

## **Teachers' and Student's Scaffolding in Second Language Learning:**

How do teacher's roles and student participations in interactions help students improve their communication skills and fluency?

**Aziza Restu Febrianto**

restu.febrianto86@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to show how scaffolding from teacher to students and that from students to students work during a sequence of language learning in which communication skills and fluency are the goals to reach. Pedagogical sequence that includes the roles of teacher in facilitating students involved in various types of learning activity and tasks has been analysed to find educational implications of the theories. Based on the data of some empirical studies, it shows that the strategy used by teacher to facilitate the activities and give corrective feedbacks is very helpful to make students focus on the goals. This is how scaffolding from teacher works efficiently in classroom learning. Pair and group work interactions among students with different characteristics also prove how scaffolding from students to students are present and contributes to the communication skills development. However, not all students can provide useful scaffolding for others due to their different personality. In conclusion, the teacher's scaffolding and students' scaffolding occur in different patterns (Storch 2002: 119-158). Teacher's scaffolding comes in a various range of support, while student's scaffolding might be helpful, but not as significantly as that of the teacher.

## **Introduction**

The biggest challenge of English teaching in Indonesia is that most students are not often exposed to practice communication in English, and they do not even use it for real-life conversations as well. As English has become Lingua Franca and being widely used for international communication among people around the world, the need of improving English communication skills is massively demanding. Today, most of the job opportunities in Indonesia require candidates to be good at English, and those who have more proficient in English communication skills would gain more promising career prospects than those who are less. English communication skills also become crucial when students graduate from school and start entering university abroad. Achieving IELTS score of at least 6.5 in speaking is not usually easy for students who never practice real-life communication. In fact, proficient communication skills help them cope with the academic environment and class interactions as well.

Scaffolding is a concept applied in education which was originally developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) in his sociocultural theory. Scaffolding is considered as a support which is temporarily given by more knowledgeable people or experts to learners in their learning process (Wood, Bruner and Ross: 1976). In a language class, the scaffolding can be from both teacher and students themselves.

## **Literature Review**

Scaffolding was firstly introduced by Wood et al. (1976), and this term has been used to define a temporary structure that supports a learning process. Scaffolding was also developed by (Vygotsky, 1978) to explain a type of support given by an expert to a novice when he firstly found and observed the 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)' concept and theory. These

concepts were proposed and investigated by many researchers. Research findings show that teacher is not the only person who plays a role as an expert in class, but students themselves are also able to give assistance with each other (Donato, 1994: 33-56; De Guerro and Villamil, 2000: 51-68; Ohta, 2001).

Bruner (1978: 89-100) believed that during the learning process, social interactional frameworks must be present. Through this learning sequence, it is expected that students can practice communication within interactional activities that help them improve their communication skills and fluency. The class consists of twenty students, and English is the only language of instructions. Tasks are given after the interactions in pair and group work activities to assess the students' performance. At this stage, teacher does not provide any help to give students opportunity to work independently. Bruner (1978) considers scaffolding as "the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some tasks so that the learners can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring." The topics being discussed and explored are taken from authentic resources according to real-life situations that students already know and experience. These easy topics stimulate students to have small talks and give them opportunities to keep talking in free interactions which then promote their fluency. Elis (1994) viewed that students can have strong motivation in learning when given many opportunities to speak. Besides, students will feel more confident and convenient to speak small things that they usually want to talk about in their first language.

## **Method**

This pedagogical sequence is adapted and modified from the Let's Talk 2 Second Edition (Jones, 2007: 4-5, 76, 84; see **Appendix 2**). It is designed to show how interactional activities in

pairs, groups and communication tasks, as well as teacher's roles improve learners' communication skills and fluency. This kind of sequence is in line with the concept of scaffolding in language learning. In general, scaffolding is defined as "the dialogic process by which one speaker assists another in performing a function that he or she cannot perform alone" (Ellis, 2003: 180). This pedagogical sequence is suggested to be applied in an Indonesian international School in which the students are at the intermediate level in English.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **The Sequence Title**

Preference and Personality

### **The Sequence Objective**

The objective of the learning sequence is that the learners will be able to talk about places that they like the most and the least, favourite colours, and tell how these preferences relate to people's personalities.

