



# The Application of Scaffolding Theory Into Oral English Teaching in Middle School

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## Abstract

In our country, oral English teaching in middle schools occupies a very important position. However, under the influence of traditional English teaching model, there are many problems in the present oral English teaching process. Therefore, how to improve students' oral English ability and the teachers' oral English teaching method effectively has become an important task. As we all know, Scaffolding instruction is one of the more mature methods of teaching that developed from the constructivism teaching mode. So this paper is aimed to combine the scaffolding theory with oral English teaching in teaching middle school students to arouse their interests and improve their abilities of speaking English.

**Key words:** Scaffolding theory; Oral English teaching; Middle school

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## INTRODUCTION

To master the speaking ability is important in language learning. However, it has been overlooked in the past few decades. So it is urgent to solve the problem. Teachers should emphasize on student-center and encourage

students to grasp their own initiative in learning. As we all know, scaffolding theory is closely related to learning environment and cooperative learning, thus the application of scaffolding approach in the English speaking teaching is of great significance. This paper is aimed to combine the scaffolding theory with oral English teaching to arouse students' interests and improve their abilities of speaking English. In this paper, the definition of the term "scaffolding" is provided and the theoretical bases of the study such as constructivism and ZPD are also explained, purpose, significance of this theory, the application of scaffolding approach including a sample teaching are also presented so as to enable readers to get a general knowledge of the paper.

## 1. THE PRESENT SITUATION OF ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

At present, the students' English level improved continually, but the majority of the students' listening and speaking skills lag behind in reading and writing skills. Due to various reasons, the training of oral English hasn't been got enough attention, so that it is always a weak link in English teaching process. And now most of the English classroom lack the atmosphere and occasions that the students use the target language, oral English training tends to be controlled by the teacher mechanically, and it lacks ideas and emotional communication between teachers and students. So, in such an environment, it's very difficult for the students' English communicative ability to get a substantial increase.

There are different points of view on how to improve students' oral English ability. The behavioral theory, behaviorists believe language is behavior and it is composed of a serious of habits. They advocate that students should concentrate on practice in learning a second language, which conforms to the characteristic of oral English that gives priority to practice.

Communicative Approach (CA), it stress communicative competence as the goal of language learning. According to their point of view, language learning should not only give students a lot of comprehensible input, but also require students to complete learning tasks, meaningful message, committed to the natural, meaningful communication.

The constructivists claim that knowledge is constructed by the learner himself rather than taught by others. They use their unique prior knowledge and experiences to manipulate the given information. In the process of oral English teaching, the relationship between teachers and students is a new type relationship of equality, cooperation. With this relationship, it can fully mobilize the enthusiasm of both teachers and learners.

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## 2. THE SCAFFOLDING THEORY

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### 2.1 Vygotsky's Concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD)

Vygotsky hypothesised that guided interactions with an adult or more capable peer could assist children to develop at a higher level of operation through the zone of proximal development. He defines this zone as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under teachers guidance or collaboration with more capable peers". Vygotsky suggested that the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills may be facilitated by social and linguistic interaction with others, such as parents, teachers or peers. ZPD is applied to teaching in many ways, one of which most educators mention being scaffolded instruction which provides instructional support or assistance by the teacher or another more capable peer in the zone of proximal development.

### 2.2 The Concept of Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction is "the systematic sequencing of prompted content, materials, tasks, and teacher and peer support to optimize learning". Some form of scaffolding is essential for helping students to develop thinking skills and higher-order thinking skills. It is obvious that scaffolded instruction can be integrated with other strategies such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and direct instruction.

### 2.3 The Steps of Scaffolded Instruction

The steps of scaffolded instruction are suggested:

a) Scaffolding—according to the requirements of "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)", establish a conceptual framework on the basic of current study theme.

b) Enter the situation—introducing students to a certain situation (a node of conceptual framework).

c) Independent exploration—let students explore independently. At first, the teacher coaches the student by modeling or demonstrating the skill, and then let the students themselves to analysis. In the process of exploring the teacher should give some necessary prompts and help students timely, gradually rising along the conceptual framework. At the beginning of the exploration process, the guidance and help from teacher can be from more to less, finally students can continue to rise in the conceptual framework without teachers' guidance.

d) Collaborative learning—group consultation, discussion. It is possible to discuss the results of the original, and the current concept of what they have learned about the increase or decrease of properties. The teacher and the student or the students themselves practice together, and then the student demonstrates the skill independently through a practice application.

e) Effect evaluation—effect evaluation including students self-assessment and the learning evaluation from the study group. The evaluation content includes: The contribution of group cooperative learning; whether finish knowledge construction that they have learned.

### 2.4 The Relationship Between Scaffolding and ZPD

There is no doubt that Scaffolding Theory cannot be separated from Vygotsky's notion of the zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is the foundation for scaffolding, and it is greatest contributing factor. The theory became a tool to move the learner into the zone. Both psychology and L2 learning literatures frequently associate ZPD with scaffolding. Scaffolding is a type of interaction that occurs in the ZPD or that can construct it. On the other hand, scaffolding will fail to work if the teacher knows nothing about the theory of ZPD.

