The Power of Verbal Scaffolding: "Showing" Beginning Readers How to Use Reading Strategies

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Abstract A single case study design was employed to describe the nature of one teacher's verbal scaffolding used during differentiated reading instruction in a kindergarten classroom. The teacher participant was selected from a group of exemplary teachers nominated from two school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania. Multiple sources of data, including transcripts of video-taped small group literacy lessons, were analyzed to glean insight regarding the nature of verbal scaffolding in classroom instruction. Transcripts were coded to identify salient patterns and themes related to lesson differentiation. The following categories were used to define the different types of talk used by the teacher to promote the independent use of strategies in reading: direct explanation, explicit modeling, invitations to participate, clarification, verification, and telling. Excerpts from transcripts are provided to illustrate examples of the different verbal scaffolds observed during the study. The teacher participant in this case study provides one example of how intentional verbal scaffolding can be used in early literacy instruction. Findings suggest this may have positive implications for student literacy growth. Furthermore, this study offers rich descriptions of verbal scaffolding and quality examples of differentiated instruction that can support pre-service teachers and in-service teachers as they plan for effective literacy instruction.

Ms. Palmer[1]: I want you to take a minute; we've been talking a lot about background knowledge, right? What's background knowledge? Do you remember what our strategy for background knowledge is? When we use what you… Dustin?

Dustin: Know.

Ms. Palmer: Already know in your head. Well, it says 'What I Like,' you should have a lot of background knowledge. I want you to think for a minute of things that you like. You can share with the group what you like. Maybe that will be the same as what this little girl in our story likes. What do you think, Hadley?

Hadley: Stuffed animal.

Ms. Palmer: Oh, maybe she likes a stuffed animal. What makes you say that?

Hadley: She has a stuffed animal.

Ms. Palmer: She does, very nice. Hadley's using her picture clues. Look at the little girl; she's holding a stuffed animal. What kind of stuffed animal is that, Hadley?

Hadley: A teddy bear.

Ms. Palmer: A teddy bear. Do any of you have a teddy bear that you sleep with at night? You just made… what kind of connection, Greg?

Greg: Self.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

Ms. Palmer: Self to…
Greg: Text.
Ms. Palmer: Text, right, just like the book.

The preceding transcript illustrates one teacher's attempts to scaffold comprehension and higher-level thinking skills with her students; yet, student responses and the topic detailed in the conversation (stuffed animals) indicate that the participants may lack sophistication. The conversation took place during a small group lesson in Ms. Palmer's kindergarten classroom. Ms. Palmer introduced her students to high-level metacognitive strategies such as accessing background knowledge, making connections with text (as seen in this example) as well as other comprehension strategies through whole class and small group text discussions.

Because students entering kindergarten demonstrate a range of literacy competencies, it is important for the teacher to provide rich exposure to print and literacy activities. As Rodgers (2004) explains, "instruction has the potential to foster and change the pace of reading and writing development; the teacher does not have to wait until the child has reached a certain level of maturity to teach the child about reading" (p. 205). Teachers of early learners should use systematic, explicit, and differentiated instruction to support students' literacy development. When provided with such support, students have the opportunity to participate in high level, complex literacy experiences.

The term 'systematic' may be misinterpreted as planned and inflexible. However, Strickland states, "Instruction is systematic when it is planned, deliberate in application, and proceeds in an orderly manner. This does not mean a rigid progression of 'one-size-fits-all' instruction. Rather, it means a thoughtfully planned program that takes into account learner variability" (Strickland 1998, p. 51). This is a complex endeavor, to say the least. Creating and conducting thoughtfully varied lessons that account for individual needs and strengths requires deep knowledge of literacy processes, pedagogy, and individuals (Ankrum et al. 2008). Exemplary teachers of literacy demonstrate the ability to weave tailored lessons into their daily instruction (Pressley et al. 2001; Taylor et al. 2003). Even with the ability to apply deep knowledge to lesson planning, it is important for teachers to be responsive to their learners; that is, it is essential that teachers have the ability to adapt their lessons to meet the evolving needs of their students during instruction (Ankrum and Bean 2008; Parsons 2010). As Morrow (2011) explains, exemplary teachers "teach skills within a meaningful context and in an explicit manner" and "view all students as capable learners who progress at their own developmental level" (p. 89). Therefore, it is essential that

teachers reflect on possible ways to talk with students and to consider the types of scaffolding one might provide for learners.

