

Scaffolding reading

Part 1.

Accessing and understanding complex texts with new and cognitively demanding ideas and concepts present challenges for all students, but especially for those who have had a limited access to such texts or who read in a second language. In addition, it is not easy for teachers to learn about students' language and literacy backgrounds, interests and motivations. However, this information is needed in order to develop the means for scaffolding and to compensate for the linguistic and textual challenges presented by different kinds of texts. Simplifying texts for language learners is not the key to better learning, rather teachers should build bridges to texts using activities that support students' reading and provide them with strategies that are transferable to other reading contexts.

There is no easy way to achieve these reading and comprehension skills, but students need to be shown a variety of strategies and should be given opportunities to take on a range of reader roles as they apply different strategies.

Reading-related activities are usually divided into three groups: pre-reading activities, during-reading activities and after-reading activities. You can easily find more information about these activities from various sources, but in the following, we highlight points relevant to the teaching of the language of schooling in a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous group.

Pre-reading activities

The aim of pre-reading activities is to help students understand the overall meaning of the text by stimulating their prior knowledge and building up relevant new topic knowledge. Here are some examples of activities:

- Students can be motivated to consider the topic through the use of more accessible texts. This will prepare them for reading more difficult texts as part of the same lesson. This activity could be done in their mother tongue or in a language they master better. For example, a piece of international news could be read first in their mother tongue and afterwards in the language of schooling.
- The scope and content of the text can be introduced and alluded to using visuals (pictures, diagrams, etc.), keywords, titles or the first sentences of each paragraph.
- Students can share their personal experiences of the topic and the teacher can develop a semantic web on the basis of their narratives. The teacher might add some key issues and concepts that are missing from students' reports. This activity is a valuable tool for assessing students' prior knowledge and ability to use appropriate vocabulary.
- Make a skeleton structure of the overall outline of the text and exclude the key content information. The skeleton text may contain only the first and the last paragraph of the text, and students are asked to predict the main points of the missing paragraphs.



During-reading activities

The aim of during-reading activities is to make the unconscious processes and practices explicit and help students to learn reading strategies from each other. Listing the strategies that good readers use can easily become overwhelming and might not motivate the students, while trying them out and discussing the strategies individual students adopt as part of their reading process may raise more interest in peers.

Young readers often consider reading as a technical procedure in which time used is more relevant than the thinking stirred by the text. One of the key points in during-reading activities is to make them realise what issues they should think about and focus on while reading a text. It is often a surprise to discover that the reader is “allowed” to use his or her knowledge and make guesses on the basis of it. Students should realise that reading is about comprehending meaning and thus thinking.

Here are some tips for scaffolding reading:

- It is often easier to pick up details or small pieces of information in a text than understand the overall meaning or structure of the text. Therefore, teach students to figure out how various kinds of texts are structured.
- There are always unfamiliar words in texts. It is not realistic to expect students to know them all, and it can only slow down the learning if students try to understand or learn them all. Therefore, assist your students in deciding which words in the text are critical and which can be skipped.
- Second language readers in particular stick to mechanical, linear word-by-word reading when they should be skipping unfamiliar terms and learning to work out meanings from the context.
- The key issues that should be recognised in text are as follows:
 - the overall organisation of the text
 - the key sentence in a paragraph that outlines its topic
 - critical reading
 - understanding the meaning and function of connectives and key signaling words
 - use of schematic knowledge to predict what is likely

After-reading activities

After-reading activities are especially important for second language readers because additional language development is possible using a familiar text. It is important to return to the text and focus more deeply on the information. Encourage the students to use the language of the text as a model for their own writing or language study and respond creatively or critically to what has been read. Teachers should also centre vocabulary-building and grammar-building activities on familiar texts. It is important to teach grammar in a systematic way, but the focus should be on meaning-critical grammatical structures. Grammatical issues should be explored as part of understanding meaning in the text and not as separate categories.

Part 2.

Choose a reading task typically used in your country and expand on it following the guidelines presented above.