of the work but still have plenty of support from the teacher.]

4. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility.

[This first example is from an early session, and the teacher is still providing substantial scaffolding by reading along with students and telling them when to make predictions.]

"I have called the three of you together to work on making predictions while you read this and other books. After every few pages I will ask each of you to stop and make predictions. We will talk about our predictions and then read on to see if they come true."

[This second example is from a later session. Students still receive scaffolding, but now it comes from written directions rather than from the teacher, an appropriately less supportive form of scaffolding.]

"Each of you has a chart that lists different pages in your book. When you finish reading a page on the list, stop and make a prediction. Write the prediction in the column that says 'Predictions.' When you get to the next page on the list, check off whether your prediction 'Happened,' 'Will not happen,' or 'Still might happen.' Then make another prediction and write it down."

[Duke & Pearson attribute this technique to Mason & Au, 1986.]

5. Independent use of the strategy.

"It is time for silent reading. As you read today, remember what you have been working on—making predictions while you read. Be sure to make predictions every two or three pages. Ask yourself why you made the predictions you did—what made you think that. Check as you read to see whether your prediction came true. Jamal is passing out predictions bookmarks to remind you."

[Here, students are reading silently by themselves, without the teacher or a worksheet to prompt their predictions. But they are still receiving some scaffolding—the reminder to predict every two or three pages, to think about their predictions, and to check them as well as the bookmark.] (Adapted from Duke & Pearson, 2002, pp. 208-210)

At this point, students have received some excellent instruction and scaffolding and are well on their way to becoming competent with the predicting strategy. However, this should not be the end of the scaffolding. Over time, the teacher will continue to remind students of the importance of predicting, point out different and increasingly challenging texts where the predicting strategy is appropriate, and occasionally discuss with students how their efforts at predicting are progressing.

Reciprocal Teaching. RT (Palincsar & Brown, 1989) is a powerful technique for teaching a coordinated set of four comprehension strategies—questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting. At the heart of RT is a series of dialogues in which the teacher and a small group of students read and discuss a text. Before beginning the dialogues, the teacher directly instructs students on each of the four strategies and evaluates individual students' proficiency with them so that she or he will know how to scaffold each student during the dialogues. Then, as the group progresses through the text segment by segment, the teacher models and guides students through the four strategies. These strategies help students to understand the purposes of reading, activate prior knowledge, focus attention on important content, critically evaluate text, monitor comprehension, and draw and test inferences. The teacher's role in these dialogues is to assist students during reading as they work to comprehend text and to focus and direct the dialogue.

In the following example (see Palincsar & Brown, 1989, for full text), the teacher reads segments of a story about bear cubs to a group of six first graders and guides them through several of the components of RT.

[The teacher reads.] "Baby bear was bigger than his sister and he began to play too rough. His sister jumped onto a tree trunk and climbed quickly upward" (p. 33). One of the children interrupts to ask, "What's rough?" Other children come up with possible examples (one suggests something to do with texture; another says "like they beat you up"), then the teacher turns to the text for clarification. The children agree that the second suggestion is what is meant in the text. The teacher replies, "The pinching and hitting, playing too hard, Okay."

The teacher continues reading and comes to a portion of the text where a prediction would be appropriate. She asks the children to predict what happens next. They correctly predict that the tree limb will break and the bear will fall. The teacher reads to confirm the prediction. "He squalled for his mother. Now the mother

splashed into the water...." One of the children asks for the meaning of *squalled*. The teacher rereads the sentence, and then asks what the children think the little bear did when he fell. The child who asked the question replies, "Whining and crying," and the teacher confirms that this was a good guess.

In this example, the teacher has guided, modeled, and prompted students as they worked to understand the text. But—in keeping with the essence of scaffolding—she or he has not simply given students the answers. Students have had to do some of the work themselves—questioning, answering questions, and making a prediction—and by repeatedly doing such work, they become increasingly competent with the strategies. As students become more familiar with the strategies, they will take turns assuming the role of the teacher. While the classroom teacher will continue to model and prompt as necessary, he or she will gradually release responsibility for orchestrating and engaging in the strategies to students. Ultimately, the students will assume primary responsibility for employing the strategies as they read.

Flexible and adaptable support

As you consider the examples of scaffolding students' comprehension we have presented, you will recognize a lot of similarities as well as a number of differences. Both examples of moment-by-moment verbal scaffolding center on the dialogue between the teacher and a small group of students. Mrs. Fry, however, relied exclusively on asking questions, while Carol Donovan used various sorts of prompts, including focusing attention on critical aspects of text, giving information, using a student's question to set the purpose for reading, and directly identifying a simple comprehension strategy.

The next two examples we presented—the use of the Questioning the Author and Scaffolded Reading Experience instructional frameworks to foster content learning—are quite different from each other. QtA employs a set of queries to prompt students' thinking and discussion as they are reading a text, whereas the SRE gives students various supportive activities to do before, during, and after they read a text. In both cases, however, the goal is the same: to support and improve students' comprehension of a text.

The final two examples we presented—the use of Direct Explanation of Comprehension Strategies and Reciprocal Teaching to teach reading comprehension strategies—are again quite different. DECS teaches individual comprehension strategies through a multifaceted process that includes describing the strategy, modeling it, using it collaboratively, guided practice, and independent use of the strategy. RT teaches the four strategies in a process that includes a relatively short period of instruction on them followed by many small-group dialogues in which the teacher guides students in their use as they collaboratively read segments of a text.

However, while the six examples have similarities and differences, all serve the function of scaffolding—"helping students complete tasks they could not otherwise complete, [and aiding] students by helping them to better complete a task, to complete a task with less stress or in less time, or to learn more fully than they would have otherwise" (Graves & Graves, 2003, p. 30).

In commenting on the sorts of evidence teachers can use in making educational decisions, Stanovich and Stanovich (2003) identified three standards: publication of findings in refereed journals, duplication of results by a number of investigators, and consensus from a body of studies. The use of scaffolding is strongly supported by evidence from all three of these sources. Our goal has been to help readers gain a broader perspective of the different roles they can play in using various forms of scaffolding, more frequently employ scaffolding in their classrooms, and thereby improve students' comprehension. We encourage teachers to add scaffolding to their instructional repertoire. It is a highly flexible and adaptable model of instruction that supports students as they acquire basic skills and higher order thinking processes, allows for explicit instruction within authentic contexts of reading and writing, and enables teachers to differentiate instruction for students of diverse needs. In summary, scaffolding invites students and teachers to collaborate as students become increasingly active readers and thinkers.

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