

2014

## Macro-Scaffolding: Contextual Support for Teacher Learning

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### Recommended Citation

Engin, M. (2014). Macro-Scaffolding: Contextual Support for Teacher Learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(5). Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol39/iss5/2>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol39/iss5/2>

## Macro-Scaffolding: Contextual Support for Teacher Learning

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*Abstract: A socio-cultural theory of learning places importance on the social and cultural context of the learning as well as the interaction between a more expert other and the learner. Scaffolding at the level of interaction may be defined as micro-scaffolding, and support which can be found in the context of the learning can be referred to as macro-scaffolding. This paper reports on research carried out in a pre-service English teacher training context which explored macro-scaffolding. Findings suggest that support at the macro-level includes the shared understanding of accepted practices of the training context in terms of what is considered 'good' teaching and the conventions of feedback. One conclusion from this study is that there is a need to recognize and explicitly discuss these norms and practices in order to support the micro-scaffolding at the interactional level.*

### Introduction

In a socio-cultural theory of learning, guidance and support of a less able peer or learner takes place through interaction in a particular social context (Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). The more able peer's role is to provide assistance and support which aids learners' knowledge construction (Gibbons, 2006). This guidance is often referred to as scaffolding. In a school setting, the interaction between the teacher and the learner is essentially dialogical (ibid) so language is one of the tools of mediation between the subject to be learnt and the learner. There has been much research into the role of talk in primary schools in the UK which is based on the premise of teacher and student talk as the mediating tool in the construction of knowledge (Mercer, 1995, 2000; Myhill, 2004; Myhill & Warren, 2005). Structured classroom talk between teacher and students guides the construction of knowledge (Alexander, 2001, 2004; Mercer, 1995, 2000; Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

While talk is clearly crucial in a study of scaffolding, the physical, cultural and social contexts play significant roles in the scaffolding of knowledge at a macro level (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986). Macro level scaffolding may be the institutional and organizational context (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Sharpe, 2006), which includes 'designed-in' scaffolding such as the curriculum, planning and sequencing of tasks. Alexander (2001) argues for macro-level support to include the social, educational and cultural context of the learning.

The main aim in a pre-service teacher training context is to support and guide the trainees to become fully qualified teachers. Micro-scaffolding operates at the level of interaction and talk through prompts, questions and cues, and macro-level scaffolding operates at the level of the teacher training context through notions of 'good' teaching, norms, and conventions of the training event. Macro-scaffolding has been little researched perhaps because of the "arduous

tasks of defining and investigating it” (Meyer & Turner, 2002, 17). The aim of this paper is to investigate and define macro-scaffolding in a teacher training context. This paper argues that not only do contextual factors need to be further explored, but so does the very special relationship between micro-scaffolding and macro-scaffolding in terms of how they operate together. One result of such an understanding is that trainers might be able to better support their trainees.

## Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a process of guided intervention within a socio-cultural framework. “Sociocultural theory is a theoretically framed approach to the study of learning and development as social constructions” (Gee & Green, 1998, 146). Such a perspective places great emphasis on the interactive and social nature of learning, that is, the guided construction of knowledge between teacher and learners. Scaffolding as a metaphor to describe the assistance a teacher or more knowledgeable peer can give in a learning context derived from the work of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). It is “an instructional process in which a teacher supports students cognitively, motivationally, and emotionally in learning while helping them to further develop autonomy” (Meyer & Turner, 2002, 18). The term scaffolding was originally introduced in the context of one-on-one tutorials and refers to the help given by a teacher or more able peer in an educational setting. The goal of research in the area of scaffolding has been to explore the nature of the support that the more competent other provides in the learning context (Wood & Wood, 1996). Maybin, Mercer and Stierer (1992) point out that the difference between teaching and scaffolding is in the *quality* of this guided intervention.

