

What is designed-in scaffolding?

Planning and programming practices to maximise student learning

Rationale

The [Multicultural Education Policy](#) commits schools to providing opportunities that enable all students to achieve equitable education and social outcomes, and participate successfully in our culturally diverse society. Approximately 25% of students in NSW public schools are learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). These students require support to develop their academic English language skills so they can access the curriculum, successfully participate in learning alongside their peers in mainstream classes, and engage confidently in the broader Australian community. This document aims to develop teachers' knowledge of designed-in scaffolding and its significance for EAL/D learners. It also aims to assist teachers to plan effective English language learning support that aligns with system priorities in literacy and numeracy, and meets the commitments of the Multicultural Education Policy.

Intended audience

EAL/D specialist teachers, classroom teachers, SLSOs, Assistant Principals Curriculum and Instruction, Lead specialists, School leaders

Timeframe for use

The document should be read in planning the implementation of intensive English programs and by teachers planning support for EAL/D learners.

Instructions for use

The document can be used to professionally develop teachers on key precepts in English language acquisition and EAL/D pedagogy. It can assist school leaders plan professional learning, lead professional discussion and guide programming for EAL/D learners. Another advice sheet explores [contingent scaffolding \(staff only\)](#) which should be read in conjunction with this teacher advice.

Concept overview

Scaffolding is a metaphor describing teaching and learning practices which help students go from where they are now to where they need to be to achieve learning outcomes. Scaffolding is the educational practices which support students to learn in what theorist Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the learning space just beyond what students can achieve independently. Students can learn in the ZPD when given appropriate support, known as scaffolding (Dufficy, 2005, Hammond and Gibbons, 2005). Designed-in scaffolding refers to planned support or 'those activities consciously chosen to scaffold learning' (Gibbons, 2009).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is the 'temporary, future-oriented, targeted help' that supports learners in developing new knowledge, skills and understandings (Gibbons 2009). Scaffolding has three characteristics:

- temporary help that assists learners to move towards new concepts, levels of understanding, and new language
- enables learners to understand how to do something – not just what to do – so that they will be better able to complete a similar task alone
- is future-oriented, so that in the future, students will be able to complete the task independently (Gibbons 2009).

Contingent and designed-in scaffolding

To indicate the efficacy of scaffolding in developing students' learning, Gibbons (2015:16) cites Vygotsky's adage 'what a child can do with support today, she or he can do alone tomorrow.' Hammond and Gibbons (2005) define two types of scaffolding: **designed-in** and **contingent**. Designed-in scaffolding is planned during programming and planning, while contingent scaffolding arises in the spontaneous interaction between teacher and students, or between students.

Inherent in this model of learning – good learning is that which is ahead of actual development (Hammond 2021) – is high challenge/high support classroom practice. The teacher challenges students in the next steps of learning, building on what they can already do. This challenge must be accompanied by planned, appropriate and timely support, which is scaffolding. High challenge/high support in practice is explored in [Classrooms of possibility \(staff only\)](#) and [Curriculum planning for every student in every classroom](#) – Curriculum planning support for EAL/D learners, especially lesson 2: Engaging EAL/D learners, and lesson 3: Learning English, through English and about English.

Hammond and Gibbons (2005) stress the importance of both types of scaffolding to create optimal learning opportunities for EAL/D students. Contingent scaffolding responds to point of need assisted learning which has not been anticipated in the programming and planning. However, contingent scaffolding cannot replace designed-in scaffolding; Hammond and Gibbons (2005) observe that without designed-in scaffolding, contingent scaffolding ‘may become simply hit and miss’ and not assist students achieve learning goals (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005).

How does designed-in scaffolding support EAL/D learners’ language learning and curriculum knowledge?

Designed-in scaffolding can be effective in building English language knowledge, curriculum content, or both simultaneously, depending on the context and the type of scaffolding implemented. The kinds of designed-in scaffolding implemented by teachers will vary from classroom to classroom because of variations in student learning needs: it ‘is a dynamic and situated act that is responsive to a particular set of circumstances in a particular classroom’ (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005:12). In other words, designed-in scaffolding draws upon knowledge of students, how they learn, and how to teach the English language, English language literacy or numeracy, and the subject area. During programming and planning, teachers make strategic choices about the activities, texts and resources, participant structures, assessment, sequence, and pace of learning to support students to learn in their ZPD.

