



Review Article

Review of Aida Walqui's Scaffolding Instruction for English Language Learners: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: The notion of scaffolding has been given greater importance among educators and within educational circles, especially those advocating the sociocultural role in enhancing learning. Apparently, this concept, as many other concepts and theories, survived for so many years in the face of the evolving theories and novelties in the field. It has also been refined and expanded to breed other forms of scaffolding. In this sense, this review examined the components of the socio-cultural theory (SCT) as scaffolding can somehow be situated within it. The SCT (sociocultural theory), which is greatly based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), that helped us understand the way scaffolding functions. To put it differently, an understanding of the SCT I made it easier for us to grasp the logic behind the pedagogical scaffolding, since the basic shared assumption is – social-‘interaction’. Besides, the consequences of the social learning that affect learning as well as learners.

Keywords: Scaffolding, Sociocultural Theory, Vygotsky, Pedagogical

1. Introduction

This review scrutinizes the model expounded by the author, Aida Walqui, and how scaffolding can play a role in supporting learners ‘achieve their potential’ (Walqui, 2006, p. 159). This model is mainly an attempt to turn around the pernicious problem that the American schools suffer from; that is the considerable cases of academic failure and dropping out.

In the same tone, the author tries through her model to give applicable types of instructional scaffolding that are not specific only to the examined context, but, as declared in her own words, they can also: “apply to [...] the teaching of academic courses in students’ native languages.” (Walqui, p. 159).

Finally, it should be noted that this report, as well as the presentation delivered beforehand, rely heavily and primarily, on the article written by Aida Walqui (2006).

2. The Consequences of the Social Nature of Learning

Learning from a social perspective has effects on learners on many levels. The way the majority of the society

perceive of the language and culture they -the learners- belong to, hence bring to school, affects to a great extent their performance and achievement. Of course, this is at the global level. Whereas, at the local level learners need to experience a sort of belongingness. This can only be achieved if “students’ culture and language” are “validated and appreciated through classroom practices.” (Walqui, p. 160). These practices will, above all, help learners develop their “academic identity”, since they will be valued, treated with respect, and they are going to recognize the positive expectations from their teachers and peers as well as the consistency there is between the society and the school contexts.

3. Learning from a Sociocultural Perspective

Before delving in into a detailed explanation of the notion ‘Pedagogical Scaffolding’, the author gives account to the main tenets of Vygotsky’s learning theory, as scaffolding can best be placed within it. Now we shall deal, in brief, with these tenets each in turn:

3.1. Learning Precedes Development

Learning is believed to be useful if it occurs ahead of development. This is based on the view that learners will develop if they are challenged, by providing an input that stretches their actual cognitive level.

3.2. Language Is the Main Vehicle of Thought

Language and thought develop independently from each other, since language starts as a social phenomenon, but at later stages they merge. This fusion is gradual in a sense, because the child at first thinks aloud using his/her 'private speech' to accomplish tasks, but at later stages this audible private speech is internalized to be a personal monologue (or inner speech); that is somehow a way of thinking.

3.3. Mediation Is Central to Learning

According to Walqui (2006), mediation is "the use of a tool to accomplish some action" (p. 161). As for the status this concept has, it is stressed by the author that it is regarded as the centerpiece to Vygotsky's theory of learning. Among the variety of tools, which are available for the child that he/she learns to use to mediate in tasks he/she performs, language comes to the fore. To put it simply, language, as being socially produced and learned, mediates the child in many tasks, like "pointing [that is] replaced by linguistic reference, the immediate environment becomes describable and can be commented upon [...] past experience can be recounted and relationships can be described" (p. 161 emphasis is mine).

3.4. Social Interaction and Internalization

The same as the notion of mediation, social interaction has salient importance in Vygotsky's learning theory, since social interaction "precedes the development of knowledge and ability" (Walqui 2006, p. 162). This tenet has effects beyond learning, because it is regarded as the source of: "Consciousness, The notions of self and identity, physical skills and mental abilities". Through the social interaction there are functions that develop in the child's culture and mind. These functions, as mentioned in the article, have dual appearance on two planes. "First, on the social, and later on the psychological level; first, between people as an interpsychological category, and then inside the child, as an intrapsychological category" (Vygotsky, 1978:128, In Walqui, 162).