Scaffolding is the intervention required for a learner to extend their zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to the gap between what the learner can do alone, and what the learner can do with guidance (Vygotsky, 1986; Wood & Wood, 1996). For example, two children aged 8 are given an exercise that they could not manage on their own. Both children are given some assistance e.g. “the first step in a solution, a leading question, or some other form of help” (Vygotsky, 1986, 187). One child could manage the exercise for a 12 year old; the other child could manage the exercise for a 9-year old. The first child has a larger ZPD which is guided by the scaffolding of a teacher or more able peer. Although Vygotsky himself did not introduce the term ‘scaffolding’, there seems to be a consensus that scaffolding is the instructional strategy suggested by Vygotsky’s reference to assistance by a more able peer. In other words, Vygotsky provided the “theoretical anchoring” (Bliss, Akew & Macrae, 1996, 38) for the notion of scaffolding, or intervention (Wood & Wood, 1996). Scaffolding which supports and guides the learner in their ZPD is “task-specific support, designed to help the learner independently to complete the same or similar tasks later in new contexts” (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005, 8).

Recent research has indicated that scaffolding can be viewed at several levels in the learning context (Engin, 2011; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Walqui, 2006). At the micro-level, this may be evidenced in the interactional talk. Examples of micro-scaffolding might be cued elicitation and recapping (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005), questions (Engin, 2013; Myhill & Dunkin, 2005), confirmations, rejections, elaborations, reformulations, and reconstructive recaps (Mercer, 1995). Macro-level scaffolding, on the other hand, is at a more structural level (Walqui, 2006), incorporating the cultural, social and educational context of the learning. Examples of macro-level scaffolding are curriculum, planning, sequencing and selection of tasks (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005), and a project or a series of tasks over time (Walqui, 2006). This level of macro-scaffolding is scaffolding which supports the talk (Westgate & Hughes, 1997) and for

micro-scaffolding to be effective, there needs to be a shared understanding of the expectations, roles and conventions, that is, a shared understanding of the learning context.

### **Macro-scaffolding: context and discourse**

As mentioned above, a sociocultural perspective on learning places great emphasis on the social and cultural in the educational context. One dimension of a pre-service teacher training context is its implicit ways of being and doing, that is, the discourse of the training context. Discourse is “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network (Gee, 1998, 51). Tension may arise when not all members of the group share or understand the accepted practices. This definition of discourse is highly relevant to a pre-service teacher training context where trainees are initiating themselves into the accepted discourse, and acculturating themselves into not only the profession, but also the norms and conventions of the context. The trainer holds considerable power in such a discourse as the ‘expert’ and the one who controls the discourse. Accepted models of being and doing, as well as accepted norms and conventions are part of the discourse in which the trainer and trainee are operating. This is a powerful force in our behavior, talk, attitudes and evaluations.

...discourse, in this sense, is relationships of power / knowledge that are embedded in social institutions and practices. They are ways of organising meaning that are both reflected and produced in our uses of language and the formation of our subjectivities (Pennycook, 1994, 32).

One manifestation of power is the way in which the trainer conceptualizes the notion of effective teaching. This influences the whole approach to the training and the content of the training since the dominant notion of good practice is manifested and promoted by the practices that are deemed acceptable and unacceptable. “The power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over alternative practices” (Fairclough, 1995, 2). Due to the nature of many pre-service teacher training courses, there is considerable judgment making from the models and approaches used in input, to the feedback given in teaching practice. The feedback is itself based on notions of effective teaching in a particular training context, and values certain teaching practices over others.

A further aspect of the pre-service teacher training context is the nature of the conventions and norms of certain training activities. This is especially apparent in post-observation feedback sessions. We need to consider whether trainees know the “rules of the game” (Copland, 2010, 465) and whether they know how to play the game. The trainers in a particular institution have a certain set of procedures for carrying out feedback sessions which are often subconscious. “For them, the roles they play and the participatory structures they evoke in feedback are normal, unremarkable, and, importantly, natural” (Copland, 2010, 471). In their studies of medical board interviews, Roberts and Sarangi (1999) refer to this concept as “gatekeeping discourse” in which the interviewer acts as gatekeeper to the discourse, and ultimately, a qualification. It could be argued that the trainer, in the feedback session, holds a similar role. Thus, it is clear that for the talk between trainer and trainee to be scaffolding talk, there needs to be a shared understanding of good practice, norms, and conventions.

By gaining a better understanding of what macro-scaffolding features exist in the educational and cultural context of the teacher training environment we can then observe the relationship between macro-scaffolding and micro-level scaffolding at the interactional level.

