What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

"Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and John Almarode have expertly created an insightful, timely, practical playbook for teachers and school leaders who want to learn more ways to ensure that all students gain skills using supportive structures called scaffolds. Most of all, educators will enjoy the techniques for using ongoing formative assessment and spiraling curriculum."

—**Virginia Kelsen,** Lead Human Resources Administrator,
El Rancho Unified School District

"At a time when every educator and transformational leader is strategizing on how to eliminate inequities and achievement gaps among their scholars, this book is a valuable, timely resource. The authors have masterfully defined the characteristics of effective scaffolding to make instruction and learning both accessible and relevant for all learners, regardless of the level they begin. I view this playbook as an absolute necessity—for its clarity and focus on the steps educators can take to help all scholars reach their highest academic potential."

—**Dana Trevethan,** Superintendent,
Turlock Unified School District

"How Scaffolding Works is a highly engaging and thought-provoking resource for school administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers to collaboratively learn about scaffolding. Each module includes real-life examples, opportunities for peer discussion, and an easy-to-use framework for deliberately planning scaffolds for *all* learners throughout the learning process. This playbook is a must-read for anyone wanting to learn how to use high effect-size strategies to scaffold learning."

—**Alisa Barret,** Director of Instruction,
Greenfield Exempted Village Schools

"This text provides a fresh lens through which to view the practice of scaffolding, applicable to all grade bands and subject areas!"

—**Tiffany Coleman,** Former Chair of Literacy Instruction,
Georgia Gwinnett College

"This playbook is a perfect next step after reading *The Teacher Clarity Playbook* and *The Success Criteria Playbook*. Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and John Almarode continue to build on the importance of clear learning targets and success criteria because knowing what success will look or sound like helps teachers navigate handling the tricky parts as a student learns. When you know where a student is and where they need to go, you can easily make decisions about scaffolding."

—**Melanie Kosko,** K–8 Literacy Coordinator, Oak Ridge Schools

How SCAFFOLDING WORKS

Nancy Frey | Douglas Fisher | John Almarode

HOW SCAFFOLDING WORKS

a playbook

for Supporting and Releasing Responsibility to Students

CORWIN
Fisher & Frey

CORWIN
A SAGE Publishing Company

FOR INFORMATION:

Corwin
A SAGE Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
(800) 233-9936
www.corwin.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-0719-0415-2

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

23 24 25 26 27 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Visit the companion website at
resources.corwin.com/howscaffoldingworks
for downloadable resources.

Acknowledgments

Corwin gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following reviewers:

