STAFF ROOM POSTER

Scaffolds Are Loans, Not Gifts

A scaffold is temporary by definition. Four principles that keep support from becoming dependence.

Contingent, not constant

Support responds to the learner's last move: give the least help that restarts progress.

In class: Prompt first, clue second, model third. Never start at three.

Visible structure, learner thinking

Frames, stems and planners hold the structure so the learner's effort goes into the content.

In class: The essay planner holds the paragraph order; the learner supplies every idea inside it.

Fade on a schedule

Every scaffold is introduced WITH its removal plan. Fading is the part most classrooms skip.

In class: Full writing frame this week, headings only next week, blank page the week after.

Hand back the whole task

After any help, the learner completes the original task themselves, end to end.

In class: You finish it from here, and talk me through your next step as you go.

SCAFFOLD CARDS: CUT AND KEEP

The Four-Step Support Ladder

In-the-moment support, lightest first. Most learners need step one or two; habitually jumping to step three teaches helplessness.

1. Prompt

Redirect attention without content. Often all that is needed.

Say: "Look back at the example. What did we do first there?"

2. Clue

Narrow the search space; the move stays theirs.

Say: "Something in the second sentence contradicts your answer. Find it."

3. Model a parallel

Demonstrate on a twin problem, then return them to the original.

Say: "Watch me do it with different numbers. Now yours."

4. Co-complete and retry

Do this one together, then they do its twin alone today, not tomorrow.

Say: "We solved that one together. Here is its twin; this one is all yours."

QUICK REFERENCE POSTER

Sentence Stems That Fade

Stems lend academic language until learners own it. The fading sequence is built into the display.

Week 1: full stems

Complete sentence openers for the thinking move being taught.

In class: The evidence suggests... because... However, this is challenged by...

Week 2: word banks

Key connectives and academic verbs, no full sentences.

In class: suggests, implies, contradicts, supports, whereas, consequently

Week 3: naming only

Name the move; learners build the language.

In class: Make a claim, support it, address the counter-argument.

Always: drop when ready

Learners who no longer glance at the display are told, explicitly, to fly without it.

In class: You have not used the stems in a week. Trust your own sentences now.

TEACHER CHECKLIST

Scaffolding Audit

Check a current unit. The first question is always 'what is the removal plan?'

Design

- [ ] Each scaffold matches a named gap: language, structure, process or knowledge.
- [ ] Every scaffold has a written fading point in the unit plan.
- [ ] Scaffolds are opt-in for everyone, not badges for the SEND register.
- [ ] The unscaffolded version of the task exists and gets used.

In the moment

- [ ] Support follows the ladder: prompt, clue, model, co-complete.
- [ ] Help ends with the learner completing the original task.
- [ ] TAs know the ladder and resist doing step three first.
- [ ] Who used which scaffold gets noted, so fading is individual.

CPD BRIEFING: STAFF ROOM COPY

Scaffolding: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the evidence supports, and the failure mode nobody plans for.

Guidance is the active ingredient

Across 72 inquiry studies, added guidance improved activities, performance and outcomes with respectable effects. Structure is what makes ambitious tasks learnable.

Contingency is what makes it scaffolding

The theoretical core, from Vygotsky through Bruner: support calibrated to the learner's last response, transferring control as competence grows. Fixed help for everyone is differentiation, not scaffolding.

Fading is where the learning locks in

Faded examples with self-explanation outperform static support: the withdrawal schedule, not the scaffold itself, builds independence.

The honest caveat

Much scaffolding research is small-scale or bundled inside programmes, and the metaphor gets stretched to cover any help at all. Hold the strict definition: temporary, contingent, fading, or it is just permanent support with better branding.

Evidence base

Margolis, A.A. (2020). Zone of proximal development, scaffolding and teaching practice. Cultural-Historical Psychology.
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Wood, D., Bruner, J.S. and Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.