

A SCAFFOLDING STRATEGY IN THE PROCESS OF WRITING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: *The main issue underlying the teaching of English in primary school is as a part of the national development that is directed towards the improvement of the quality of human resources. One aspect of this goal is the improvement of the mastery of foreign languages, particularly the English language (Huda, 1999). As a foreign language, English belongs to the difficult subject to teach for young learners, especially for writing skill. This article tries to offer a scaffolding strategy in the process of writing as an alternative way of teaching method in teaching writing to young learners. This method provides step-by-step guidance in writing that is suitable to young learners' characteristics.*

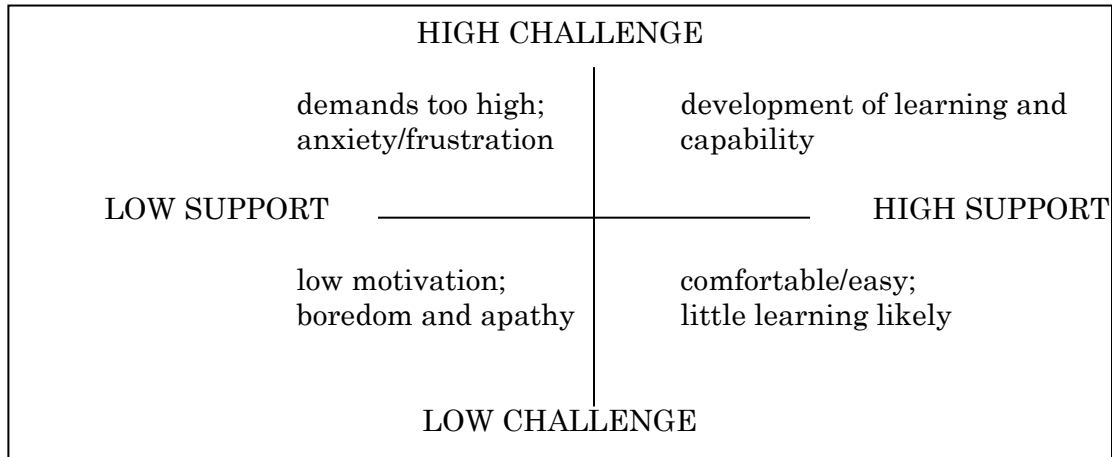
Key words: Scaffolding, Process of Writing, Young Learners

Most of Indonesian students have English as their first foreign language. It means that they learn English through a language that they are still acquiring. This fact has an implication that while learning *in* a language is that there also has to be learning *about* the language (Halliday, 1980 in Dare and Polias, 2001). This implication leads to the question on how the best practices to learn English in teaching and learning in the context of schooling.

One of the strategies believed to be helpful is scaffolding. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term 'scaffolding' as a metaphor to capture the nature of support and guidance in learning (Hammond & Gibbons, 2001:2). They used the term to describe the nature of parental tutoring in the language development of young children. They showed that parents who were 'successful scaffolders' focused on their children's attention on the task at hand, and kept them motivated and working on the task. Such parents divided the task into manageable components and directed their children's attention to the essential and relevant features. Furthermore, these parents demonstrated and modeled successful performance, while keeping the task at an appropriate level of difficulty.

Scaffolding is a concept closely related to theoretical construct of Zone Proximal Development (ZPD) advanced by Lev Vygotsky. Zone of proximal development (ZPD) is Vygotsky's term for the range of tasks that are too difficult for the child to master alone but that can be learned with guidance and assistance of adults or more-skilled children.

In the context of classroom interaction, the term scaffolding refers to temporary assistance and support that teachers provide to help learners complete a task or develop new skills, concepts, or understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone (Hammond & Gibbons, 2001). The relationship between level of difficulty of the task and support given to the learners in teaching-learning environment can be understood easily as shown in Figure 1 below, drawn from Mariani (1997).



The types of scaffolding or support provided will depend on the students' current level of English and their familiarity with the language and with the activity. In particularly the teaching of writing skill, then, scaffolding is should be given extensively throughout step-by-step process in writing. Thus, process writing is suitable for ESL or EFL young learners since one of the influential features is involving step-by-step guidance in producing a final piece of writing.

There are commonly five-steps in process writing namely prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Prewriting is the initial and important step. In this stage, children are given a chance to prepare to write and to collect their thoughts and ideas (Linse, 2006:102). There are three kinds of scaffolding activities given in this stage. First is building up their knowledge about the topic they will write. The teacher should make sure that her students have enough background knowledge of the topic. Next, the teacher gives a modeling text. The aim is for students to become familiar with the purpose, overall structure, and linguistic features of the type of text they are going to write. Then the teacher and students write a text together. By doing so it is expected that students can see how the text is written. The focus is on illustrating the process of writing a text, considering both the content and the language. Those three kinds of scaffolding activities proposed are adapted from stages in the curriculum cycle namely building up the field, modeling the text type, and joint construction (Gibbons, 2002:60).