Gee (1998) refers to these two differences as primary and secondary discourses. Since the trainees in this study are non-native speakers of English, not only do they need control over the primary discourse (in this case, spoken and written English), but they also need to be aware of, understand, and control the secondary discourse, the language needed for particular institutional contexts. As Gee (1998, 56) points out “It is, of course, a great advantage when the secondary discourse is compatible with your primary one”. This knowledge can then support a more open and explicit awareness of accepted norms and practices which trainers can refer to. In turn, it is hoped that the interaction between trainees and trainers can be more effective and supportive.

The aims of this research were the following. Firstly, to explore the macro-scaffolding of this particular teacher training context with regard to the notions of effective teaching and the conventions of the feedback session, and secondly, to examine the relationship between an understanding of the macro-scaffolds and the effectiveness of the micro-scaffolding as evidenced in the talk between teacher and trainer.

## **Methodology**

This study was a qualitative one incorporating ethnographic techniques such as interviews, lesson observations, feedback sessions and respondent validation. Since the study was focused on the natural, every day practices and activities of the pre-service teacher trainees, a qualitative research paradigm suited this research due to its valorization of naturally occurring data, as well as the emphasis on the description and interpretation of social situations (Flick, 2007). This research incorporated data which were part of the trainer and trainees’ already existing work. These included self-evaluation reflections, running commentaries on lessons, lesson plans, post-observation feedback sessions, and assignments.

## **Participants**

The participants were a cohort of English Teacher Education students enrolled in an English-medium university in a large city in Turkey. Their degree was a joint BA/MA course. The course comprises 3.5 years studying English Literature, and 1.5 years in the Education department, resulting in an MA and Qualified Teacher Status. This research took place in their final year. On graduation, the majority of students are employed by high schools in Turkey in the private sector. I was their lecturer for core courses, as well as their supervisor for school experience and teaching practice courses. In their final year of Education classes, the trainees were taking classes such as Classroom Management, Methods, and Current Trends in English Language Teaching. For their classroom experience, the first semester course was entitled School Experience, and it involved the trainees spending one day a week in a high school working with a mentor teacher. They were expected to teach one lesson a week. For their final semester, they took a six-week practicum course in which they had to teach almost every day. The 15 students who formed the research participant group were the group of students assigned to me for the School Experience course and the Teaching Practice course.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Considering my closely entwined role of researcher and observer, ethical issues were paramount. Students were asked for their consent through a description of the research aims and data collection techniques. I endeavored to follow the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2004) in the following ways. Firstly, I obtained voluntary informed consent before the research started making it clear that the participants could withdraw at any time. Secondly, I made my role of both their trainer and researcher clear at all times and I clarified in the consent form how they would be involved in the research. Thirdly, I explained that the data would be confidential and the participants would be referred to only by the initial of their name. In fact, this was clarified further when they received their transcripts and saw that there were initials only on the document. Finally, I provided the participants with copies of the transcripts of an audio copy of the feedback sessions.

In the consent form I hedged the research topic slightly by stating the purpose was to study interaction between trainer and trainees. I specifically did not use the term 'language' or 'talk' since this could have worried some of the trainees, as English is their second language. I did not want them to think I would be evaluating their language. Although many writers suggest one is honest about the purpose of the research (Creswell 2003) I felt that the exact purpose here would affect their learning in the training context.

#### **Data Collection**

Although the research group were 15 randomly chosen trainees from the cohort, some of these trainees were observed twice by the researcher, so the data include a total of 23 transcribed audio-recordings of feedback sessions, an interview with two colleagues, 23 self-evaluations of teaching written after their lesson, 15 school experience reports (written after their first semester School Experience, described above) and 12 respondent feedbacks. Feedback sessions were audio-recorded for minimum intervention and disturbance, and also to reduce stress levels. Recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after the session (Rapley, 2007). Students had a high level of English competence and all interaction took place in English.