### **Activity Procedure**

As stated, the purpose of the pedagogical sequence is improving student's communication skills and promoting their fluency. Achieving these goals, the activities and tasks should be well organised to enable students engaged in interactions which entail small talks. The interaction can be done in pairs or groups. According to Donato's result of the study (1988), "knowledge is constructed by interactions of individuals within society, and learning is the internalisation of the social interaction." During the interactions, teacher monitors the interactions and encouraging

students to be active in the group discussions. He or she can give help when needed. At the end of the interactions, teacher gives a short follow-up discussion to point out any significant mistakes, give answers for questions and additional communication practice. To assess the students' performance in interactions, communication task which creates information gaps is provided.

This sequence procedure basically follows the principles of scaffolding according to Wood et al. (1976: 98) as follows:

- Recruiting interest in the activities and tasks
- Tasks are simplified
- Focusing on achieving the learning goals
- Pointing out critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution
- Frustration and stress are controlled when solving the problem
- An idealised version of the act to be performed is demonstrated

The characteristics of instructional scaffolding from Applebee and Langer (1983) are also found in this pedagogical sequence as follows:

1. Intentionality

The purpose of the lesson is to help students to be able to talk about the link between personal preferences and personality.

2. Appropriateness

It is usually not easy for students to talk about the topic and share their ideas in English. A list of vocabulary and sentence examples are given to help them active and engaged in conversations.

### 3. Structure

The procedure of the learning sequence is organized structurally which includes:

- Brainstorming
- Small talk in pairs
- Group Discussion
- Communication Task
- Conversation Game (Expansion)

### 4. Collaboration

During the lesson, teacher monitors the interactions, take notes for errors and mistakes and leads follow-up discussion to give corrective feedback and answer any questions.

### 5. Internalization

After working in pairs and groups, students are given an opportunity to work alone during the communication task.

## **1. Pre-Session**

In the beginning, teacher explains the learning objectives to class. To initiate the activities, he or she introduces the topic to students, “Places that they like the most and the least,” based on real-life situations that they like to talk about. The pictures or videos are also used to show the real portraits of the topics given. Students are asked to think about everything that comes up from their mind when seeing the pictures. They brainstorm and list their ideas, opinions and feelings

about places in the pictures and videos according to their experience. Teacher gives guidance, motivation and tells them what they are going to do with the information they already have. Gibbons (2015) stated that as learners do some brainstorming, problem solving in pairs or groups and any other related activities, they are engaged in authentic situations, internalizing, and questioning, justifying and contributing information.

## **2. Pair Work Interactions**

As students already have sufficient information to share in the pre-session stage and are ready for a talk, the class is divided into pairs, and students are asked to find a partner to work with. Before starting the talk, students look at the pictures again and describe what places that they like the most and the least. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning progress only occurs when learners interact with a more able person in community, and therefore the assistance from teacher is necessary and should be in line with the learner's needs. Teacher shows a list of particular words to use when students describe the places to their partner. To get them more tied to the topic being discussed, a sample of conversation is given through listening session. Teacher also gives an example by demonstrating the places that he/she likes, and students guess his/her personality.

During the interactions, teacher is moving around and listening talk from each pair. Then, he or she makes notes for any mistakes students make, but does not correct them while they are talking. Interaction without any intervention from teacher like this makes them feel more confident and convenient to express themselves. Willis (1992) mentions that "in the absence of teacher, students' interaction becomes far richer." At this stage, peer scaffolding occurs, and students develop their skills through it. In her study, Storch (2002: 147-150) finds that when

participating in a pair work, learners can provide support to each other in particular patterns. Regarding these patterns, she explained that teacher needs to understand how to arrange a pair interaction well and make sure that there is a transfer of knowledge in it. Based on these findings, she pointed out the need for teachers to monitor the interactions and do follow-up discussion as offered in this learning sequence.

### **3. Group Work Interactions**

In this session, students are assigned to work in groups. Nassaji and Swain (2000: 49) explained that “knowledge is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction and communication among learners in social settings”. Each group consists of four people. Arranging group based on the students' level of communicative proficiency is also taken into account so that the less proficient students will be exposed to more language input from the more able ones. The more communicative proficient students can help others when they have problems in speaking. They also share communication strategies that they already possess and provide feedback after the talks. The object on the topic is changed from places in pair work interaction to colours. Students listen to a talk about colours and personality and then are given 15 minutes to discuss the following questions with their group members:

- Do you think colours that you like describe who you are?
- How about the colours that you do not like?
- What do you think about this analysis? Is it real or fake?

Again, the role of teacher is only monitoring the interaction happening in each group, listening to their talk and making notes of their mistakes without giving any corrective feedback. Feedback and answers of any kinds of questions are provided during the follow-up discussion when the

talk is finished. According to Long (1983), corrective feedback is really needed, and it becomes a pedagogical means used to modify the students' input for their output improvement.