Differentiating Instruction: Scaffolding Learners

One method for supporting learners during instruction is known as scaffolding. Wood et al. (1976) describes scaffolding as the "process that enables a child or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). In this definition, the careful guidance of a teacher enables the learner to complete a task that would otherwise be impossible. Fostering student independence is central to successful scaffolding; therefore, the scaffold must eventually be removed to allow the learner to apply new learning independently.

Scaffolding is a learner-centered construct; as such, instructional scaffolds may take various forms, depending on the needs and strengths of learners (Dennen 2004). Pentimonti and Justice (2010) describe instructional scaffolds in terms of a continuum of low to high support for learners. "Low levels of support featuring minimal levels of adult assistance are those scaffolding strategies provided when a child is nearing maturation in a given area of development" (p. 343). Scaffolds that are more structured in nature provide more adult assistance; these are categorized as offering "high support" for learners (Pentimonti & Justice 2010). Scaffolds from either end of this continuum may be necessary, depending on the developmental level of the learner, since the ultimate goal is to reduce the amount of scaffolding provided to foster independence.

Expert teachers build various scaffolds into instruction. For instance, teachers may provide young learners with a visual representation of each aspect of the daily agenda to accompany the text. For example, a picture of a book might represent the word "reading". This, along with an explicit explanation of how to read and use the chart, would allow emergent learners to anticipate the day's events, even if they cannot independently remember the sequence or read the text on the chart. This could be categorized as a scaffold that offers high support to the learner. However, some students may quickly understand how to use the chart, and may only require a simple prompt to remind them where to look if the schedule has not yet been internalized; this prompt would be considered a low support scaffold. Exemplary teachers of literacy weave scaffolds into their reading instruction, particularly in small group lessons (Ankrum 2006; Ankrum et al. 2008; Morrow 2011; Taylor et al. 2003). The level of support is adjusted to meet the needs of the readers.

Verbal Scaffolding

Teachers in constructivist classrooms believe that knowledge is built through social interactions, especially with a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky states, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (p. 57). During literacy instruction, knowledge is mediated through the teacher, who gradually transfers control of the concepts (e.g., use of reading strategies) to the students (Wozniak 1980).

Integral to Vygotsky's theory is what he described as the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86, author's italics). Learning is enhanced when assistance is provided as the child works within his or her ZPD. Through this assistance, or social mediation, the learner internalizes the expected behaviors, concepts, and/or strategies. Vygotsky argued that effective instruction occurs at the child's ZPD, since this is where true learning transpires.

Language is one tool used to mediate the construction of meaning (Wertsch 1985). In the classroom example provided earlier, Ms. Palmer serves as the "more knowledgeable other", using spoken interactions to guide and extend student learning (Mercer 1995). The teacher is not alone in the construction of knowledge; providing information is not sufficient because students learn by engaging in meaningful conversations with the support of the teacher. Therefore, we refer to these interactions as verbal scaffolds.

Verbal scaffolding is a key element in constructivist classrooms (Tracey and Morrow 2006; Roehler and Cantlon 1997). It is through meaningful conversations between students and teachers that guided problem solving can occur in reading instruction. This can lead to effective and critical thinking (Duke and Pearson 2002; Hogan and Pressley 1997). Classroom discourse does affect student thinking and ultimately achievement (Cazden 1988; Johnston 2004). Rodgers (2004) explains that "studies suggest that teachers scaffold children's reading behaviors by using language effectively; they respond to a student's reading behaviors with talk that is designed to bring the student a little further along" (p. 505). Further, Taylor et al. (2003) found that student achievement was positively

affected when coaching (e.g., prompting and questioning) rather than telling, was the predominant method of instructional delivery. In addition, in Ankrum's (2006) case study, differentiated verbal scaffolding was observed across small group lessons in one exemplary teacher's classroom. Effectively scaffolding students through questioning and prompting can provide the developmentally appropriate support that young learners need to think on a higher level (Maloch 2002).

The verbal scaffolding that a teacher offers to support student learning is an essential ingredient in differentiated lessons. Verbal scaffolding includes prompting, questioning, and praising learners; it is this spoken interaction between the teacher and the students that can ultimately make the difference to struggling readers (Rodgers 2004). However, verbal scaffolding is difficult to characterize and, as a result, is often not a consideration or focus in the resources available to teachers on differentiated instruction. The purpose of this manuscript is to provide a description of effective verbal scaffolding so that teachers may reflect on how to consistently and intentionally integrate this into their small group reading instruction.