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## 3. THE APPLICATION OF SCAFFOLDING THEORY IN ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

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Applying scaffolding theory in the teaching activities, teachers should give students higher level support and help, and teach them some principles or rules that can be used to solve some problems when no people can help, so as to let learners Strengthen the sense of learning independently, build the learning ability of self-control and self-responsibility. With scaffolding (the assistance), the teacher transfers the learning task to the students gradually and finally withdraws it from the learning process. In middle school oral English teaching process, teachers help students identify their the zone of proximal development, on the basis of this, teachers should train these students selectively, give full play to its "scaffolds" effect, help students avoid some problems (their tension, poor vocabulary and grammatical structure is simple,

spoken time is short, take a long time to organize their thoughts or searching words, repeated use the same word or sentence structure, etc.) arise when doing oral English training. Except for a series of oral English training, teachers should try their best to choose a lot of topics that are closer to their lives, leave necessary time as far as possible for students to think about or discuss, then use what they have learned to express their views. In order to arouse students' enthusiasm of speaking, teachers can select interesting topic for the students to discuss and voice their ideas. Such as: Have you ever met someone in your life whom you want to be like that person and why? When heard this question, students may have no idea at that moment due to their tension. At this point, the teachers guide paraphrased strategy is used to delay students' thinking time, first of all, expressed interest in the topic, then relayed: Have I ever met a person that I want to be? Well, I need some time to go back to my previous memories to such kind of a person who definitely has exerted a significant influence on my life. I think... so, use circuitous strategy naturally. You can also use some transitional words, sequence words to make the language expression more logical. Again, such as, the teacher may initiate this topic: I would like to focus on your future life. When you decide to get married, what qualities will you look for in finding a would-be husband? Heard this question, some students are ashamed to express for introverted or the content some students expressed are relatively single. The teacher may guide students adopt the strategy of avoidance, circuitous transfer the topic to others, then expounds his views, they can agree with the above mentioned view, and also they can oppose. That is:

This is a really unexpected question. What qualities do I look for? I think different people may come up with different views towards this question, because we have a different outlook on the experience of my friends, they hold that ...

if their view point is consistent, they can say: "I share the same ideas with them. Because..." If he is not in favor of that, they could say: "Well, I am sorry for them, I believe..." After that, the students will have words to express their personal views. After the training of the student, they can form a group to retell the story, role playing, picture description and other activity. Such as this topic: Talking about the life in the future, learners' thinking style is unitary, after the implementation of cooperative learning, ideas, it will make the subject more interesting. Girls can share emotional, fashion, tourism, and other topics with others, cars, electronic communication products...these topics are from boys. Through the communication strategy training, the students gradually developed the abilities to learn independently and solve problem skillfully, the debate in cooperation can help cultivate students' critical thinking. Debate in oral English teaching is an important

way to improve students' cooperation degree. For example, "money and love, which one does you think is more important. Should everyone be allowed to own a car?" Teachers can choose this topic and let the cooperation team to clarify their point, leave enough time for students to search the materials, and after group discussion, they could make a summary. The communication strategy training is important, however, the content of the language itself, fluency, accuracy are all equally important, and cooperative learning in oral practice after the strategy training also plays a crucial role. At this point, teachers should pay more attention to fluency, under this circumstance of form error that does not affect the meaning expression can be ignored, after students overcoming anxiety, they can put up accurate demand.

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#### **4. SOMETHING NEEDED TO BE PAYED ATTENTION TO WHEN CARRY OUT THE SCAFFOLDED INSTRUCTION**

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##### **4.1 Put the "Scaffold" Within the Area of ZDP**

The guidance of teachers needs to be given in the area of ZDP. It is a potential virtual space, it is only appear when the problem arises and learners' abilities closer to the ability they should achieve. So, students existing level must be considered when teachers set the situation. In the process of oral English teaching, teachers need to focus on students' reaction by listening, observing and inquiring timely, explain and make an adjustment when necessary. So as to keep the students' learning level in the area of ZDP.

##### **4.2 Build "Scaffold" in the Effective Interaction Between Teachers and Students**

Through interaction, the teacher can know the progress of situational activities, reviewing preset goals of learning task, find ZDP of students, the teacher can select position, time of the "scaffold", so as to regulate the students' learning process, and what's more, improve the learning efficiency.

##### **4.3 Remove "Scaffold" When Student's Ability Improved**

The role of "scaffold" is to help students go through the zone of proximal development smoothly and then make a further development. Since then, the teacher should remove "scaffold", let the students have more independent space, then their ability developed from the actual development level to the level of potential development.

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#### **CONCLUSION**

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English should be learned not only as knowledge but as a tool for communication and the latter is more important

because it is the final goal of language teaching and learning. So forms of traditional classroom teaching need to be changed thoroughly. The present study is undertaken to determine whether constructivism should have a role in oral English classroom in junior middle school. The article explored the approaches which have influenced English language teaching in China and some of their theoretical basis. Through the analysis of the content of language teaching in oral class, it is generally acknowledged that constructivism teaching in oral class constitutes a very important, practical and theoretical perspective in current education research, it is suitable to be applied in oral English teaching.

After all, to master a language, one should pay great attention to this oral English practice. To train a lot of “mutes” is to develop students’ practicing abilities fully. So teachers should serve for this purpose. Teachers should try their best to offer more opportunities for students to practice their oral English. So, everyone should know the

importance of speaking in learning a language, and pay more attention to this section.

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