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Reading Supports for All

Scaffolded reading experiences help English language learners master both reading and content.

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Teaching students with a wide range of abilities and needs has always challenged teachers. Language is rapidly becoming an additional form of diversity, and many teachers have little information or education that focuses on assisting multilingual learners with their reading skills. Scaffolded reading experiences can help. They provide a practical, research-based framework that teachers can use to support English language learners.

A scaffolded reading experience (SRE) is a flexible framework for teaching lessons involving texts. It is designed to facilitate English language learners' reading development as well as their learning through reading (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004). The framework can be used in both reading and content-area lessons at all grade levels, in regular classrooms, pullout English as a second language (ESL) classrooms, bilingual education classrooms, foreign language

classrooms, and special education classrooms. SREs are, of course, only one part of a comprehensive reading program. English language learners, just like monolingual learners, need instruction designed to broaden their repertoires of reading strategies and skills.

The scaffolded reading experience framework consists of a set of prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities to use with any genre of text, including fiction and

nonfiction. Figure 1 (p. 71) shows menus of possible categories of activities within each part of the framework. When planning an SRE, teachers start by considering their specific students, the reading selection, and the reading purpose; they then create activities that are modulated as needed for the English language learners.

For instance, a 5th grade teacher may plan an SRE for the chapter "Mom, Did You Vote?" in Joy Hakim's *War, Peace, and All That Jazz* (1995) for her class of 25 students, three of whom read Spanish more easily than English. The teacher plans a number of prereading questions for the whole class but selects only three for the English language learners, asks the ESL teacher at the school to write these three questions in Spanish, and then presents them to the English language learners. As the teacher asks each question in English, she points to the corresponding question in Spanish.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) first used the term *scaffolding* to characterize mothers' verbal interaction when reading to their young children. Scaffolding in SREs refers to a temporary and adjustable support that enables students to accomplish a task that would be impossible without the scaffold or to accomplish a task more fully or more easily than they could without the scaffold (Gravés & Graves, 2003). Training wheels on a bicycle are a perfect example of a physical scaffold. Scaffolding has been shown to be a powerful instructional tool that many educators endorse.

Successful implementation of SREs depends on several components. First, there is the scaffold itself—the temporary and supportive prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities that serve as a skeleton to support English language learners. Second, teachers should use scaffolded reading experiences in ways that place students in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), in the sense that the experiences require the students to use functions that have not fully matured but that are in the process of maturing. This calls for activities that successfully

support the students through tasks that they could not quite manage independently.

For example, some 6th grade English language learners might find Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989), which deals with a family's flight from Nazi persecution, outside their zone of proximal development if they were asked to read it on their own. Such activities as building background knowledge about World War II and the Nazis and preteaching difficult vocabulary could

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put the book within their zone of proximal development. The teacher should gradually shoulder less and less of the scaffold, transferring more and more responsibility to students. When teaching a similarly difficult selection in the middle of the year, the teacher might preteach fewer words, and when teaching a comparable selection at the end of the year, the teacher might simply give students a glossary of the difficult words.

Reading in a New Language

Scaffolded reading experiences are especially important for English language learners because reading in a new language may involve more complexity than native language reading—and reading in one's native language is already complicated enough.

English language learners need to use mental executive functioning as they read, putting together and juggling many cognitive processes. This may be more burdensome for English language learners than for native speakers because it involves more processes, such as translation.

What Transfers

Results from several studies (Chikamatsu, 1996; Koda, 1993) indicate that second-language readers definitely rely on their native language in ways that facilitate their second-language reading processes. On the whole, English language learners from kindergarten through high school tend to transfer phonological awareness, or knowledge about the sounds used in language, from one language to another—a facilitative transfer (Gottardo, Yan, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2001). Some languages have cognate words (look-alike words that derive from the same root, such as *idea* in English and *idea* in Spanish). Although these words are usually pronounced differently, readers can easily recognize them as they read in the new language. Selected cognitive processes, such as some word recognition strategies and some comprehension strategies, may also be used similarly in both English language learner reading and native language reading (Fitzgerald, 1995).

Cultural Understandings

Acceptable word orders for the same meanings and intentions differ across languages. For example, in English we might say, *I forgot the book*. In Spanish, we could say, *Se me olvidó el libro*, which literally translates into English as "Itself to me forgot the book." Differences in syntax often signal different cultural understandings. *I forgot the book* implies that *I* am at the center of things in my universe, whereas the Spanish statement takes *me* out of the center of that universe and places greater importance on the object, the book. These two syntactical arrangements illustrate different cultural understandings about how individuals relate to objects in time and space and how they assign worldly significance. When confronted with new acceptable word orders, English language learners are not only learning new syntax, but they are also struggling to adapt to new cultural understandings.

Making It Manageable

SREs support English language learners with the complexities of reading in a



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new language in several important ways. Having students do prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities breaks down a complex reading task into smaller chunks. This framework also eases the cognitive demands on the English language learner by structuring these demands in distinct stages.