The second step of process writing is drafting. In this stage, children begin to draft their ideas on paper (Dorn & Soffos, 2001:33). The content is

emphasized rather than mechanics, they are encouraged not to worry about form or correctness or even the order (Linse, 2006:102). Children are reminded that they can write down any idea related to the topic.

The third is revising. In this stage, the children are trying to examine their writing related to the order and flow of their ideas. The teacher can give scaffolding to the children by giving a constructive feedback for clarity and best choice of the words. Children need to know what ideas or organization they should keep as well as what they need to change to make it better (Linse, 2006:107). Some techniques that can be used are carets (to add words or phrases), lines and crosses (to delete unnecessary information, circles with connecting lines (to move pieces of text to a new position), and cut-and-paste (to rearrange larger chunks of passage within the text) (Dorn & Soffos, 2001:33).

The fourth is editing. In this stage, the children proofread their work in terms of grammatical and spelling errors. The children can use spelling tools to identify errors (Dorn & Soffos, 2001:33). For instance, they circle misspelled words, and use the dictionary to correct spellings.

The last step is publishing. In this stage, the children's writing product will be shared to others. This means that they should work on how to lay out the text in the most appealing way to the reader (Dorn & Soffos, 2001:33). For example, if they include pictures to illustrate the text, they should organize their writing by considering how much text to put on.


TEACHING PROCEDURES

The following procedures exemplify the use of scaffolding strategy in the process of writing. The topic is about writing the favorite animals.

Prewriting Stage

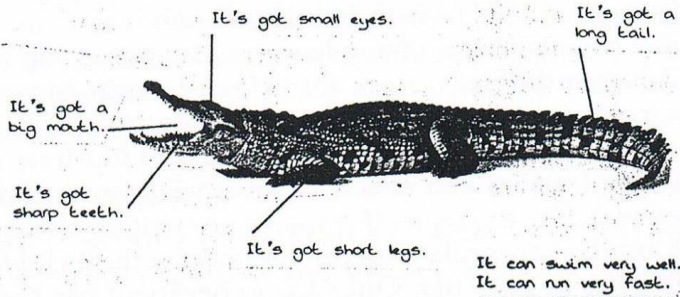
- *Building the Field.* Find out what pupils know about their favorite animals in order to activate their knowledge about the topic by relating it to their own experience, eg *Have you been to a zoo? What do you find there? What animal do you like?*
- *Modeling the Text Type.* Provides a reading material that will model the type of writing the students will produce. Things to be considered is the model text should be at the right level of the students, not too low or too high from their level. The example of model text below is taken from Bradshaw and Hadfield, 2003, p.59. It is designed for six-or seven-year old children.

Unit 12





2 My favourite animal
Listen and read


My Favourite Animal Is The Crocodile.




Make sentences. My favourite animal is the ...


1 giraffe


2 bushbaby


3 lion


4 penguin

It's got ...	black wings,	sharp teeth.	a long neck,	fly.
It can ...	climb very well.	run very fast.	a long tail.	
It can't ...	big eyes.	swim very well,		

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Excellent Book 1 (Bradshaw and Hadfield, 2003, p. 59)

- Create a story (based on the model text) about a kid who likes a crocodile eg *It's Yani. His favorite animal is a crocodile.*
- Check if the students can read and understand every information related with the new word meaning from the text (nouns, adjectives, verbs).
- The sentence pattern can be explained by transferring the meaning in the native language.
For example:
It's got..... = Dia mempunyainya.....
It can..... = Dia dapat.....
It can't..... = Dia tidak dapat.....
- *Joint Construction.* Demonstrate how to do the exercise of making sentence given on the model text. It is supposed to match the sentence pattern in the right side with the noun phrase in the right side.
For example:
My favorite animal is the penguin.
It's got black wings.
It can swim very well.
It can't fly.

Drafting Stage

- Ask the students to draw their favorite animals. It is done to make them motivated in writing if there is a picture on their paper.
- Have them to give a line around the picture they made to sign out what part of the animal they want to describe.
- Then, ask them to write about their favorite animals.
- Tell the students to write unfamiliar words they encounter in their native language.

Revising stage

- Help them by giving feedback about what part they might be missed in describing about their favorite animals.
- Give them the English words for their list of the unfamiliar words.
- Help them learn how to make their writing interesting and comprehensible to the reader in terms of organizing the idea.

Editing stage

- Check the students' mechanical mistakes, including spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Publishing stage

- Have them to read their written text in front of the class.
- Display their works on the cardboard inside the class.

CONCLUSION

Writing is a complicated activity that needs a process in producing a text. This implies that it needs a gradual support and guidance of activities to help the students finishing their writing, particularly young writers. The scaffolding in every steps or stages of a process used to produce pieces of written text is explored. The challenge of this strategy is you should develop your intuition and ability to observe and monitor children's way of working so you can plan and provide support more sensitively and flexibly based on children's constantly changing needs.

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