

Scaffolding Literacy meets ESL: Some insights from ACT classrooms

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In second language classroom contexts, enabling ESL students to access school learning is a double challenge. Teachers need to scaffold students' engagement with written language at the same time as they move them from (often diverse) first languages into English itself. Literacy pedagogies – even those most successful with native speakers of English – need adaptation if they are to meet the needs of ESL students. While the use of 'scaffolding' as a metaphor has been widely taken up in language teaching, this paper looks closely at one 'take' on scaffolding – Scaffolding Literacy (Gray and Cowey, 2001). This paper seeks to describe the core components, to identify the DNA, of Scaffolding Literacy (SL) before reporting on a project where ESL teachers in ACT primary and secondary schools were introduced to the principles and practices of SL. The goal was to evaluate the pedagogy's effectiveness for ESL learners. The project found SL to be an extremely effective pedagogy in ESL teaching, but identified several important innovations on the sequence which value-add for ESL learners whilst still maintaining the essential core of the SL pedagogy. These innovations include the use of non-narrative texts, the deliberate selection of culturally inclusive texts for study, the incorporation of the linguistic and cultural resources of the students and their families, and the need to incorporate greater use of multimodal teaching strategies to supplement and support oral language in order to build understandings of the language and the context of challenging texts.

Introduction

In second language classroom contexts, enabling ESL students to access school learning is a double challenge. Teachers need to scaffold students' engagement with written language at the same time as they move them from (often diverse) first languages into English itself. How do we bring students into the written mode when oral English is still developing? For ESL students, learning to read and write English is more complex if only because native speaker intuitions based on spoken language cannot be presumed upon. Literacy pedagogies – even those most successful with native speakers of English – need adaptation if they are to meet the needs of ESL students. While the use of 'scaffolding' as a metaphor has been widely taken up in language teaching, this paper looks closely at one 'take' on scaffolding – Scaffolding Literacy (Gray & Cowey, 2001).

This paper reports on a project which introduced ESL teachers in ACT primary and secondary schools to the

principles and practices of Scaffolding Literacy in order to evaluate their effectiveness for ESL learners. Scaffolding Literacy (hereafter SL) is a pedagogy designed "to scaffold students in reading and writing challenging, age-appropriate texts, and to make knowledge about text and written language explicit" (Culican, 2006). The pedagogy is distinctive in that it not only involves a well-theorized rationale based on neo-Vygotskian principles of learning but a well-worked out sequence of strategies for teaching reading, spelling and writing. With its origins in work originally done two decades ago by Max Kemp at the University of Canberra to assist mainstream children with literacy difficulties (Axford, 2007), SL is used in the Schools and Community Centre at the University of Canberra where one-on-one work is done to support students who are under-achieving in literacy at school. Over the last decade, it has also been applied to Indigenous literacy teaching contexts in various parts of Australia (Rose, Gray & Cowey, 2001). SL has been re-badged as *Accelerated Literacy* in Queensland, NT, SA and WA under the direction of