Scaffolding Strategies

Scaffolding is a process where trainers use concepts, materials, and language tools to support student learning. Scaffolding is breaking up the learning into chunks and then providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk. When scaffolding reading, for example, you might preview the text and discuss key vocabulary, or chunk the text and read and discuss as you go.

Scaffolding can be used at any point of the learning – at the point of providing inputs and explanations, through to modelling, interacting, and assessing.

Scaffolding might include:

- Explaining a new concept through a concept map.
- Making deliberate comparisons with the first language and culture.
- Pre teaching vocabulary and focusing on particular words.
- Providing examples and asking learners to notice particular aspects/features.
- Using questions to probe learners’ conceptions and prompt them to describe their interpretations and challenge their opinions.
- Using various ways of representing ideas and concepts (e.g. visuals, diagrams, organisers, highlighting, various media and technologies).
- Providing feedback that relates to improvement.

1. Demonstrate and model

Modeling for learners is a cornerstone of scaffolding.
- Always show learners the outcome or product before they do it. If a teacher assigns a discussion essay or technical report, a model should be presented side-by-side with a criteria chart or rubric. You can guide learners through each step of the process.
- Talk through the process, which will allow you to model your thought process as you: read a text, solve a problem, or design a project.

2. Tap into Prior Knowledge

Ask learners to share their own experiences, knowledge and ideas about the content or concept of study and have them relate and connect it to their own lives. Brainstorming is one approach to activating prior knowledge – it values the learners past experience, treats them as an intelligent human being and motivates them to listen, contribute and learn.
3. Give Time to Talk

All learners need time to process new ideas and information. They also need time to verbally make sense of and articulate their learning with their peers. Communication is critical in the workplace and teamwork can mean that other learners will assist and mentor ESL learners with their assignments.

4. Pre-Teach Vocabulary

With complex readings, use all of the scaffolding techniques. Brain storm the title, getting learners to activate their prior knowledge of the topic. Group read the larger text and then develop vocabulary lists of words in context.

5. Use Visual Aids

Graphs, pictures, and charts can all serve as scaffolding tools.

6. Pause, Ask Questions, Pause, Review

With all the diverse learners in our classrooms, there is a strong need for teachers to learn and experiment with new scaffolding strategies. You have to slow down in order to go quickly. Scaffolding a lesson may, in fact, take longer to teach, but the end product is of far greater quality and the experience much more rewarding for all involved.