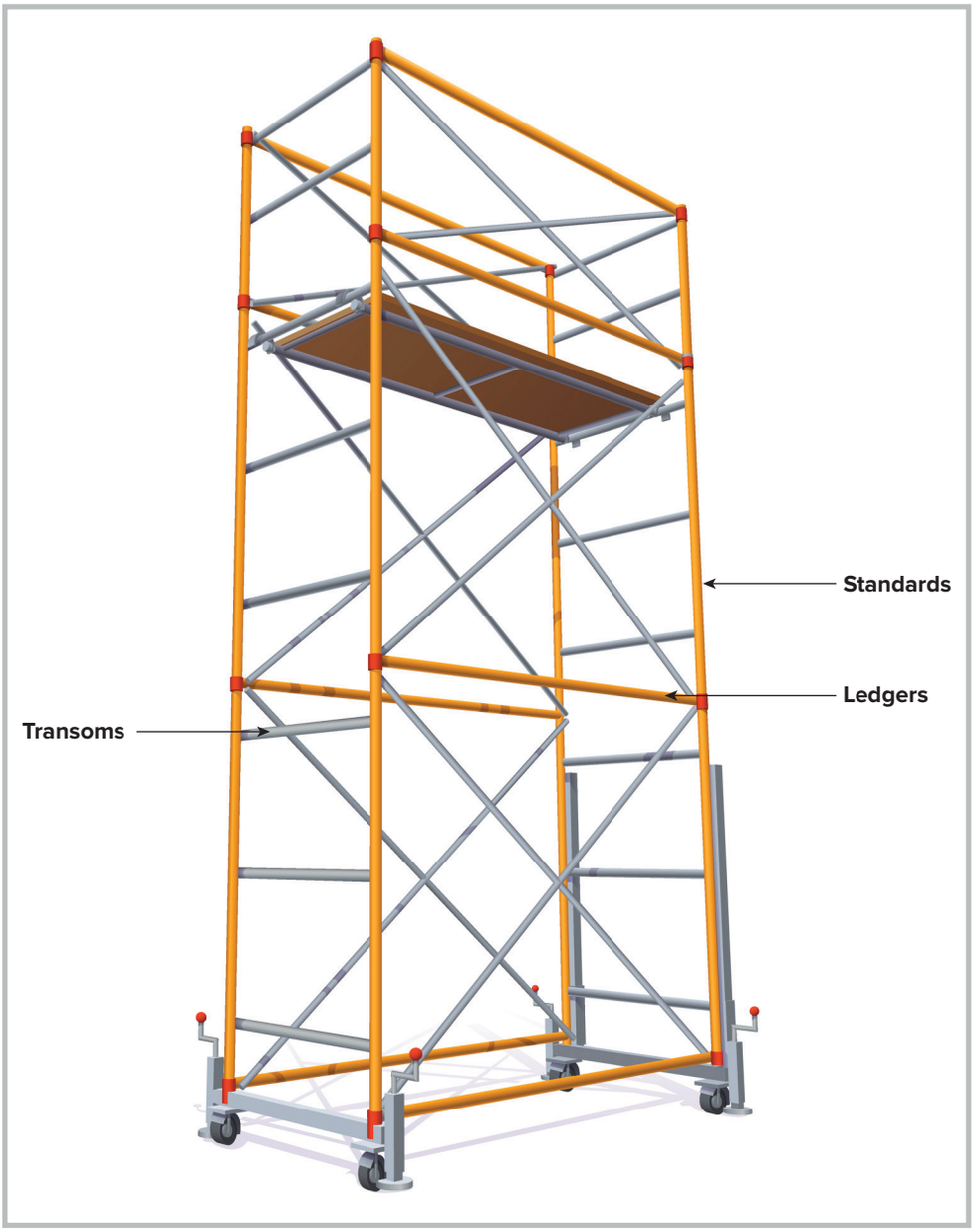
Lydia Bagley
Instructional Support Specialist
Cobb County School District
Marietta, GA

Tiffany Coleman
Former Chair of Literacy Instruction
Georgia Gwinnett College
Loganville, GA

Introduction

In September 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, a photographer snapped a photograph of 11 ironworkers sharing and enjoying their lunches and cigarettes.

This picture has found its place as one of the most iconic and recognizable photographs in the United States (e.g., *100 Photographs: The Most Influential Images of All Time;* Time, 2016). You likely have seen this photograph and, regardless of the number of times you view this picture, have a reaction to the idea that these men are suspended 70 floors above Manhattan without any support or safety equipment. These men worked daily to build a 587-foot-tall (179 meters) skyscraper, but only with the help of a scaffolding system. Like all scaffoldings, there are three main components: standards, ledgers, and transoms.



Source: Graphic courtesy of iStock.com/Sussenn

What does this have to do with this playbook, a playbook on scaffolding? To answer this question, let's turn our attention to the definition of scaffolding. What exactly is meant by *scaffolding*?

Scaffolding is a support system or structure. This supporting framework is temporary and movable, allowing individuals to move forward in whatever task is at hand. What is important to note here is that there is an essential relationship between the scaffolding and the specific task at hand:

1. Scaffolding is only used when the task at hand is not possible to complete without that support system or structure.

2. Scaffolding is customized (i.e., movable) based on the specific needs of the individuals engaged in the task; there is no one-size-fits-all scaffolding.
3. Scaffolding is used until the support system or structure is no longer needed; scaffolds are temporary and not permanent.

Take a moment and circle, underline, or highlight the term *temporary* in the third statement. You will need this term again very soon.

This is a playbook about the scaffolding of learning in our schools and classrooms. Instead of building skyscrapers, we are building self-regulated learners who take ownership of their learning. Instead of standards, ledgers, and transoms, we offer strategies, interventions, and different approaches. As we begin to uncover how scaffolding works, take a moment and reflect on the three relationships between scaffolding and tasks.

Relationship Between Scaffolding and Tasks	What does this make me think of in my own school or classroom?
Scaffolding is only used when the task at hand is not possible to complete without that support system or structure.	
Scaffolding is customized (i.e., movable) based on the specific needs of the individuals engaged in the task; there is no one-size-fits-all scaffolding.	
Scaffolding is used until the support system or structure is no longer needed; scaffolds are temporary and not permanent.	