The post-observation feedback sessions were one-on-one conversations between the trainer and trainee and lasted approximately 25 minutes. The feedback sessions followed common institutional procedures (Copland, 2010). The trainee was asked to reflect on the lesson and the trainer gave some comments. Together they identified areas of strength and areas to develop. The researcher had two separate interviews with two colleagues in the Education Faculty who were teaching the same group of trainees. The interviews did not have a pre-determined schedule, but aimed to elicit how the trainer thought the trainees constructed knowledge, and how the trainer was supporting this. The self-evaluation reports of the lessons were about the lessons on which the observation and feedback had taken place. Trainees were required to fill out a form eliciting whether they had achieved their aims, what the students had learnt, areas of strength, and areas for development. The school experience reports were written at the end of a semester experience, and elicited reflections on their learning points, their understanding of how schools worked, and their understanding of classroom processes. As for the respondent feedback, trainees were given a copy of their feedback transcripts and asked to comment on it in any way they wanted. The documents such as self-evaluation reports, school experience reports and respondent feedbacks gave a window into the learning process through the eyes of the trainees, seen in their choice of topics and language. These words were also the result of their thought process and thus gave an insight into their concerns and constructs in teaching (Creswell, 2003).

### Data Analysis

Over time, assignments, self-evaluation forms, transcripts of audio-recorded feedback sessions were examined. The data were initially coded for instances of scaffolding at interactional level. This was done by looking very specifically at the language used by trainer and trainee, the prompting, questioning and hints. Firstly, all texts were studied several times, highlighting any salient points. There were no a priori codes or categories. The aim was one of discovery, rather than to establish or confirm a priori linguistic or social categories (Richards 2003). The concepts were “observer-identified” (Lofland, 1970, cited by Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 211) by the researcher herself as the data were examined.

The texts (consisting of transcripts of feedback sessions, assignments, transcripts of interviews) were processed through Weft QDA (Weft QDA, 2007), a qualitative data storage programme, freely available in the public domain. Through this programme, categories were defined and refined over time. Initially, the focus of the research was the trainer and trainee talk. However, it became clear very early on that there was a further contextual level of scaffolding taking place. Through the talk in the feedback sessions and the self-evaluations, it emerged that an understanding of teaching was linked to the existence of, and the understanding of factors such as expectations, norms and conventions in this particular training context. Since these categories transcended the actual talk between trainer and trainee, these instances were then coded as macro-scaffolding. Westgate and Hughes (1997, 131) remind us that although most researchers look for the observable features of discourse and scaffolding, there are significant factors which scaffold construction of knowledge which “lie behind the talk rather than being visible in it”.

To achieve rigor (Holliday, 2002) and show “the workings” (ibid, 47), the following procedures were taken. Firstly, there was triangulation of methods through using a variety of techniques such as observation, audio-recordings of feedback sessions, interviews with colleagues, document analysis of lesson evaluations, observation notes, assignments, and lesson plans. Secondly, there was validation of the transcripts with the participants, in the form of member-checking. Thirdly, there was temporal validity in the sense that this research took place over two distinct semesters in an academic year. Data were gathered initially September – January, and then the categories were refined and confirmed in the period February – June.

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, all post-observation feedback sessions are with the researcher as trainer. The study would have benefitted from analysis of interaction and talk in feedback sessions with other trainers in the institution. This would have provided data that was not researcher-driven or focused, and as a result more neutral. However, due to workload and other duties, time-constraints were central to the decision not to involve other trainers. In addition, as in teaching, some trainers prefer to ‘keep the training room door closed’ and may not have welcomed intrusion into their work. Secondly, the very specific context of Turkish pre-service teacher trainees could be regarded as a limitation. However, this specific pre-service English language teacher training of non-native speakers of English is common in many parts of the world. Thirdly, the dual role of researcher and participant required the author to be reflexive at all stages of the research, and account for any possible prejudices and judgments.

The following part presents data which emerged as macro-scaffolding in this particular training context. The first section illustrates the macro-scaffold of ‘effective teaching’ and how it supports conversations about teaching. This is referred to by both trainees and trainers in their self-evaluations, assignments and school experience reports and respondent validation. The

second section presents data from post-observation feedback sessions in which the macro-scaffold of understanding the conventions and norms of feedback sessions impacts on the success of the interaction and talk between the trainer and trainee.