When it comes to the internalization process, a transformation takes place, "involving appropriation and reconstruction", resulting in a difference between the social function and the mental function; that is the internalized function.

3.5. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The SCT has been known by the notion of ZPD. The latter is regarded as the procedural level on which all the other constructs of the theory work together. To define it, we would not find better than using the words of the one who

conceptualized it and gave it birth, that is, Vygotsky who says:

"It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978: 86, cited in Walqui, p. 162)

The author gives a brief account to how and why the ZPD was created, but the most captive fact she states is that Vygotsky did not provide a specified instructional theory using this construct of ZPD.

4. Scaffolding

Having reached this part, we are now about to deal with the focal point around which the whole article turns. Scaffolding as defined in the article means:

"a process of 'setting up' the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it." (Bruner, 1983: 60. In Walqui, p. 163)

Besides this definition, many other explanations were provided but they all share the same idea, that is, the steps and stages the provided help goes through with a special attention being given to the situation (context) of such assistance. Also, another important conclusion that is highlighted by the author is that "it is only within the ZPD that scaffolding can occur" (p. 163).

4.1. Scaffolding as a Structure and Process

After an elaborated section, the author comes to highlight the distinction there is between scaffolding as a structure and a process. This division was preceded by a set of examples to pave the way to her division of the concept Scaffolding. While the latter is used to mean 'a process', it refers to the actual work that is carried out (as exemplified by the "Peek-a-boo" game in her article). When the intended meaning is 'a structure', scaffolding simply refers to hints and steps that enable the process from being executed (as depicted in the article through the "facilitative structure of supports and boards" used in construction and building).

The just briefly-explained logic of scaffolding is somehow general, because it refers to the assistance provided in all contexts. However, in education scaffolding is conceived of as a tripartite set of pedagogical scales: Scaffolding 1, Scaffolding 2, and Scaffolding 3.

4.2. Three-Tier Pedagogical Scales

According to the author, "Scaffolding 1" is more like providing what is basic for other skills to be developed, for example, a planned curriculum or a classroom organized and pre-planned lesson. This first scale is more general and more structured. For the second scale, "Scaffolding 2", there is a movement towards realizing what was planned in the "Scaffolding 1". It is an instantiation of the first scale into particular activities in class.

Lastly, "Scaffolding 3" is the moment-to-moment

assistance that the capable other provides, be it a teacher or a peer. This last scale is more improvised, more specific, and not rigid like the first scale, it is flexible as a process. The second scale, "Scaffolding 2", is the intersection of the other two scales. In other words, it is where the structured and the improvised come to an interplay.

4.3. Features of Pedagogical Scales

4.3.1. General Features

We have mentioned earlier that scaffolding can refer to that process of a guided help in any context in a child's life. This general meaning has three central features, as mentioned by Walqui in her article, which are: "Contingent, Collaborative, and Interactive" (p. 163). So, when scaffolding is contingent it depends on other actions or behaviors. To put it quite another way, to scaffold depends on the displayed behavior(s) that influence the type of help to be provided and the degree of such help as well. Scaffolding is collaborative when what is achieved at the end is a result of a united achievement. Finally, Scaffolding is interactive when there is an engagement of multiple parts. However, this last idea will be shown later that it is not always the case.

4.3.2. Features Specific to Schooling

These just explained features are more general to fit the schooling context, and for that they were refined and elaborated so that we got six central features. They are straightforward and self-explanatory, in a sense, as follows: "Continuity, contextual support, intersubjectivity, contingency, handover/takeover, and flow" (p. 165).

