

## Transcription: What practical strategies do you use to scaffold language?

### Simon Armitage

Geography teacher

So, we need to be very careful that we display, we structure, we make clear the technical language which we're using during a lesson. One way in which I do this is that, I might have a list of words that are appropriate to this particular lesson that I have written on the board at the start of the lesson. And, as we encounter these words, which could be very specifically technical, or they could be facilitating in our expressions of ideas, so words like 'compare', 'contrast', 'evaluate', 'explain', all of these words are possible just to write on the board, and just to tick off as we use them.

Another thing to do, along that line, is to consider actually acknowledging the students' own use of that same language. So, when a student might use a particular word in an effectively accurate way, we add it to the list. Or, we could, of course, formulate another list, of words that they're perhaps not using quite correctly, or they're introducing, and that we want to return to. The important thing in this is that you're making the learning visible to the students, and leaving those words, that language, as prompts to them to refer to later on during the lesson.

One method I always use in my class, particularly perhaps with more extended pieces of writing, is to encourage students to underline key terms that they are using. Actually, more than that, to underline the key terms in the question itself, by identifying, perhaps, the command word, the trigger word, 'explain', 'describe', 'compare', 'evaluate', or the phrase, 'to what extent', within a question. It hones the students' mind, their ideas, on what they're actually going to be writing.

When they start to write, imagine the question is, "explain the formation of a waterfall". The important thing that they would need to do is to include processes in their explanation. What better way to confirm that they are using processes, than to encourage the students to underline the processes that they're referring to. So, they're using the names, that means that I can direct the students back to that piece of work, and challenge them: is there enough in your answer that you can underline, is there enough that you've expressed in a technical way?

So, as a geographer, I'm keenly aware that the world around my students, the world around me, is the reference point, the anchor point for my students' understanding. And, what I want my students to be able to do is, I want them to be able to see in their mind's eye what they're writing about. They, therefore, need to be able to see some of this language too. Now, that may sound very abstract, the reality though is that the walls of my classroom, or the projection screen at the front, can be my prompt in this.

If I'm talking about the process of, for example, suburbanisation, or re-urbanisation, taking two particular things from settlement, or urban, geography, then I could be displaying images about exactly those things, as I refer to them in the classroom.

If I'm trying to work with my students, to encourage them to use that language, I can also use those images as prompts that I can physically point to around the room, as I want them to refer to it. So, the images are there to help the students to have reference points.

We shouldn't assume that students know how to approach their answer to a particular question. In fact, students can be quite paralysed in their writing, and their expression of ideas, because they perhaps

don't know where to start. So, a writing frame can help with this, it can release them, and allow them to express their ideas far more effectively. What I would do is, I would give a simple, probably one side of A4 document, or I would project it onto a screen, and it would list, perhaps, on one side the key bits of terminology that I would be encouraging the students to use. But then, it would give them a sequence, through which they could progress in their answer.

Students can be encouraged to write collaboratively, as well as write individually, and this can be a very good way of supporting students of differing ability levels, or perhaps different awareness or experience, in use of English as their language of communication. So, either using physical means, writing on pieces of paper, or digitally, collaboration can help to encourage correct ways of writing, or better ways of writing, and writing precisely and concisely is usually the name of the game here.

So, what I might do is, I might divide a question up into different component parts, encourage one group, for example, to write about environmental issues, another group to write about economic issues, another group about social issues. And then, they can combine their writing in a finished piece.

Really, what this does is, it raises the expectation, it raises the bar on what is possible, so the student that is struggling to express the first ideas, gains clues and ideas from others.

### **Ursula Woodhouse**

Business Studies teacher

There are a number of strategies I use to scaffold language learning in my classroom. One of them would be, for example, to give my learners an opportunity to practice the language before setting a written task. For example, when I teach promotion, learners are encouraged to find an example of promotional material, and present it to the class. That way they will have an opportunity to use nouns, verbs, adjectives, related to promotion and advertising. And, once they are ready, I would give them a model sentence, for example, promotional materials should include, or may include, or will include, and they can then follow that example and make use of that when responding to a written task.

So, another technique, quite often used in my classroom, is perhaps activating prior knowledge and, getting students or learners to focus on the subject. I might give them sentence hats to match, or terms and their explanations, their definitions to match. It's particularly useful when we discuss, for example, the recruitment process, there's no point in talking about the process if they don't know what a vacancy, or a CV, or to hire, or to dismiss means. Quite often they are familiar with the concepts in their own language, but obviously don't know English vocabulary for the terms. So, it's just the kind of introductory exercise to get them to focus on the subject.

Another strategy I use to scaffold language in my classroom would be, for example, when learners are expected to compare and contrast, to create a bank of expressions, such as in comparison, similarly, in contrast, or, however, but, whilst. So, that way, if we've got the expressions ready, they can use them effectively in their written responses.

So, another useful technique in my classroom, to support learners, is perhaps supporting verbal deliveries with images, flow charts, or timelines for history teaching. And, that way, if learners are perhaps a little bit lost, they are not familiar with some expressions, the images fill in the gaps and help them stay focused, and benefit, obviously, from the delivery.

Another technique that works for me to scaffold language, and support my learners, is perhaps to repeat explanations more than once, and increase the difficulty of explanations. So, for example, I would say, first, to promote means to tell people about what you do and what you offer, and how it's good for them,

and that would be a very basic explanation. The second state would be perhaps to say, to promote means to inform your potential consumers of your product, and also how beneficial the products are to meet their needs. And, that is an explanation that would, obviously, get my learners from basic understanding, to understanding where key terms are explained, where subject specific knowledge is introduced.

One thing for learners whose first language is not English, it's very important that we give them regular brief feedback, both on their subject, as well as the language learning as well. That reinforces the message that, obviously, supporting the language is as important as supporting the subject knowledge. For example, my learners may start by saying, people often buy, however, when using words like, consumers often purchase, I would praise them, and show it as a good example of developing language skills.