Scaffolding tasks, whether those tasks are the construction of a skyscraper or tasks in our schools and classrooms, are absolutely essential in the successful completion of the tasks. However, scaffolding is not as easy as connecting standards, ledgers, and transoms. Consider the following questions that must be considered when putting up, moving, and taking down. In the extra space provided, add your own questions about scaffolding. What questions do you have for your own teaching and learning?

- When do I set up the scaffolding?
- How much scaffolding is needed?
- How do I know when and where to move the scaffolding?
- When do I remove the scaffolding?
-
-
-
-
-

The questions we provided, along with those questions you added to the list, will serve as our learning goals in this playbook. From time to time, you will be prompted to return to this list and check in with your progress in answering these questions.

Throughout the pages of this playbook, we will look at different examples from primary, elementary, middle school, and high school content, skills, practices, dispositions, and understandings. Scaffolding can and should be a part of teaching and learning in every school and classroom. This requires that we collaborate with our colleagues to generate, gather, and make sense of the evidence about our students' learning. This evidence is what helps us answer the above questions.

COLLABORATE TO SCAFFOLD

Each module offers you an opportunity for learning how scaffolding works, practicing the "putting up, moving, and taking down" of scaffolds with different grade-level and content areas, and, finally, applying the learning to your own school and classroom. We encourage you to engage in this playbook by circling, highlighting, underlining, writing in your own notes and responses, and using sticky notes to mark pages. Most importantly, though, we encourage you to collaborate with your colleagues. Although using this playbook as part of your personal learning is fine, the opportunity to dialogue

about scaffolding and collaborate on how to use scaffolding to accelerate learning is best done collectively with colleagues. We offer three suggestions for collaborating with colleagues:

- Work with an accountability partner
- Work with an instructional coach
- Work with a group of others during your common planning or PLC+ meeting (see Fisher et al., 2020)

Let's start with **accountability partners**. The use of this playbook during common planning or your PLC+ meeting may not be feasible. You may be more comfortable partnering with a colleague across the hall, in another part of the building, or in another school. You and this colleague can move through the modules, engage in the tasks, implement ideas in your own classrooms, and debrief the impact this had on advancing student learning. You and this colleague will serve as accountability partners in increasing your effectiveness at scaffolding learning for your students.

A second way to work collaboratively through this playbook is to work alongside an **instructional coach**. Instructional coaches provide all of us with an outside perspective on the teaching and learning in our classrooms. They can provide us with the right feedback at the right time. In fact, working with an instructional coach may offer the opportunity for the instructional coach to build their capacity by scaffolding to the instructional coaching cycle. After all, we have all needed our own professional learning scaffolded at some point in our careers. Either way, sitting down with an instructional coach, engaging in critical dialogue about supporting learners, developing specific scaffolds for your students, and then working together to evaluate the impact on student learning is an invaluable asset to professional growth.

Finally, this playbook can support your **work with a group of others** in collaborative conversations during your PLC+ meeting (Fisher et al., 2020). The work of this playbook is another tool for the work you do in your PLC+. The use of these five guiding questions of PLC+ will keep the focus relentlessly on the learning of our students:

- Where are we going?
- Where are we now?
- How do we move learning forward?
- What did we learn today?
- Who benefited and who did not benefit? (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 8)

In PLC+, teachers identify learning intentions and discuss ideas for instruction. They meet to review student work and figure out if their efforts have been fruitful. They also talk about students who need additional instruction or support for success. This is best done together, during our work as a community of learners.

I.1 HOW THIS PLAYBOOK SUPPORTS THE WORK OF PLC+

PLC Question	Module
Where are we going?	Module 5 focuses on goal setting and notes the value of knowing where we are going. In addition, Module 4 explores mental models of expertise, which are even bigger than the lesson goals we have for students.
Where are we now?	Module 7 focuses on front-end scaffolds and the ways in which we plan based on what students already know. In addition, Module 3 offers a model of scaffolding based on what we know about students and their current levels of understanding.
How do we move learning forward?	There are several modules that focus on moving learning forward, including Module 6 on deliberate practice to the four modules on scaffolding learning (Modules 7, 8, 9, and 10).
What did we learn today?	Having a clear understanding of what we learned today (both us and our learners) requires noticing what learners are saying and doing and communicating with them around their learning. Again Modules 7, 8, 9, and 10 provide evidence of students learning, and Module 11 focuses on fading scaffolds based on what students have learned.
Who benefited and who did not benefit?	While every module of this playbook applies to this particular question, the primary issue is around noticing which learners are giving, receiving, and integrating feedback. This is especially important in peer scaffolding, Module 10. If we do not take notice of how learners are engaging with the scaffolds provided, we may not know who benefited and who did not until it is too late.