### **Macro-scaffolding: The ‘Right’ Way to Teach**

A category of macro-scaffolding which emerged from all feedback sessions, reflection papers and interviews with colleagues was a notion of the ‘right way to teach’. Phrases such as ‘practise what we preach’; ‘wrong techniques’, ‘good methodology’ and ‘mistakes about teaching’ displays a notion of ‘the right way to teach’. Colleagues working with the same group of trainees also talked about a ‘right way to teach’ and the concept of trainer as model. The excerpt below is from an interview with a colleague where he brings up the notion of ‘loop input’ (Woodward 1991, 2003). This is an approach to teacher training in which the trainer models the activity she wants the trainees to do with their own students. The interview was open-ended, and he refers to the role of trainer and the need for trainers to model good teaching behavior.

#### **Excerpt 1**

“We practise what we preach, so, we, I actually take them through this process so perhaps they can take their students through that process as well, so it’s not just introduction skills or concept, also showing how to go about a student-centred inductive writing lesson” (Interview data).

In this interview, the trainer believes that not only should trainers be encouraging trainees to use a particular approach, but that they should also be modeling such an approach. The trainer equates the loop input with the idea of practising what we preach. This modeling promotes and valorizes a particular approach over others, and suggests a ‘right’ way to teach. The model allows the trainer to introduce an approach to teaching, as well as providing common ground for evaluating and discussing teaching.

The uses of the words ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and phrases such as ‘make mistakes’ were commonly used by trainees to describe their teaching. One trainee writes about this in a school experience report.

#### **Excerpt 2**

“After Mrs X’s observation and getting many useful feedbacks (sic) from her, I felt I showed an immediate progress in terms of practising what I should do and avoiding wrong techniques” (School Experience report).

The trainee has formed a conceptual model of good practice against which she can evaluate her own teaching. This model is likely to be the model of ‘good’ practice presented and demonstrated in the course. She uses terms such as ‘should do’ and ‘avoid wrong techniques’ which suggests that there is one way to teach and in order to be successful she must learn this way. To use the term ‘wrong’ implies that the trainee knows of a ‘right’ way. The trainee has built up a binary distinction between right and wrong teaching. It is also clear that she sees the



trainer's role to guide her to stay on this 'right' path and that to make progress she needed to teach in the 'accepted' way.

The notion of 'proper' methods is also evident in the trainees' self-evaluation reports which they wrote after their teaching practice. One trainee's first sentence in her self-evaluation was as follows:

### Excerpt 3

"I think my lesson was good. Of course there were some mistakes but I tried to apply the proper method" (Self-evaluation form).

The language the trainee uses here very much suggests that in her mind there is a right way, a proper method. She evaluates her lesson in terms of to what extent she could use the techniques her trainers had taught her. She also uses strong evaluative words such as 'good' to describe her lesson. Her notion of 'good' is based on how much she used the 'proper method', and uses the term 'method' in the singular to suggest one type only.

A model of 'good teaching' also framed the post-observation feedback to the trainees. In the interview excerpt below, a colleague teaching the same cohort of trainees as the researcher stated that when giving feedback he had in mind a 'good model' of teaching. This model helped him to frame the feedback, but it is clear that the model also influenced his perceptions of a lesson, and influenced his value judgments about a lesson and teaching performance.

### Excerpt 4

"My feedback was framed very much in terms of not just methodology, my own sense of what good methodology is, but my sense of classroom management but more concretely, what we'd actually been talking about or reading about in the classroom management course. So this made it a very strong interactive process" (Interview data).

There are two points that need to be made here in terms of framing the feedback to trainees. This trainer is explicit about what framed his feedback, and that this frame was his own 'sense' of 'good practice'. He also explains that a basis for his feedback was the content of his classroom management sessions, a strategy he used to bridge the theory with the practice. As can be seen from the above comments made by trainees, they were very much aware of a model of a 'right way' to teach and that our role was to point out the difference between what they were doing and the 'right' way.