#### **4. Communication Task**

Communication tasks have to be done in pairs and the activities involved are more challenging. These tasks are provided to see how much students have learned from the previous activities and how they apply it in real-life conversations. When talking to a person, we usually do not know what information that he or she is going to share. This kind of gap is known as "information gap." Jones (2007) notes that "a lot of communication involves bridging an information gap: You know things: I don't know, and I know things you don't know." In this task, students simulate information gaps like those exist in real-life conversations. As students have different information of the given topic, they cannot see their partner's information. They have to find out what their partner knows and tell him or her what they know. It means that they exchange information in a realistic situation. By sharing information like this, information gaps will be bridged, and finally, meaningful communication will take place as well. The following are the procedure of the communication tasks:

- a. Students ask their partner questions about what his or her favourite activities, hobbies and interests. The question sheet is provided by the teacher.
- b. After they get the answers and gain information from their partner, they are asked to describe their partner's personality using their own words. Some particular keywords such as adjectives are also given to help them to speak.

This section takes around 30 minutes and allows teacher to see and assess student's progress of performance. There is no teachers' guidance or even follow-up discussion as exists in the

previous activities. The scaffolding is removed or reduced when learners have already been able to learn independently (Applebee and Langer 1983: 6).

### **5. Conversation Board Game**

When students finish the communication task, teacher introduces this game to play as an additional activity. This is a fun game that requires 20 minutes to play and can be used for reviewing. The procedure is similar to Snake and Ladder game.

- a. Students are divided into groups of three or four. Each of them brings a dice and choose any tokens such as coins or eraser.
- b. Each of the group has one board made of paper consisting 100 squares on it, and many of them provide a question.
- c. As the token is put on the start square, the dice is rolled, students have to answer a question from the square where their token is located.

### **Conclusion**

In short, in this pedagogical sequence, the teacher's scaffolding can be identified from his or her roles in all stages of the learning activities provided such as facilitating students with appropriate steps to support their learning process, providing guidance, motivation and help and leading follow-up discussion to give feedback and answers to questions. The interactions between the more communicative proficient students and the less able ones for language input show that the students' scaffolding is present and works in different patterns due to students' different

characteristics. It is important that teacher uses various techniques to help students give support to their peers.

### **About the Writer**

Aziza Restu Febrianto got his bachelor's degree from the English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang. He has worked as an English Language Teacher for both formal education and non-formal education sectors. In 2016 he pursued his master's degree at the MA TESOL program at the Institute of Education, University College London, UK. He currently teaches at AKPELNI and SUN Education.

### **References**

- Applebee, A.N., & Langer, J. (1983). *Instructional scaffolding: Reading and writing as natural language activities*. *Language Arts*, 60(2), (pp. 168-175).
- Bruner, J. S. (1978). *The Role of Dialogue in Language Acquisition*. In A. Sinclair, R. J. Jarvella, & W. J. M. Levelt (Eds.), *The Child's Concept of Language*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- De Gerrero, M. C., & Villamil, O. S. (2000). *Activation the ZPD: Mutual scaffolding in L2 Peer Revision*. *Modern Language Journal*, 84(1), (pp. 51-68).
- Donato, R (1994). *Collective Scaffolding in Second Language Learning*. In J.P. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds), *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research*, (pp.33-56).
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gibbons Pauline. *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

- Jones, Leo (2007). *The Student-Centred Classroom*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Long, M. H. (1983). *Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input*. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, (pp. 126-141)
- Long, M. H. (1985). *Input and second language acquisition theory*. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* Rowley, (pp. 377-393).
- Nassaji, H., & Swain, M. (2000). *A Vygotskian perspective on corrective feedback in L2: The effect of random versus negotiated help on the learning of English articles*. *Language Awareness*, 9(1), (pp. 34-51).
- Ohta, A. S. (2001). *Second Language Acquisition Processes in the Classroom: Learning Japanese*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Storch, Neomy. (2002). *Patterns of Interaction in ESL Pair Work*. *Language Learning* 52(1), (pp. 119-158)
- Willis, J. (1992). *'Inner and outer: spoken discourse in the language classroom'* in M. Coulthard (ed.). *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Wood, D. J., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). *The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving*. *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology*, 17(12), 89-100
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Zhao, R., & Orey, M. (1999). *The scaffolding process: Concepts, features, and empirical studies*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Georgia.