Whether you have an accountability partner, access to an instructional coach, or a high-functioning, high-impact PLC+, the benefit of a collaborative approach is the opportunity to engage in critical dialogue around what scaffolding looks like for you and your learners. In fact, the need for a collaborative approach is highlighted by the very picture that started this conversation. There is more to the story in the photograph of the 11 ironworkers.

This photograph was staged. That's right, staged. The photographer did not naturally capture these 11 ironworkers dangling from the sixty-ninth story of the building swapping lunches and cigarettes. Instead, they were staged in a variety of poses to generate a photograph for advertising the building. Furthermore, the sturdy and reliable RCA building was right below them, outside of the view of the camera (Contrera, 2019). Again, staged. One of the challenges we must look out for during our work in this playbook is over-scaffolding. Unlike the photographer of this picture, we want to ensure that our scaffolds do not remove the productive struggle, lack the customization to meet the needs of our learners, or become a permanent fixture. If that happens, even if outside the field of vision of us as a teacher, we can create a complacency and slow down the progress of the learning. Instead, our singular focus must be to keep everything within our field of vision so that we can accelerate student learning.

Let's unpack *how scaffolding works.*

1

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCAFFOLDING

LEARNING INTENTION

We are learning about the foundations of scaffolding so that we can better understand how scaffolding accelerates learning.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

We will know we are successful when

- We can define what is meant by scaffolding.
- We can identify the foundations of scaffolding.
- We can apply scaffolding to a common task in our lives.
- We can describe the reciprocal relationship involved in scaffolding.

In your own words, describe what is meant by scaffolding in your school or classroom. To support your thinking, use the following question stems to get you started.

- What is scaffolding in our schools and classrooms?

- Why would we want or need to scaffold?

- When do you think scaffolding is appropriate? When is it not appropriate?

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Who gets the scaffolds?

- How do you scaffold learning?

Hold on to your answers to these questions. They will help us later in this and upcoming modules.

Instructional scaffolding has been a part of teaching practices since at least 1976 when Wood, Bruner, and Ross coined the phrase. However, the idea of scaffolding is much, much older. We have been "scaffolding" learning experiences for students since there have been apprenticeship models of learning.

The apprenticeship model is used by teachers to support learners in a specific task. Learners work alongside teachers to develop proficiency in a specific skill that begins with the teacher *modeling* the skill. Through low-stakes tasks, the learner mimics the actions of the teacher and reflects on their own experience. This is called *approximating*. Over time, the learner begins to engage in higher-stakes tasks with the role of the teacher *fading* away. Finally, the learner performs the actual task independently, seeking assistance from the teacher when needed. This leads to *self-directed learning* and the student *applying* the learning to other situations.

Take a moment and identify specific ways you have used the apprenticeship model in your own classroom:

Modeling:

Approximating:

Fading:

Self-directed learning:

Generalizing/applying:

Educators have always done more than simply relied on telling information to students. In other words, we scaffolded learning before the term *scaffolding* was ever used. Of course, we have learned a great deal in the years since the term *scaffolding* was first introduced.

The term *scaffolding* resonates with us because of the diversity we observe in our learners each and every day. From fractions to figurative language, physical geography to photosynthesis, or Renaissance Art to refinement cues, each of our students is at different points in their learning progression. Thus, supporting them in a way that offers them the opportunity to succeed is something we value and strive for in our classrooms. Yet, our most common experience with the term *scaffolding* is associated with construction sites or buildings.