Esposued practices of right ways of doing and behaving can serve as a macro-scaffold which is used to demarcate acceptable teaching performance by both trainers and trainees. The trainees expect input and guidance on their performance, thus the role of the trainer inevitably involves making judgments and evaluation. The models of good practice act as guides and frames for trainers and trainees. In one sense, a blue-print acts as a scaffold as it reduces the possibilities, and breaks down the complicated job of teaching. Trainees have specific techniques to use which have been presented to them. They can take their 'tool-kit' of teaching techniques and prepare a plan. It could be argued however that the model also restricts the trainees, that the model is a "straightjacket" (Myhill & Warren, 2005, 55) rather than a scaffold. The model is used as a "means of control" (ibid, 55) rather than a guide where the trainer's aim is to steer the trainee along a predetermined path which fits her own ideas of 'good' teaching. To a certain extent this could be true, however, the current context is that of pre-service teacher training

which warrants the use of a model by which the trainees can compare their own teaching. Since the trainees have no prior experience of teaching, the model or concept of good teaching acts as a guide to promote self-evaluation and judgment making.

### **Macro-scaffolding: Norms and Conventions of the Feedback Session**

The conventions of lesson feedback were part of the English language teaching (ELT) discourses that the trainees found themselves in. Conventions of feedback refer to understanding the norms and procedures of the feedback session, as well as the expectations of the trainer for the trainee to reflect and critically analyse their lesson. Hammond & Gibbons (2005) refer to the support of shared goals and expectations as macro-scaffolding. It was part of the expectations of the course that the trainees were able to reflect on their performance and analyse strong and weak points.

Some trainees were aware of these conventions and were able to articulate them. In a respondent feedback, one trainee wrote:

#### **Excerpt 6**

“At this moment (referring to the transcript of the feedback session), Mrs X addressed questions about the parts of lesson where I was not that much effective. We discussed together these points. The most important thing about this process was that Mrs. X did not expose or force her beliefs directly on me” (Respondent feedback).

The trainee comments in this extract reveal that he understood his role as active participant in the feedback process by his use of the phrase ‘discussed together’, an awareness that the feedback session is an opportunity to co-construct knowledge of teaching. It is also clear that he understood the trainer’s role as that of guide and facilitator rather than sole authority, and that the feedback was a joint process of learning and meaning-making.

On the same theme, another trainee also wrote the following:

#### **Excerpt 7**

“I became aware that my mentor and I were mostly on the same page during the feedback”. (Respondent feedback)

The trainee articulates the importance of convergence of ideas for the feedback process to be beneficial. His use of the term ‘on the same page’ is insightful as it suggests the need for both trainer and trainee to understand each other. He also refers to the fact that the feedback was a process, and that the trainer and trainee were both active members of this process. The discussion in the feedback session brought him to the conclusion that convergence was necessary for a constructive educational conversation.

The next excerpt is part of a feedback session which demonstrates the points above, where the trainee understands her role of active participant. She also understands the conventions of the feedback session by critically evaluating her lesson and responding appropriately to the trainer’s prompts.

**Excerpt 7**

- T: What about you? What's your opinion of your lesson? What are you happy with? What were you not so happy with?
- ST: It was good to have such a small class and I guess I made all students engage I made all students talk but as some of the students came late to the class. I couldn't have made them read their quotations and share their ideas about their (inaudible) besides these, what can I say?
- T: What would you change if you taught this lesson again?
- ST: Actually I realised that I had to prepare a back up plan for the latecomers as well and considering the time I need to have some extra strategies to work.
- T: Like what would you have done then? I mean, what could be a back up plan?
- ST: Back up plan, for instance, as the students came late, I may omit the drawing part and just focus on the quotations so everybody talked about the quotation so I have made some, I may make some changes like this. (Feedback session)

In this feedback session the trainer (T) opens with a general question. The trainee (ST) is expected to give a brief evaluation of the lesson, reflecting on what went well and what did not go well. The trainee does not reflect on what did not go well, so the trainer prompts with a further question. The trainee then fulfills the expectation of being critical and articulates the shortcomings, followed by suggestions for developing the lesson. The trainee has responded appropriately to the questions. There is shared understanding of the procedure and process, aims and conventions. The excerpt also reveals how the questions and prompts the trainer uses effectively scaffold the trainee's reflection based on her understanding of the context.

**Macro-scaffolding and Micro-scaffolding: A Symbiotic Relationship**

The theme of understanding conventions of the feedback session was most apparent in instances where the trainee did not have such awareness. As is often the case, the less straightforward interactions exemplified the theme more clearly. An inability to reflect on the lesson during the feedback session suggested that the trainee did not understand the conventions of a feedback session. This could be from an unwillingness to self-evaluate, but it is more likely that the trainee is unclear about the different modes of the discourse (Roberts, Sarangi, Southgate, Wakeford & Wass, 2000).