Our Study: An Investigation of Exemplary Small Group Instruction

The data collected for this microanalysis are drawn from a wider multi-year study intended to explore the nature of effective small group differentiated reading instruction in the classrooms of four exemplary teachers of literacy. In our initial exploration, we identified which aspects of small group lessons were differentiated to meet the needs of the learners. A purposeful sample was used; teacher participants were nominated as exemplary by administrators and literacy specialists in two southwestern Pennsylvania school districts. We provided district personnel with a list of research-based characteristics of effective literacy instruction to aid them in their nominations ("Appendix"). Following the nominations, we observed each teacher's literacy instruction using the CIERA School Change Classroom Observation Scheme (2000) to confirm that they fit the research-based profile of an exemplary teacher of literacy.

Since our overall goal was to describe the ways in which teachers differentiate instruction in their classrooms, several sources of data were collected to provide a complete picture of *how* each teacher instructed her students in reading. Our initial analysis indicated that verbal scaffolding was one aspect of the lessons the teachers differentiated to meet needs of the learners. Another research question resulted, leading us to explore the types of verbal scaffolding that teachers use to enhance reading development in beginning readers. In this article we provide a

description of one exemplary teacher's use of verbal scaffolding to support the developmental needs of beginning readers. The following discussion will revolve around data collected from Ms. Palmer's kindergarten classroom, because we wanted to highlight the high-level conversations about/around text that occurred with beginning readers.

Context

Ms. Palmer teaches kindergarten at an elementary school that enrolls approximately 650 K-6 students. The National Education for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes the school's locale as 'town: fringe', because of its proximity to a large urban area. The school population is 97 % white with 27 % receiving free/reduced lunch. Title I services are available to qualified students at the school.

Ms. Palmer holds a teaching certificate in Elementary Education and is a certified Reading Specialist. She has been teaching full day kindergarten for 2 years and served as a reading specialist in the same school for 1 year prior to that. Ms. Palmer has participated in a variety of literacy professional development opportunities provided by her school district. She described the in-classroom teaching demonstrations provided by her district's literacy coach as the most powerful influence on her instruction. During the year of our study, Ms. Palmer had twenty-three students in her class, 11 boys and 12 girls. Nine of these students qualified for Title I support at some point in the school year; however, by year's end, all but two students exited the program.

Data Collection

We collected data from various sources in order to understand the changing nature of literacy instruction across the course of the school year. We observed 1 week of literacy instruction at three time points (fall, winter, and spring) during the school year to document the differences and similarities across small group lessons over the course of the entire year. Sampling instruction over the course of the school year in this way is consistent with previous studies of exemplary literacy instruction (Pressley et al. 2001; Taylor et al. 2003). Videotapes and extensive narrative notes were taken to document the group size, lesson focus, materials used, teacher-student interactions (e.g., conversation topics and types of scaffolding), and other relevant information during each literacy lesson. Attention was paid to how these aspects varied among lessons. We coded observations using a priori codes that were developed from a pilot study (Table 1), in addition to new codes that emerged during the observations (Table 2).

Brief, informal teacher interviews were also conducted prior to each lesson to illuminate Ms. Palmer's planned focus. These interviews allowed her to describe the planned lesson and her rationale behind the plan. Feedback interviews were conducted upon completion of the observations. Ms. Palmer was encouraged to reflect on her lessons, elaborate on decisions made during the lessons, and provide insight about the differences in the instruction among the groups.

Data Analyses

Data analyses were ongoing throughout data collection with the use of the constant comparison method (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The main analysis reported here consisted of a two-stage process of reviewing the transcribed small group lessons.

First Stage of Analysis

During the first stage of analysis, we reviewed field notes and audio transcripts to identify initial patterns and themes in the data related to lesson differentiation (Strauss and Corbin 1990). For example, when we looked across lessons, we noticed that the length of time that Ms. Palmer spent with each group varied, she used different texts with each group, the focus of each lesson was different, and that some groups met with Ms. Palmer more frequently than others. Based on this initial breakdown of differences, we conducted an in-depth analysis of one lesson and then refined our coding scheme (Table 1). We coded the first lesson transcript, reaching an inter-rater reliability rate of 87 %. We resolved all disagreements through discussion. Two members of our research team coded the remaining transcripts.

Expanded field notes of literacy instruction, teacher interviews, and theoretical memos provided information to crosscheck the transcripts. For example, during several transcribed lessons, individual students were asked to read aloud. This could have been coded as part of the lesson focus, reading aloud. However, field notes revealed this to be an example of assessment; the teacher was taking a running record of the child's reading behavior.

