

Foundational Schema

By Steve W. Dunn

As we unite our school in one philosophy, the ultimate goal of each classroom should be to move children to independence. This is where students have reached automaticity in the skills or strategies. The child is no longer aware of the strategies that they are using because the processes have gone underground to automaticity (done without overt thinking). In order to acquire this level, we need to see how to descaffold from demonstration to independence. There are basically three levels of instruction in the classroom. They include:

- Whole group for the purpose of demonstration
- Guided practice for the purposes of assessing and coaching
- Independence for the purpose of moving the skill/strategy to automaticity or self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978) - this could include pair and small group work as well

Demonstration

As we reflect on demonstration, it is important to identify that there are two levels of demonstration. Level one is the clear, uninterrupted showing of the skill or strategy. Children observe and hear the internal dialogue that the learner uses to navigate their way through the process. Level two is the interactive think together level where children are questioned as to their thinking. It is in this way that the child is doing the think aloud.

Demonstration – Level One

The first level is what I call the “*Show and think out loud*” level. This is not the telling level, but the showing level. We actually **do** the process for children

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and think aloud our process (Davey, 1983). This is when a teacher clearly models for children how he/she goes about a process. For example:

“When I look at non-fiction text, the first thing I do is to look at the heading, bold print, graphs, charts, pictures/captions, and diagrams on the page. This helps me predict what the text is going to be about and builds ideas and concepts I may need as I read the page. First I look at the bold heading at the top of the page. It says ‘Eggs.’ I know that I am now going to be reading about fly eggs and the life cycle. As I’m thinking about that, I now look at ...”

Notice that the teacher is not asking children what they think or feel but clearly shows his/her own “self-talk” (the internal dialogue he/she uses as he/she steps through the process) so that children get a clear, focused and uninterrupted model. The ultimate purpose is to hand off the self-talk, or private speech (Vygotsky, 1978) so that children will know the internal dialogue they need to practice independently and move to self-regulation. For instance, as a child independently reads the non-fiction book, we would want them to say to himself/herself, “The first thing I need to do is to look at the heading and bold print and think about what the text will be about based on this information.” Self-talk acts as a self-monitoring device so that children do not practice incorrectly when they are at independence. It is important that all children be infused with the self-talk they need before releasing them to practice. I find that many times I am so interested in getting the children **to do something** quickly that I forget to show them what it is that I would like them to do and how to do it. We have forgotten that active participation can take place between the ears. It doesn’t always have to be activity-

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based. In fact, I perceive that to be part of the problem with instruction. Many times demonstration turns into one big group grope. We ask children their opinion instead of clearly showing the model! For example, in a group grope, the following vignette using the same big book on flies might sound like this:

Teacher: “Let’s look at the first page. What do you think I should do first?”

Response: “Find your favorite part and start to read?”

Response: “Look for the new vocabulary words?”

Response: “Find your favorite part and share it with a friend?”

Response: “Ask the teacher?”

Response: “Call 911!”

Have you ever asked kids what they thought you should do before you demonstrated the process and your conversations went to goofy land? Children began hastily conjecturing bizarre responses and completely confused the instruction by random acts of guessing. This can, in fact, help children misconstrue knowledge as opposed to getting a clear picture in their head the first time. Dr. Sousa, in his book, *How the Brain Learns*, states that “...practice does not make perfect; practice makes permanent.” We want to make sure that before we ask children to practice anything, there is a clear understanding of what and how to do the process so that bad practice does not make permanent bad learning.

Demonstration – Level Two

The second level of demonstration is interactive think together. This is when I begin to bring children into the process that **I have previously showed**

them and thought out loud my thinking process. It is in this way that I can do some surface monitoring of what I need to redemonstrate and what children are actually getting from my demonstration. The key point is not to get children to memorize a list of actions to do, but rather to move deeply into questioning his/her thinking. This is another chance for demonstration to transpire, with children doing the thinking out loud for the other children. For example, using another big book on snails, the vignette might sound like this:

Teacher: “For the last couple of weeks, I have shown you the process I use to read nonfiction. Today, I would like you to help guide me through the process. What is the first thing I do when I open to the first page?”

Response: “Look at the bold print and think about what the main idea is going to be about.”

Teacher: “And why do I do that?”

Response: “Because usually the bold print is the main idea or topic of the page.”

Teacher: “So tell me what you are thinking as you read this bold print at the top of the page.”

As I see my students need more demonstration by the responses they give me, I can quickly move from the interactive think together and shift back to the “show and think out loud” level in order to clarify and redemonstrate what children need (Figure 3.1). For example:

Teacher: “After I look at the bold print, what is the next thing I might do?”

Response: “Find your favorite part and read it?”

Response: “Turn to the next page?”

Teacher: “I need to show you. Watch and listen carefully to what I do next. First I look at the pictures. As I look at the pictures, I think about...”

As I move from level one (show and think out loud) to level two (interactive think together), I am beginning the gradual release toward independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) as students begin to take more responsibility and control of their

learning and processes. Teachers who are exemplary at demonstration have the capability to carefully task analyze the little steps that children need to move from teacher dependence to student independence. This support needs to be thought of as a self-destructing scaffold (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). As students become more familiar and move toward automaticity (done without overt thinking), the self-talk and supports are torn down so that the child does the process independently. It is important that we do not provide so much support for students that we teach children to be teacher dependent. On the other hand, it is important that we provide enough support that they are set up to succeed. This is a balancing act that needs to be driven by formal and informal observation and assessment. The bottom line is that we need to supply a scaffold (Rogoff, 1990) that is taken away as children move towards independence.

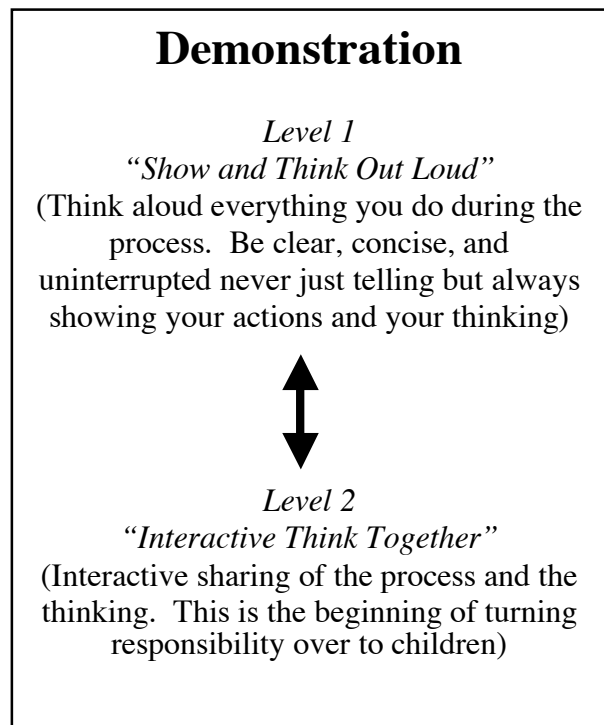


Figure 3.1