Teachers as designed-in scaffolders

- While programming, teachers use [backward design](#) from the planned tasks and activities to identify and plan the necessary support for language and subject learning. In this process the teacher anticipates the support groups of students may need to engage and build on learning. Some designed-in scaffolding strategies include [building the field \(staff only\)](#),

identifying language and cultural demands of texts and tasks, [sourcing ways to amplify the curriculum through images and multi-modal approaches \(staff only\)](#), carefully planning opportunities for oral language and carefully considering [participant structures](#).

- The process of backward designing a teaching and learning unit from the syllabus outcomes and summative assessment task ensures that all English language, content, literacy and/or numeracy skills and knowledge are explicitly taught in sequence. The department has published a [programming template](#) which includes [Universal design for learning \(UDL\)](#) prompts and has a column to detail modifications and adjustments. This template could be edited to allow for planning designed-in scaffolds which will support EAL/D learners' language and literacy learning.
- Teachers can design assessment task notifications which detail the content, skills and knowledge requirements expected by the task, and sequence the various steps or procedures required to successfully complete the task. Assessment should be informed by the [Curriculum policy standards](#) of the department's Curriculum planning, programming, assessment and reporting to parents K-12 policy, especially policy standard 2 and NESA's [assessment principles](#). [Enhancing assessment task notifications for EAL/D learners \(stages 4 and 5\)](#) is a practical course which assists teachers to design accessible and equitable assessment task notifications.
- At the beginning of a sequence of teaching and learning, use mind maps, progressive [brainstorms](#), and other tools to elicit students' prior knowledge of content, language, literacy and numeracy.
- Use school excursions, concrete materials and visuals to frontload students with the background knowledge necessary to successfully participate in the unit of teaching and learning.
- Design tasks which explicitly teach the language, literacy and/or numeracy skills needed in the teaching and learning unit.
- Sequence the tasks so they consecutively build the language, literacy, numeracy skills as well as content knowledge.
- Use [learning intentions and success criteria](#) which include language, literacy and numeracy goals, and which align to the backward mapping of the unit of teaching and learning.

- Use [exit tickets](#) and other learner reflection tools to encourage development of students' metacognitive awareness (awareness of their own learning). The information collated from exit tickets feeds back into programming and planning.
- Create activities which shift between a range of [participant structures](#) to support student learning, and to provide gradual handover so students become increasingly independent as learners.
- Use [message abundancy](#) to amplify the learning of new concepts, new language, new literacy or new numeracy. [What is message abundancy? \(staff only\)](#) explores this pedagogy in greater detail.
- Use exemplar texts or [WAGOLLS](#) to model the content, language, literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills for students so that they have clear understanding of expectations. See [LISC and WAGOLLS](#). These exemplar texts should be [deconstructed](#) and the same type of text and related content should be jointly constructed to model content, text structure and language features and vocabulary.
- Incorporate [graphic organisers](#), [Frayer models](#), [Think boards](#) and mentor texts in learning activities to make explicit to students the target content, knowledge and skills.

Glossary

Participant structures: refers to different organisational structures within lessons. These include whole class; group; pair and individual tasks. Decisions about participant structures are made in response to the specific learning purpose of a task. By designing-in shifts in participant structures as students move from one task to the next, teachers may design-in different levels of support, and to target that support to meet the needs of specific groups or individual students (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005).

Message abundancy: refers to ways in which students have multiple opportunities to access the same language or concepts. These could include spoken and written language, visual support, or physical activities that involve manipulation of objects (Gibbons, 2009).

WAGOLL: What a Good One Looks Like – an exemplar text which clearly displays the skills, knowledge and content assessed in the task.

Evidence base (reference list)

Dufficy, P (2005) Designing learning for diverse classrooms, Newtown: PETAA.

Gibbons, P (2009) English learners, academic literacy and thinking: learning in the challenge zone, Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Gibbons, P (2015) Scaffolding language scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom, 2nd ed Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Hammond, J (2021) 'Scaffolding in EAL/D education' in Harper, H and Feez, S, An EAL/D handbook, Newtown: PETAA. pp 16-18.

Hammond, J and Gibbons, P (2005) 'Putting scaffolding to work: the contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education' Prospect 20 1 pp 6-25.

NSW Department of Education (2018) Classrooms of possibility: [high challenge](#) and [high support](#)

Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: Aligns with strategic priority to improve literacy and numeracy, aligns with [What works best – EAL/D](#), aligns with the [Multicultural Education policy](#) and [procedures](#) and the [Multicultural Education Plan 2024-2027](#).

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain: Curriculum

Alignment to Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: 1.3, 1.5, 2.2, 3.2

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Feedback and comments: Please email suggestions and feedback to eald.education@det.nsw.ed.au citing the name of the document

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