Second Stage of Analysis

During our second stage of analysis, we explored the manner in which Ms. Palmer's questions and prompts varied across lessons. Therefore, we conducted a microanalysis of teacher discourse patterns. After analyzing the teacher-student interactions, we adapted codes from a study conducted by Roehler and Cantlon (1997). The focus of this microanalysis was the nature of the teacher's verbal scaffolds (e.g., questions/prompts to enhance problem solving and/or comprehension). We coded each turn taking episode in the conversation; that is, each time the teacher

Table 1 Coding scheme

Code	Definition	Example
Time	Time and frequency spent in small group instruction	Students struggling with reading tasks met with the teacher more frequently, often in shorter time increments
Materials	Types of materials used by students and/or teacher in small group lesson	Leveled texts, white boards, handouts, word cards.
Lesson Focus	Instructional focus for small group lesson	Comprehension strategies, vocabulary development, decoding skills are common examples
Post reading assignment	Teacher assignment for student response following reading	Student may write a response to reading, act out a portion of a story, or provide a retelling of the text
Assessment	Assessment tools utilized by teacher to inform small group instruction	Running records, anecdotal records, and rubrics are a few examples
Teacher talk	Scaffolding, through talk, provided by the teacher during small group instruction	Later defined as verbal scaffolds, refer to Table 2

Table 2 Teacher talk codes (adapted from Roehler and Cantlon 1997)

Verbal assistance type	Definition	Examples
Direct explanation	Explicit statements used by the teacher to assist students in understanding a concept or strategy	"A caption is when the author adds words near the picture to describe the photograph. Look at our mentor text. The sentence under the picture tells us all about this dolphin's teeth."
Explicit modeling	Verbal demonstration of strategy application. Includes think alouds and talk alouds	"Let me think, when I take a look at this photograph, I think, look at all the different colors and the sizes. Are all rocks the same? No, so my caption is going to be: rocks can come in many sizes and shapes."
Invitations to participate	Statements used by teacher to encourage student participation by eliciting student to provide explanation, elaboration, or direct evidence from text	"What do you want to tell me about this photograph on the front page? Does anybody have something that they would want to write?"
Clarification	Guided discussion or questioning used by the teacher in order to help correct student misunderstanding	"That looks like a coat, but look how the word starts. Could that be coat? What else could it be if it starts with a j?"
Verification	Confirmation of valid or correct student response	"Your inference makes sense! The boy in the picture is crying. The book tells us he fell down. We cry when we fall down because it hurts; I bet you are right. The boy got hurt."
Telling	Teacher provides answer for student in order to continue the discussion or the reading	"That word is *jacket*."

spoke, regardless of length of the turn, the scaffolds were coded. Table 2 provides a list and description of the codes used to categorize verbal scaffolding through teacher talk during the small group lessons.

Ms. Palmer's Classroom: A Close Up Look

For the duration of our study in Ms. Palmer's kindergarten classroom, we consistently observed the explicit nature of her verbal scaffolding. In particular, she demonstrated an ability to clearly explain and model the cognitive act of reading. Ms. Palmer "coached" her emergent and early level readers in how to decode and comprehend text throughout her small group lessons (Clark 2004).

In the following section we share lesson transcripts from Ms. Palmer's classroom to illustrate the different types of verbal scaffolding that she provided for her young learners.

Transcript One

Ms. Palmer: Now, we are going to talk about shoes, because that's what our book's going to be about. Before we are going to start talking about shoes, we need to talk about what happens when we come to a word we don't know. What are you going to do if you come to a word you don't know, Declan?
Declan: Sound it out.
Ms. Palmer: Sound it out, very good. Now, I need to ask you a question, Declan. This word is in our book. (Teacher writes 'slippers' on a small white board) Can you guys figure that word out? Someone tell me what that is? I like what I hear you doing, Declan. I like what Riley's doing, too.
Students: (The children make various attempts to decode the word slippers)

Ms. Palmer: Very good, this is the word slippers. But more importantly, what Ms. Palmer heard you doing was… I did not see you going like this s-l-i-pp-e-r-s. You didn't try to sound each letter, right? No, I heard Declan go "sliii." And I heard Riley going, "errrs." Do you know what you guys were doing and you probably don't even realize it? Do you know? Riley?
Riley: We were chunking.
Ms. Palmer: You were chunking! You guys are so awesome. You were chunking. My favorite way of sounding out. So when it's a longer word, we need to find chunks that we know. Very good. There are going to be different types of shoes in here.