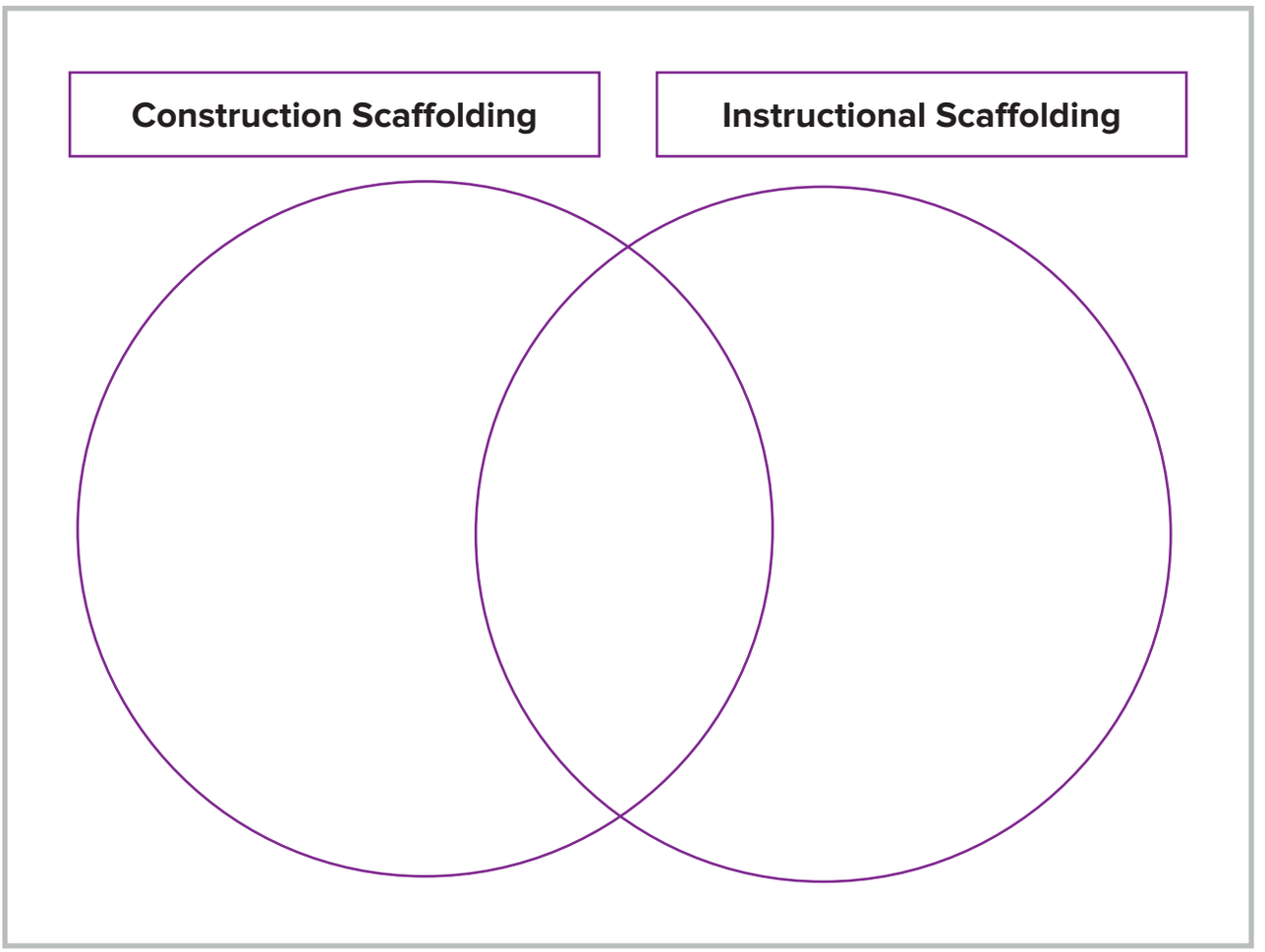
The point of any scaffold is to provide a temporary structure that is subsequently removed.

Take a moment and flip back to the Introduction, page 3. There was a term you were asked to circle, underline, or highlight. That term is what fills in the next sentence in this playbook. Write that term in the spaces.

> A construction scaffold is a _____ structure for holding workers and materials during the erection, repair, or decoration of a building. Essentially, scaffolds extend the reach of the worker and provide access to places that would have been inaccessible without the _____ structures.

The term you just added to the previous sentences is very important to our work in this playbook: *temporary*. The point of any scaffold is to provide a temporary structure that is subsequently removed. Interestingly, contractors do not. It's also worth noting that we don't spend a lot of money on scaffolding to make them look pretty. The standards, ledgers, and transoms are not dressed up or painted. They are, however, closely monitored to ensure the safety and security of the workers.

Are you starting to see the direction we are headed in this playbook? Let's start jotting down our thinking up to this point. Using the Venn diagram below, compare and contrast construction scaffolding with instructional scaffolding. This is just the start of our thinking, and we can add to the Venn diagram later.