The following excerpt demonstrates a misunderstanding of expectations. The trainer asks for self-evaluation according to the usual procedures of feedback sessions, but the trainee is unable or unwilling to discuss what her weaknesses are.

**Excerpt 8**

- T: Ok, alright so now, in terms of your aim, "students will have read and discussed" (T reads out from the trainee's lesson plan). Do you feel you achieved your aim?
- ST: Yes, we have read the article, we have discussed, I asked some questions, they responded to me, I asked for their personal experiences, I think it went well and I tried to achieve these, I think so, yes.
- T: Ok, right, is there anything you would change if you were to teach this lesson again?

ST: Mm. (pause). In terms of? (Feedback session)

The trainer opens with the general question which aims to prompt a reflection of strong points and weaknesses from the lesson. The trainee points out what went well, without mentioning the weaknesses. The trainer then further prompts with a second question. The trainee seems unwilling to criticize herself, and then asks for clarification. The trainee's question suggests she does not know what her weaknesses are, or that she believes the lesson went well. The trainer asks the same questions and prompts in the same way as the previous feedback excerpt, but in this discussion the questions do not scaffold the trainee due to a lack of understanding of the conventions of the context.

In the following extract from a post-observation feedback session, the trainee was encouraged to reflect on his preparation of questions for the lesson. In the pre-conference there had been a discussion about the need to prepare and ask very specific questions, but he had not done this.

#### Excerpt 9

T: Because you've got a big aim here, "the students will have read and discussed, analysed" you said you wanted them to analyse the texts. In order to analyse we have to find very specific questions.

ST: Yes, I am saying that.

T: And I looked for some well yesterday when we talked you said "yes, yes I'll ask some questions", so I thought they might be in your lesson plan.

ST: Yes, I thought the same thing, to prepare some questions, but to be honest, I couldn't think of any appropriate questions. (Feedback session)

Despite the very specific focus of the conversation, the trainee did not pick up on the fact that he was expected to reflect on his reading questions. The trainer expected him to reflect on the fact that he had not asked specific questions in the lesson, which in turn meant that the students had not been able to analyse the text. In response to the opening prompt, he confirms that his aim was to ask questions. He is unable or unwilling to critique his teaching. The trainer prompts further, to which the trainee evades self-evaluation of teaching by excusing the lack of questions on his preparation. The trainer's guidance and directive strategies here do not scaffold construction of knowledge about teaching because there is no shared understanding of the aim of feedback. The trainee understands the importance of preparing questions, but he does not understand the need to be critically evaluating his lesson and discuss weaknesses. The final excerpt reveals a trainee who not only understands the conventions of the feedback session, but is able to manipulate them to suit her own preferences. The typical procedure (Copland, 2010) that all trainers in the institution used was first a discussion of strengths, and then weaknesses. This order also mirrored the questions on the self-evaluation form that trainees filled in before the feedback session.

#### Excerpt 10

T: Do you want to talk about your lesson, if you've had a chance to think?

ST: I want to start with the points that I need to consider.

T: You don't want to start with positive points?

ST: No, I don't want.

T: No, Ok, fine it's up to you.

ST: The last activity wasn't successful, about the phrasal verbs. (Feedback session)

The trainer opens with the usual question to prompt the trainee to reflect. In this case the trainee knows that she is expected to start with the strengths, but specifically requests to discuss weakness first. The trainer is clearly surprised, but after giving her another chance to start with positive points, continues with the procedure the trainee has requested. This short excerpt is interesting in that it highlights an overextension of the accepted norms and conventions of the feedback session. The trainee wants to discuss something she is worried about, and manipulates her understanding of the procedures to fulfill her aims. She could only do this if she was already aware of the usual order. She also clearly understands the convention that she self-evaluates, but does this in the way she prefers. The fact that the trainee has an understanding of the context and discourse of the feedback session means that the trainer's prompts can effectively scaffold the learning.