Ms. Palmer lends a variety of verbal scaffolds to her students' reading attempts in this portion of one small group lesson. Ms. Palmer begins with an *invitation to participate*, where she introduces students to a potential problem they may encounter, and asks them what they will do when they come to a word they do not know. This serves several purposes; Ms. Palmer can assess student knowledge of a skill or strategy that she has already taught (e.g., using familiar letter combinations, or chunks, to decode unfamiliar words), while helping students to access their prior knowledge so they are ready to apply a partially known skill or strategy. This also provides an opportunity for students to search for a strategy that they were previously taught. Help is provided only as needed, which leads to self-regulation. Pressley et al. (2001) identify the development of self-regulation as one common characteristic of exemplary teachers.

After Declan provides a general answer ("sound it out") Ms. Palmer *verifies* his correct response, and allows students the opportunity to practice the strategy with the unknown word, 'slipper'. She praises successful attempts, leading students from a general strategy (sounding out) to the more specific strategy identified by Riley as "chunking." This allows Ms. Palmer to assess her students' ability to identify and apply a previously taught strategy. Once the students successfully use this decoding strategy, she praises the students with explicit examples, *verifying* again their correct response. This is likely to lead to use of this strategy again in the future. Ms. Palmer pushes her kindergarten students to name the strategy (chunking) and then adds a *direct explanation* to explicitly explain to the students what they just accomplished; that is, using chunks that they know to decode longer words. This explanation could be classified as a high level of support by Pentimonti and Justice (2010), and helps to solidify the understanding for all of the children in the group.

Ms. Palmer continued the discussion with these children by switching the lesson focus to comprehension:

Ms. Palmer: Why do you think someone would wear slippers, Rebecca?
Rebecca: For warm feet?

Ms. Palmer: Ahh, very good. So, people wear slippers to keep their feet warm. Maybe they don't have socks on. Maybe they're like Ms. Palmer; my feet are always so cold I wear socks and slippers.

As Morrow (2011) has explained, exemplary teachers balance skill instruction (decoding) with comprehension instruction. Ms. Palmer consistently teaches balanced lessons to her small groups. She also consistently uses verbal scaffolds to guide the small group conversations. As in the previous example, Ms. Palmer begins the discussion when she *invites Rebecca to participate* by asking her to explain the rationale for an event in the story. Ms. Palmer follows this with a *verification* and an elaborated example to prove the point provided by the student. By doing so, it is more likely that Rebecca will apply her background knowledge to future texts to make good inferences, just as she did in the above transcript.

Ms. Palmer frequently applied invitations to participate in the observed lessons in order to begin a discussion and/or encourage her students to think aloud and share their processing. Pentimonti and Justice (2010) would classify these invitations as low-support scaffolds; however, in this case the scaffolds encourage self-regulation in Ms. Palmer's learners. Scaffolding was then tailored to the responses of the children throughout the lesson. In some cases, Ms. Palmer offered higher levels of teacher support. This is exemplified in the transcript below, where she provided a bit of information through a leading statement, allowing the students to "co-participate" in describing a concept or strategy (Pentimonti and Justice 2010).

Transcript Two

Ms. Palmer: Remember how we said, if I chunk it and I sound it out I need to reread the… Ellie?
Ellie: Sentence.
Ms. Palmer: Sentence. And make sure it makes…
Ellie: Sense.
Ms. Palmer: Sense. If it doesn't make sense I have to stop. That little voice up here should be saying, 'whoa, whoa, whoa, I have to stop here,' right? Alright, now, when we take a look at the book, what genre is the book? It helps us to be a better reader if we know what kind of book we're reading. Dustin?
Dustin: It's a non-fiction book.
Ms. Palmer: It's non-fiction text. Very good, how did you know, Dustin?
Dustin: Because it has a photograph.
Ms. Palmer Photograph on the front, often tells us it might be non-fiction.

In the above example, Ms. Palmer offered both low support and high support scaffolds to her learners. Students were encouraged to co-participate; then Ms. Palmer followed the

above *invitations* with an *explicit modeling* of her thinking; she provided another high level support by describing what the 'little voice' was telling her to do. This think-aloud provided insight into her cognitive processing, so her young learners could be fully aware of what good readers do when they encounter something that does not make sense in the reading. Ms. Palmer followed this interaction with a discussion of genre, offering low level scaffolds (e.g., open-ended questions) to *invite participation* in the discussion. Beginning readers are able to identify the genre of a text if they are provided with developmentally appropriate clues (e.g., photographs in non-fiction text) that they may attribute to the genre. While it is true that clarification may be needed in the future to explain exceptions where fiction texts include photographs, this is a developmentally appropriate generalization for kindergarten children as they begin to make sense of print.

