**Scaffolding learning in course materials**

Although the principle of “teaching from the known to the unknown” and linking learning to the student’s experience and context are important, these are not sufficient for deep learning to occur.

Apart from making the links to the everyday life of the student, it is necessary that learning is structured so that new knowledge (here we are talking about new *concepts* and not just about content) is mediated and presented in a systematised way. This is especially true when the students is being introduced to something completely knew which does not necessarily link to something that s/he *can* relate to in their everyday lives.

**Devices for scaffolding course materials**

# Principles for teaching

### Teaching texts

* should develop a **narrative** to carry meaning
* starting from known frame of reference
* **key points** boxes are valuable structuring devices
* encapsulate previous more general discussion in the terms of the expert discourse
* help reveal advance of discursive level through the text
* **section summaries**
* provide a brief resume of ‘plot’ development
* enable students to apprehend the overall flow of the narrative
* **core questions**
* help writer to ensure that there is a well defined underlying plot
* help students to keep hold of what it is
* enable students to return at end of text and recognise their progress into the discourse
* because of the inherent problems of sustaining meaning within an unfamiliar frame of discourse it is important to be able to keep other elements of difficulty to low levels. Key dimensions of difficulty are:
* **unfamiliarity** of examples, contexts etc: – such that student lacks existing conceptual structuring for purposes of internal representation of what you are trying to say
* **abstractness** of discourse: – formalistic representations which students have much greater difficulty operating on (than cases, stories etc.)
* **complexity** of analysis: – multiplicity of variables in play increases the mental load

### Activities within teaching texts

* have a similar role to incidents in a play
* the ‘plot unfolds through the activities
* direct exposition can be kept to a minimum
* teaching points emerge out of activities
* enable students to operate a discourse levels they are capable of
* and to move between levels as they connect everyday experience and everyday discourse to issues posed within the expert discourse
* designing activities
* each activity should be there because it makes a key move into the expert discourse – not simply to keep the students active
* think what the ‘content’ of the activity will be – then work out the ‘answers’ you want students to arrive at (i.e. the teaching points you want it to deliver) – then work out the questions you need to pose to the student to set them off in the right direction
* don’t ask big broad questions with many possible answers (students will just skip to your answers) – be highly specific as to what student has to do (or they won’t be able to engage at a level of discourse which is meaningful to them)
* after the activity provide ‘answers’ employing a slightly more advanced version of the ‘expert discourse than the student is likely to have employed (to help move them forward into the discourse)

### Assessment

* Since the central aim is that the student becomes a reader/speaker of the expert discourse, writing is central to the learning process
* even writing brief notes is central to ‘constructing the discourse’ for oneself
* Hence need to set short writing tasks frequently
* Need to keep tasks simple
* it’s always more difficult to work in an unfamiliar discourse than habitual speakers think
* hence students spend hours on writing tasks (and this is very high quality learning)
* whereas wallowing in the indistinct framework of an obscure question produces very little progress

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