



Using scaffolding to help children's language

What do you mean by scaffolding?

Scaffolding is a way to support children's learning of language. It helps a child move from simple language to more complicated language.

Scaffolding language means helping a child learn a new skill by building on skills that they already have. Adults give support by talking to children in different ways. As a child learns the new skill, the adults can reduce the amount of support they give.

"What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow"
Vygotsky.

So, does it work?

Yes. Scaffolding can be used by all the adults talking to a child, including parents. Providing language support at the right level for a child can really make a difference to their talking and understanding.

The aim of using scaffolding is to make language accessible to children and help them move on to the next stage. Adults using scaffolding can help to reduce anxiety about talking for children they are working with.

Successful scaffolding relies on you knowing the language level of the child you are working with.

Can you give me some examples of how I might use scaffolding?

Here are some examples of the most common scaffolding techniques you might use in your practice:

- Repeat what the child says the correct way, for example: "tar"- "yes, a **car**"

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- Say it again a different way, for example: “milk gone” - “yes, milk is *finished*”. This helps children learn new words.
- Repeat and extend, for example: “yes, milk has all gone. You’ve drunk it all.” This helps children learn to speak in longer sentences.
- Pre-teaching vocabulary: it’s important to think about your choice of words. For younger children these will probably be concrete words linked to what you can see, or what you are doing and useful for early conversation. With older children you might choose words which are useful in school or linked to their topic.
- Sentence starters. These can be used to scaffold conversations and for starting thinking about topics. Start a sentence and leave a gap for a child to finish for example “One thing I enjoyed about our school trip was ...”. Sentence starters can also be great for encouraging quieter children to join in, for example “Simple Simon says touch your....”
- Questions, especially ones that have no right or wrong answer. For example “What would happen if ...?” “What do you think he might do ...?” “What shall we do next?”

I’d like to use scaffolding with the children in my setting. How do I do it?

Firstly, remember to think about your own language:-

- Does it match the language level of the child you are talking to?
- Does the child know and understand the words (vocabulary) you are using?
- Use straightforward sentences with simple grammar; perhaps break up information into short segments, for example “... so you finished colouring. Now cut. Then stick it on the paper.”
- How fast are you speaking? Think about reducing the speed at which you talk, and always try to include pauses. This helps understanding and allows time for information to be processed.
- Are you using open questions (ones that don’t rely on one word answers) to help communication?

Also, you will need to think about:-

- the age of the child you are working with
- what skills you’d like them to learn
- the environment you are working in
- what opportunities there will be to practise/develop their new skills..

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Transfer into practice

What scaffolding techniques would you use to support these children? Would you choose to extend what is being said? Add vocabulary? Add a word?

- “dog”
- “like it has big wings and have colour on it”
- “I’m making a rocket. It’s the best”
- “it big and big”

Useful links:

To watch examples of scaffolding in use **watch** [this video](#)

[Talking Strategies KS2](#) – ways to improve communication skills in the classroom

[Top Techniques](#) poster for supporting early language skills

[Talking Point](#) website – information about typical speech and language development

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