Discussion

Developmentally appropriate practice has been described by Morrow (2004) as building on what children already know, providing scaffolding to extend the learning, and presenting academic instruction in a meaningful way. Ms. Palmer demonstrated her adept ability at accomplishing this in her small group lessons. Through our observations, it was clear that the children in her classroom joyfully awaited their turn to be called to the guided reading table. Once they were called, the children quickly gathered their belongings and hurried to meet with Ms. Palmer, chatting excitedly as they prepared for the lesson. Ms. Palmer carefully selected the texts for the children in each group; she considered student interest and reading level so that each could read within his/her zone of proximal development. This intentional planning ensured that students experienced success in each lesson, while taking on new understandings and reinforcing previously taught strategies.

Ms. Palmer did not spend the majority of her small group time listening to students read aloud. Instead, small group lessons were rich with meaningful and targeted instruction. Students participated in open-ended, scaffolded conversations before, during, and after reading the provided text. Further, each lesson was different, based on the needs of the learners. Each lesson we observed fits Morrow's (2011) description of meaningful and developmentally appropriate lessons.

Most importantly, Ms. Palmer exhibited the ability to be responsive to her learners. Although she intentionally planned certain teaching points, as evidenced through the lesson plans she submitted, Ms. Palmer consistently diverged from the planned teaching focus to meet the needs her learners presented through the lesson discussions. This demonstrated Ms. Palmer's ability to make split-second instructional decisions based on the natural conversation that took place. Rather than providing planned questions and patterned replies, Ms. Palmer responded authentically in the conversations. As Johnston (2004) explained, "thinking through what we are going to say next *as we interact* with children would mean that we were not giving them our full attention and not being genuine" (p. 7). By providing the children her full attention, genuine response, and verbal scaffolding, Ms. Palmer was able to take each student further in her or his literacy development. In fact, although the twenty-three students entered Ms. Palmer's classroom with a wide variety of knowledge and experiences, all left her classroom reading at or above the benchmark level for the end of kindergarten. This is especially remarkable since twelve of those children did not recognize all of the letters of the alphabet when they entered school.

Ms. Palmer's teaching provides evidence of the power of verbal scaffolding; if we make our thought processes 'visible' to young learners they can more easily apply thinking strategies to their own reading. This is the very definition of exemplary and developmentally appropriate instruction.

Limitations

This case study serves only as a description of one teacher's effective verbal scaffolding. Moreover, Ms. Palmer was identified as an exemplary teacher of literacy. As such, the discussion cannot be generalized to all classrooms. While our larger investigation suggests that the verbal scaffolding described in this case study played a critical role in effective small group instruction, more research is needed to determine how it influences student reading achievement.

Implications

Ms. Palmer provides one example of how intentional verbal scaffolding can be used in early literacy instruction. Our study suggests that this may have positive implications for student literacy growth. While differentiating instruction is a topic that is frequently included in preparing pre-service teachers for reading instruction based on evidence-based strategies, it would be useful to provide quality examples of differentiated instruction, such as this one, to explicitly demonstrate the manner in which small group discussion can be utilized to scaffold young learners in the reading process.

Appendix

Teacher Nomination Form

Research-based Characteristics of Effective Literacy Instruction

Please nominate one teacher in each grade (Grades K-3) who consistently demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Utilizes a variety of grouping formats when teaching reading and writing (e.g. whole group, small group, pairs, individual)
- Spends more time teaching reading lessons in small group format than whole group format
- Differentiates instruction based on assessment results
- Models instruction in literacy-related skills and strategies
- Scaffolds instruction to meet the needs of individual learners
- Engages students in higher-level thinking skills during literacy discussions
- Expects students to respond to instruction actively (e.g. reading, writing, manipulating, discussing)
- Provides students with opportunities to read a variety of books
- Has high expectations for student achievement
- Attains high levels of student engagement in instruction

School District: _____

Nominees:

Kindergarten:_____

Grade 1:   _____

Grade 2:   _____

Grade 3:   _____

____   **Check here if the classroom teachers (above) have assessment data to demonstrate success in increasing reading level of 85% + students over the course of the previous school year (e.g. DRA or benchmark running records collected over the course of a school year.)**

____   **Check here if the classroom teachers (above) have assessment data to demonstrate success in increasing reading level of 75% students over the course of the school year (e.g. DRA or benchmark running records collected over the course of a school year.)**

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