

Chapter 1

Scaffolding to Support English Language Learners in a Kindergarten Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of a kindergarten classroom and examines how a kindergarten teacher uses scaffolding to diversify instruction in the classroom to support ELLs. The authors focus on the scaffolding resources used to support learning and describe the kinds of support provided and opportunities for students created so they can use their developing language in class with the teacher and classmates. The authors identify planned and interactional scaffolding resources used in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) is one of the most important aspects of the modern United States classroom. ELLs often come from different language and educational backgrounds and a variety of home life experiences and cultural values that they bring to each unique classroom. There is a persistent achievement gap between

ELLs and native English speakers (Kindler, 2002), and ELLs have had higher dropout rates than English background students (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000). Addressing ELLs' needs requires teachers to be able to support their developing language abilities in the classroom and out of the classroom in interactions with classmates and teachers.

Expectations for both teachers and students to fulfill their responsibilities as educators and learners are high, yet the pressure is even higher for classrooms with ELLs. Elementary school

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teachers are expected to be able to effectively support ELLs within a mainstream, general education classroom context. ELLs need to perform well in numerous assessments, which are ultimately tied to teacher performance. These students are expected to talk about subject matter that is difficult for them to understand, regardless of the language barrier. Learning the customs of school becomes especially important in many cases. Kindergarten is one of the most crucial times for ELLs that will shape their development of content skills as well as their attitudes towards education.

This chapter examines how a kindergarten teacher uses scaffolding to diversify instruction in the classroom to support ELLs. Based on a case study of a kindergarten classroom, we focus on the scaffolding resources that are used to support ELLs' learning. We describe the kinds of support provided and opportunities for students created so they can use their developing language in class with the teacher and classmates.

BACKGROUND

Teacher Competencies to Work with English Language Learners

The changes in student populations in U.S. classrooms require that future and in-service teachers develop a knowledge base, expertise, and competencies necessary to effectively work with linguistically and culturally diverse students. A review of the extensive literature on preparing teachers for diverse populations reveals that much scholarship has been produced over the last decades, including studies on who prospective teachers are, their background and prior schooling experiences, activities and classes that intend to reduce prejudice, program evaluation research, and the role of fieldwork experiences (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). There is also evidence that many in-service and pre-service teachers feel uncomfortable and unprepared to work with linguistically

diverse students and do not have theoretical or experiential knowledge about Second Language Acquisition (SLA), English language development and teaching English language learners (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Menken & Antunez, 2001; Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003).

In light of research on multicultural education and teacher education, Howard and Aleman (2008) and Faltis, Arias, and Ramírez-Marín (2010), among others, have analyzed the competencies or capacities – essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions – that all teachers should develop for teaching diverse learners. Howard and Aleman (2008), with a focus on P-12 teachers, stress the importance of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, integration of pedagogy, learning and culture; knowledge of effective practices that include understandings of students' lives, communities and larger social and political discourses, and the need for critical consciousness and reflection. Faltis et al.'s (2010) analysis of the literature suggests more pragmatic competencies on what all secondary teachers of ELLs need to know and be able to do: to understand BICS/CALP distinction, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the role of home language (L1) in learning the second language (L2), and content area and language proficiency standards; to use small group work and heterogeneous grouping; pay attention to language forms; to advocate for their students; and to resort to community engagement and multiple assessment.

Another area that has been effective in teaching diverse learners is the ability to tap into different "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that students' families share. Moll's research addressed how family members use their funds of knowledge to sustain their families both economically and socially, and how these relationships connect them with other members of the community. This body of work emphasizes that in order to know their students as a "whole" person, the teacher must be able to

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