Giving account to what the author says regarding each of these features, she starts with continuity to convey that scaffolding does not stop at one stage, but it is a constant movement towards achieving the end results. The second among the six features, "contextual support", that simply means providing a supportive and encouraging environment. The third is "Intersubjectivity", which builds on the previous feature to guarantee a full engagement of the child/learner in the process of scaffolding. When it comes to fourth feature, "contingency", through which a constant evaluation of the process, the helper can be informed about when parts of the structure can be moved elsewhere according to the process demands. The last idea simply means that the help being given to the learner on a particular aspect can be reduced or ceased and moved to be given on other aspects the learner needs help with. The fifth feature, "handover/takeover" that is based on making the role of the learner increased in contrast with decreasing that of the helper (be it a teacher or a peer). For the last one, the so called "flow", there should be a balance between the challenges and help as well as the skills of the learner in order for sound scaffolding to take place.

4.4. Scaffolded Interaction Differentiated from IRF

Walqui moves to give account to two different types of spoken interaction. The first category scaffolds students' learning, because it provides an opportunity for negotiating the meaning. It is also based on a collaborative production of

utterances, where students speak for themselves and are encouraged to take their utterances further. It was named differently by different scholars such as Jerome Bruner who called it: "ratchet-like" or "vertical construction" by Scollon. The second category of classroom spoken interaction is exemplified in the article by the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) method, which is more direct and kind of imposing a "recitation script" on the learners (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988. Cited in Walqui, p. 165).

4.5. Beyond the Expert-Novice Context

Thus far, we have been dealing with the components of scaffolding where the notion of 'a more knowledgeable' person is what comes to the mind. The help learners receive from an expert, such as guidance, advice, modeling, and other forms of assistance. According to the author ZPD as well as scaffolding are not only concerned with that interaction that happens between, as I have just mentioned, a more knowledgeable other (expert), but it is also distended to have other types of scaffolding relationships.

4.5.1. Interaction with Equal Peers

This type of scaffolding relationships is based on the idea that peers with equal knowledge can scaffold each other. It is referred to in the article as "*collective scaffolding*".

The learners here collaborate to produce skills and results that none of them would be able to produce alone. To make it a lot easier for understanding, the author's words are pertinent in this regard when she says: "learners create zones of proximal development for each other and engage in mutual scaffolding" (p. 167).

4.5.2. Interaction with Less-Capable Peers

Another additional type of scaffolding relationships stems from the belief that when you teach something you master it. So, providing assistance to a less-capable peer is going to create an opportunity for both parties (learners) to learn; the less-capable learner is going to move to the next developmental stage of/in his/her ZPD, while the assisting learner is going to master and consolidate what he/she already knows.

4.5.3. Drawing on Inner Resources

The last type of scaffolding relationships is more like a self-reliance strategy that the learners can have or develop, of course, from previous experiences, the remembered models, and the internalized variety of learning strategies. In this type, the learners can work alone in a "self-directed way" when they are faced with difficulties in tasks or challenging activities.

Having all these forms of scaffolding relationships in hand, we can see how many sources are available for learners to scaffold their own learning, and reach high developmental levels, and also for teachers to implement in the same endeavor.

After this theoretical account of 'Pedagogical Scaffolding', the author Aida Walqui moves to provide some strategies for instructional use. These, as she says are for English learners, but as we clarified previously they can be used in other

instructional contexts.

5. Types of Instructional Scaffolding to Use with English Learners

The following six strategies are shared by Aida Walqui as types of instructional scaffolding that can be used by teachers. Many of the tasks described below employ grouping structures familiar in cooperative learning literature. These types could be reported as follows.

5.1. Modeling

Since Modeling is concerned, students see or hear samples of what is requested. Students imitate models of effective writing, speaking, reading, and problem solving. In this regard, the whole class may engage in an activity that is later reenacted in pairs, threes, or groups of four people. Students are guided to work with photocopied samples of other students to guide their own thinking. We use this strategy for certain reasons. Indeed, it provides clear examples and it is considered to be as an imitation of an early state in learning. In addition, it provides explicit guidelines and standards for students' outcomes. It also provides a text for analysis and learning.