For instance, imagine a sheltered English classroom with a monolingual English teacher. The 10 students in the class—7th, 8th, and 9th graders—are native speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hmong, and they read English at 4th grade through 6th grade levels (Cooke, 2002). The teacher plans a set of social studies lessons in which the students learn about ancient Chinese memorial ceremonies and rituals for the dead. He asks the students to name examples of past, present, and future experiences that have had—or will have—serious impact on their lives. The students are reading *Black Powder* by William Wu (1993), which deals with a Chinese 17-year-old's efforts to honor his dead father with a fireworks display. The teacher divides the reading into three days of small, highly supportive sessions. The first day, he targets four prereading activities: motivating the students, which might involve the teacher sharing a personal example of an especially poignant ceremony; relating reading to students' lives; building background

knowledge; and preteaching vocabulary. The following day, he engages the students in three during-reading activities: reading aloud to students, guided reading, and silent reading. On day three, he leads a discussion session as a postreading strategy. By dividing the reading process into three smaller chunks, the teacher simplifies content, breaks down learning into stages, and supports the students in the complexities of the reading task.

Empowered to Help

Teachers can use SREs to "slice" student goals and assignments to help tailor lessons to English language learners' abilities and needs. For instance, a 5th grade teacher conducts a series of lessons on sound waves. Her class includes two Latino English language learners who are recent arrivals to the United States. Because it is unrealistic to expect the English language learners to achieve the same content-learning goals as the native English speakers in the same amount of time, the teacher plans an SRE. She sets up learning goals for all the students and selects a subset for the two Latino students.

On the first day, the teacher's content-learning goals for her class include the concepts that waves have amplitude and frequency. For the Latino students, she selects a single goal: frequency. She then

decides on specific prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities that will help the students achieve those goals. For the Latino students, she selects a subset of activities that fit the learning goal of frequency. By choosing a specific goal with related activities, the teacher reduces the complex cognitive reading demands on the English language learners so they can begin to learn in English.

Content teachers often believe they have no power to help their English language learners improve their reading skills. When teachers use SREs and modulate their lessons specifically with new language learners in mind, however, they become empowered to ease the cognitive demands that weigh heavily on English language learners. The 5th grade teacher who taught the lesson on sound waves recognized how overwhelming the lesson would be for the English language learners, but she believed that these students could learn *something* if she did specific activities in advance.

An SRE in Action

Imagine you are working on social studies concepts with a class of 5th graders. Of your 30 students, six are English language learners, four of whom are recent arrivals to the United States and native speakers of Spanish. The class is reading the first chapter of Cooper's *Indian School: Teaching the White Man's Way* (1999), and the goal you have set for the class is to learn the most important information presented in the chapter. However, you slice the goals for the four Latino students. You would like them to learn just one main idea from the chapter, one reason why the U.S. government sent Native American children to boarding schools.

You might begin prereading instruction with a motivational activity for all students, such as showing photographs of Native American children leaving their reservation and the same children sitting in classes at school. You might also preteach difficult vocabulary that is important for understanding the chapter—words like *interpreter*, *alien-*

ated, and *proposition*. You decide, however, that the Latino students should focus on learning just one new word—*proposition*—because it has a Spanish cognate that they might already know. And you might provide a prequestioning activity in which you pose questions that students can answer later on as they read the chapter. For instance, you might ask the following questions: Which children were sent away to the boarding school? When did this practice begin and end? Why did the U.S. government want to send Native American children to boarding schools? You ask the Latino students to focus on the last question only.

For the during-reading portion of the lesson, you might read part of the chapter orally to all students and then have students read the rest of it silently, looking for answers to their questions. Pair each Latino student with a strong English reader and ask the English readers to write a statement of one main idea from the text, draw a graph or picture that illustrates that idea, and explain the graph or picture to the partnered English language learner. Ask the English readers to work with their partners in answering the question about why the U.S. government wanted to send Native American children to boarding schools.

After students finish reading the chapter, they might break into discussion groups of three or four students to answer the questions posed during prereading. The teacher would carefully consider which group each Latino student should join and would point out that the Latino students should handle that one specific question. Finally, the groups could come together and share their answers, with the Latinos contributing as they are able.

New diversity in the United States points to enormous opportunities for a future filled with multilingual and multi-literate citizens. Scaffolded reading experiences provide a powerful yet flexible framework for teachers to move English language learners toward fulfilling their promise as readers and learners. ■

FIGURE 1 Prereading, During-Reading, and Postreading Activities

Prereading Activities

- Activating or building background knowledge.
- Providing text-specific knowledge.
- Relating the reading to students' lives.
- Preteaching vocabulary.
- Preteaching concepts.
- Prequestioning, predicting, and direction setting.
- Using students' native language, such as writing important concept words in the students' native language or inviting adult speakers of the native language into the classroom to translate.
- Engaging students and community members as resources.
- Suggesting reading strategies.

During-Reading Activities

- Silent reading.
- Reading to students.
- Guided reading.
- Oral reading by students.
- Modifying/simplifying the text.
- Using students' native language.

Postreading Activities

- Questioning.
- Discussing.
- Building connections.
- Writing.
- Drama.
- Artistic, graphic, and nonverbal activities.
- Application and outreach activities.
- Using students' native language.
- Engaging students and community members as resources.
- Reteaching.

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