Let's consider a familiar example: teaching someone to ride a bicycle. Think about a time when you taught a child to ride a bike or when you observed another person teach a child to ride a bike. Make a list of the actions involved in this process in the following space.

Actions Taken to Teach Bike Riding

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

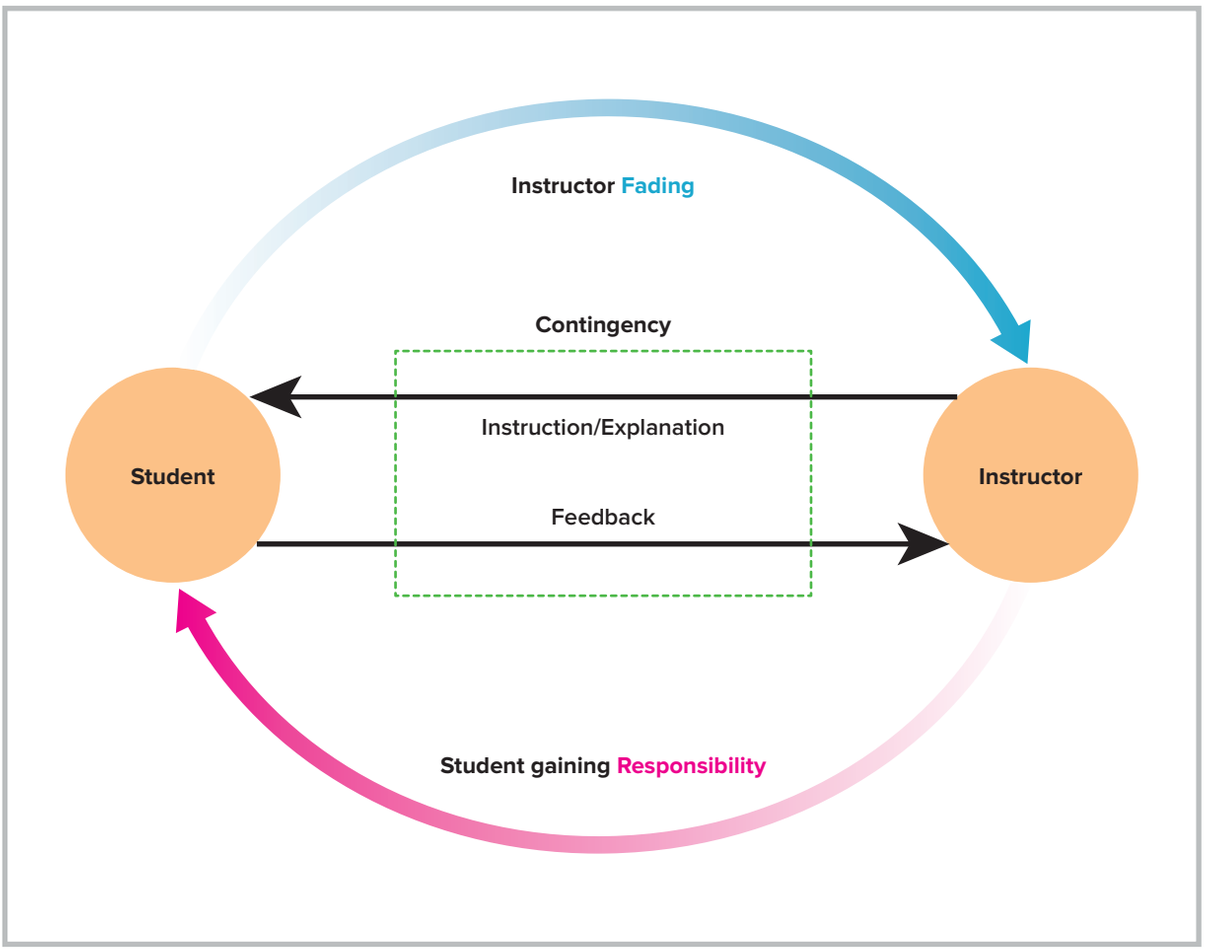
We asked colleagues and friends to consider the same process and gathered their responses.