5.2. Bridging

The next strategy is bridging. While using this strategy students share their previous knowledge and understandings and build on them new concepts. It is also an adequate connection of a novel piece of knowledge into the already existing mental structures. The activation of students' prior knowledge necessitates relating the new events or items to already existing cognitive concepts or prepositions. In the article under study Tharp & Gallimore (1988, p. 108) define bridging as "the weaving of new information into existing mental structures" (p. 171). It is based on linking new knowledge to prior knowledge. This strategy is applied in the educational context efficiently through relating relevant materials to already existing entities. It is also an establishment of a personal link between students' knowledge and the material to be taught. For example, Brainstorming and KWL charts.

5.3. Contextualizing

Since contextualization is concerned, students work with manipulative, pictures, two-minute videos, and other objects or sources of information to construct meaning. The teacher may provide useful analogies or metaphors to bring complex ideas closer to the students' world experience. This process requires the instructors to use many strategies. The instructor makes language learning more comprehensible and reduces cognitive demands of learners. What is more, to enhance recall through the creation of complex memories and make language accessible and engaging by bringing complex ideas closer to the students' own experience. For instance, instructors may use certain strategies like hands-on activities,

framing questions and labs and demonstrations.

5.4. Schema Building

Schema building is a process of organizing learners' knowledge and understanding.

During this stage students work with advance organizers, graphic organizers, or other ways to visualize the whole picture first before studying the details. Class agendas may be posted on the wall, or the teacher may provide an overview of the parts of a lesson before getting into it. This strategy provides students with many benefits. Furthermore, it helps students to construct a conceptual map. It is also an efficient way that provides students with an ability to process information top-down and to distinguish between central and peripheral information. Moreover, it helps students to establish the connections that exist between and across concepts.

5.5. Developing Metacognition

In the article, cognition has been defined as "the ability to monitor one's current level of understanding and decide when it is not adequate" (Brandsford et al., 1999, p. 35). It includes the ways in which students manage their thinking abilities. Students receive explicit teaching strategies for thinking and problem solving as they engage in reading, writing, or inquiry tasks. They reflect where they are in a process and how they are thinking about their own thinking. For instance, thinking-aloud, allowing students to select their preferred learning strategy, rubrics and Think-Pair-Share strategy.

5.6. Re-Presenting Text

Since text re-presentation is concerned, students transform the linguistic construction they have already been presented to into forms of other genres. In this way students will have opportunities to represent their own understanding of written or spoken words through scripts, skits, or enactments. Other types of genre transformation include representing a poem as a narrative, changing a third-person historical narrative into an eye-witness account, or expressing scientific text as letter to a friend or a poster. For instance, thinking-aloud, reciprocal teaching, learning logs and KWL charts.

6. Conclusion

By and large, Scaffolding may take different shapes. As we have seen in this review, all of them serve one purpose; that is to bring about learning. Aida Walqui believes that scaffolding corroborate such belief as: "the only good teaching is that which is ahead of development" (p. 176). This is to be achieved through "practical strategies and tasks", but of course there is a need for "well versed" teachers, too.

7. Implications

One of the benefits of applying instructional scaffolding in teaching is that it helps the learners to become engaged in the

learning process. As they become active ones, they stop listening passively to information presented by their instructors; instead they build on their own knowledge and develop their cognitive processes. Dealing with a kind of students who have low self-esteem and learning difficulties, by encouraging them to follow the model provided, they can develop their own model and become intrinsically motivated to learn and fully engaged in the process of learning. Another benefit of this type of instruction, and especially while dealing with psychologically imbalanced students, it can minimize the level of frustration of the learner. This latter is extremely important especially with special needs students, who may become demotivated because of the frustration and anxiety they have while learning.

On the other hand, Scaffolded instruction adds extra difficulties to instructors, since developing the supports and scaffolded lessons to meet the different needs of each individual would be extremely time-consuming. Besides this, the implementation of individualized scaffolds in a classroom with a large number of students would be teachers-challenging. In addition to what has been stated, instructors who are not well trained, may not properly implement instructional scaffolding and therefore will not meet the expected effect of these strategies on learners.

Finally, well trained teachers and instructed curriculum, and different types of instructions that have already been mentioned would be appropriate for the specific lesson content. 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 is far more important.

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