## Discussion

The research question focused on how contextual factors scaffold pre-service trainees, in particular, how an understanding of accepted practices of 'effective' teaching, and the norms and conventions of a training context can support teacher learning. These were identified as themes which arose from all sources of data and in many conversations with all trainees at some juncture. As can be seen above, it is clear that the trainer and trainees were operating in a specific educational context. This context provided a dominant practice of what good teaching is, and what the conventions of English language teacher training are, with its expectations and roles of trainer and trainee. There was clearly a notion of 'good' teaching and the 'right' way to teach which is used by trainers and used by trainees to evaluate their teaching. This understanding creates a scaffold for thinking about and reflecting on teaching practice, planning and preparation. It acts as a scaffold in conversations with trainers about teaching. It also acts as a scaffold for trainers to organize the input of the training. It could be argued that this prescriptive notion of 'good' teaching is a straightjacket (Myhill & Warren, 2005) in the sense that the trainer was steering construction of teaching knowledge along a "predetermined path" (60). However, this is a pre-service teacher training context, and none of the trainees had taught before. As a result, at this stage in their learning they needed a model against which they could compare their own teaching. Mercer (1995) reminds us that a feature of effective scaffolding is to make smaller the challenge of the task by taking steps to reduce the difficulties. A model of teaching does this. Modeling, demonstrations and possible frameworks are part of the scaffolding role of the teacher (Alexander, 2004; Anton, 1999; Samaras & Gismondi, 1998), and therefore a significant part of a trainer's role also.

In some cases, trainees were very aware of this dominant practice and it formed the basis of their evaluations, lesson planning, lesson execution and discussions on teaching, as well as their relationships and roles in the teaching conversations. However, some trainees did not understand the expectations of the feedback sessions, their own roles as that of reflective practitioner, and the trainer's role as a guide. It is important that both parties share expectations and have a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities. These shared understandings and expectations create scaffolding conditions for the interaction and moment-by-moment micro-scaffolding that takes place in the interaction between the trainer and trainee. As the excerpts revealed, aspects of the context which acted as a macro-scaffold were a model of 'good teaching', conventions and norms of feedback sessions.

From the data it was clear that scaffolding operates at a level of educational and cultural context, as well as an interactional level. The micro- scaffolding and macro-scaffolding are mutually beneficial and symbiotic. The data suggests that both levels are necessary to support the construction of teaching knowledge. For example, a particular question or prompt from the trainer to promote reflection on a teaching point is only an opportunity for scaffolding if the trainee understands the conventions of feedback sessions. Similarly, even if the trainer or trainee understands their role in scaffolding teaching knowledge, scaffolding may not take place if the trainer does not use an appropriate question or prompt, or if the trainee does not become actively involved in the feedback by asking questions or justifying actions. Hammond & Gibbons (2005) make similar conclusions about the relationship between micro and macro scaffolding from their extensive study in a school context. Without the contextual macro-scaffolding “interactional support may become simply a hit and miss affair that may contribute little to the learning goals of specific lessons or units of work” (20).

## Conclusion

Recent research has pointed to the need to examine scaffolding at both a interactional level, as well as a contextual level (Daniels, 2001), and to explore the relationship between the two (Walqui, 2006). Contextual support as macro-level scaffolding lays the foundations for effective micro-scaffolding. In the context of pre-service teacher training, it is clear that trainees’ construction of teaching knowledge is influenced by their understanding of the conventions of feedback, as well as an awareness of the norms and accepted practices they are operating in. The notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice which inevitably permeate all training contexts can act as a support for learning as long as the accepted practices are made explicit, and the trainee is exposed to a variety of ‘effective’ teaching practice. The aim of scaffolding is to reduce the difficulty of the task, in this case, learning to teach. Trainers and trainees need to recognize the role that the context plays in this learning process, and be cognizant of the supportive structures which underpin good scaffolding. This calls for trainers and trainees to be openly explicit about their expectations, and the conventions of the training activities. It also calls for trainees to be critical of the context in which they are operating. A useful exercise would be for trainers and trainees to examine transcripts from feedback sessions where scaffolding does not take place and discuss what is happening, and why. This may pave the way for explicit discussion of expectations from both sides in the interaction, and may raise trainers’ awareness of how they need to support the interaction.

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