1. Used a smaller bike
2. Added training wheels
3. Added safety equipment (e.g., helmets, pads)
4. Held the back of the bike and ran behind
5. Encouraged the child

You may have had other items on your list, but let's analyze the lists a bit. Note that there are actions that "right-size" the experience. The bike was smaller to fit the child. Did you have items on your list that "right-sized" the experience? If so, mark those with an "R." There were temporary supports included on our list, such as training wheels or no pedals so that the child could touch the ground. Mark the temporary supports on your list with a "T." We also had items on our list that made sure that the child felt (and was) safe. For example, the adult handled the tricky parts as the child acquired other foundational skills. Mark the safety supports on your list with an "S." Finally, we encouraged and praised the progressive learning and performance. Mark those items associated with feedback on your list with an "F." You probably also remember the first time that you let go. The child turned their head to see you, moved the handlebars to the right or left, and promptly fell over. And what did you do after you checked to make sure that there were no injuries? You encouraged the child to get back on the bike and try again.

The items on our list and your list are part of a reciprocal relationship involved in teaching someone to ride a bike. This reciprocal relationship was illustrated by Malik (2017) (see Figure 1.1).

1.1 RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP IN SCAFFOLDING



Source: Malik (2017).

Take a close look at the image of the two-gradient model developed by Shoaib Malik. Use the space below to summarize what you see in the model and what you believe the model communicates about instructional scaffolding. You may even want to add additional questions to the list on page 4 in the Introduction.

Now, let's start to tie all of this together. This reciprocal relationship forms the foundation for instructional scaffolding.

SCAFFOLDING FOUNDATIONS

There are some key takeaways from the example of teaching someone to ride a bike that apply to any situation where scaffolds are provided, including

- Right-sizing the task
- Making sure learning is a safe experience
- Handling the tricky parts as the student learns
- Providing encouragement, even when there are temporary failures

The success of scaffolding depends on the intensity, frequency, and duration of the scaffolds.

If you were lucky enough to teach a child to ride a bike, hopefully you are no longer running along behind them, holding the seat, and offering encouragement. Eventually, you faded your support as skills developed.

COACH A PEER

Talk with a peer about a task that was challenging for a learner or learners. Write that task at the top of the chart below and then discuss the questions below to learn more about how we try to scaffold learning.

DESCRIBE THE TASK	
How did you make sure learning was a safe experience?	
How did you handle the tricky parts as the student learns?	
How did you provide encouragement, even when there were temporary failures?	
How did you fade the supports?	

The evidence on instructional scaffolding is strong. There have been four meta-analyses on scaffolding, with an overall effect size of 0.58, which is an above-average influence and one that should accelerate learning (www.visiblelearningmetax.com). Of course, like many other influences, the success of scaffolding depends on the intensity, frequency, and duration of the scaffolds. In the hands of an expert educator, scaffolding is a powerful way to deepen learning.

CONCLUSION

Instructional scaffolds are an important strategy to ensure students' learning. There are several foundational aspects of scaffolding, including the idea that the scaffolds are temporary and should be faded.

Before moving on to the next module, we have provided a list of concepts explored thus far in the playbook.

- Instructional scaffolding
- Temporary
- Fading
- Right-sizing

Flip back through Module 1 and the Introduction and add additional concepts to the list.

Using the terms listed on the previous page, summarize your learning using ***all*** of the terms. Make sure your summary highlights the relationships between these terms and does not simply repeat their definitions (e.g., purposeful practice, *not* naive practice).

Scaffolding requires learners to engage in deliberate practice.

However, there is one part of scaffolding that we are missing. Scaffolding requires learners to engage in deliberate practice. We will turn our attention to the importance and role of practicing very soon. Before we do that, let's look at the history of scaffolding. Knowing the origin of scaffolding and the research behind this important aspect of teaching and learning provides the foundation for *how scaffolding works* in our schools and classrooms.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Before moving forward, consider the success criteria for this module. You will notice these statements have been revised from "We can" statements to "Can I?" questions. Using the traffic light scale, with red being not confident, yellow being somewhat confident, and green indicating very confident, how confident are you in your understanding of the foundations of scaffolding? You'll also want to take note of evidence you have for your self-assessment.

SUCCESS CRITERIA	SELF-ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE
Can I define what is meant by scaffolding?		
Can I identify the foundations of scaffolding?		
Can I apply scaffolding to a common task in our lives?		
Can I describe the reciprocal relationship involved in scaffolding?		

online resources

Access resources, tools, and guides
for this module at the companion website:
resources.corwin.com/howscaffoldingworks