TESOL, 2006

Explicitly supporting reading and writing in the adult ESL classroom

The project

- Conducted for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney, 2003-4

- Funded by Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

- AMEP Centre Researchers: Anne Burns, Macquarie University, Sydney and Helen de Silva Joyce, NSW Adult Migrant English Service

- AMEP Teacher Researchers: 10 teachers from NSW, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania

Research Program

- Readings on concept of scaffolding and explicit teaching sent to teachers

- Introductory two-day workshop focusing on:
- research on scaffolding in NSW primary and high schools (Hammond and Gibbons)
- research on scaffolding in indigenous communities (Rose)
- action research (Burns)

- A series of national workshops interspersed with phases of action research by project teachers

- Filming of six classrooms - implementation of scaffolding and explicit teaching practices

- Key focus areas emerging from program:
    - *learning-centred* approaches that support learning and ensure learner success
    - *task-based* approaches that develop practical activities to support learning
    - *text-based* approaches that focus on whole texts as the ultimate goal of learning
- *scaffolded* approaches – "built-in" and "contingent"

Theoretical concepts and principles

Vygotksy

- zone of proximal development (ZPD):

…the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978: 86)

Key principles drawn from Vygotskyan theory:

- Individual learning takes place through interaction with others in social contexts.
- Language is fundamental to cognitive development as it is a tool for thinking and doing.
- Learning is mediated by skilled others who support learners in the tasks they undertake.
- Learners can achieve more learning with the support of skilled others than they can achieve alone.
- Learners move towards greater independence as their knowledge and skills increase.
- Teachers can gradually withdraw support as learners achieve success.

Vygotsky, L. (1934/78). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Scaffolding

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) developed the term *scaffolding* - metaphor for the role played in learning by interactional talk between learners/skilled others.

Skilled others:
- Make learners interested in the task
- Simplify the task, often by breaking it down into smaller steps
- Keep learners on track by reminding them of the goal of the task
- Point out what is important or show learners other ways of doing parts of the tasks
- Control the learner's frustration during the task.
- Demonstrate an idealised version of the task.

Too often human learning has been depicted as a paradigm of a lone organism pitted against nature – whether in the model of the behaviourists' organisms shaping up responses to fit the geometrics and probabilities of the world of stimuli, or in the Piagetian model where a lone child struggles single handedly to strike some equilibrium between assimilating the world to himself or himself to the world. (Bruner, 1985: 25)

Bruner, J. (1985). Vygotsky: A historical and conceptual perspective. In Wertsch, J. (Ed). *Culture, communication and cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
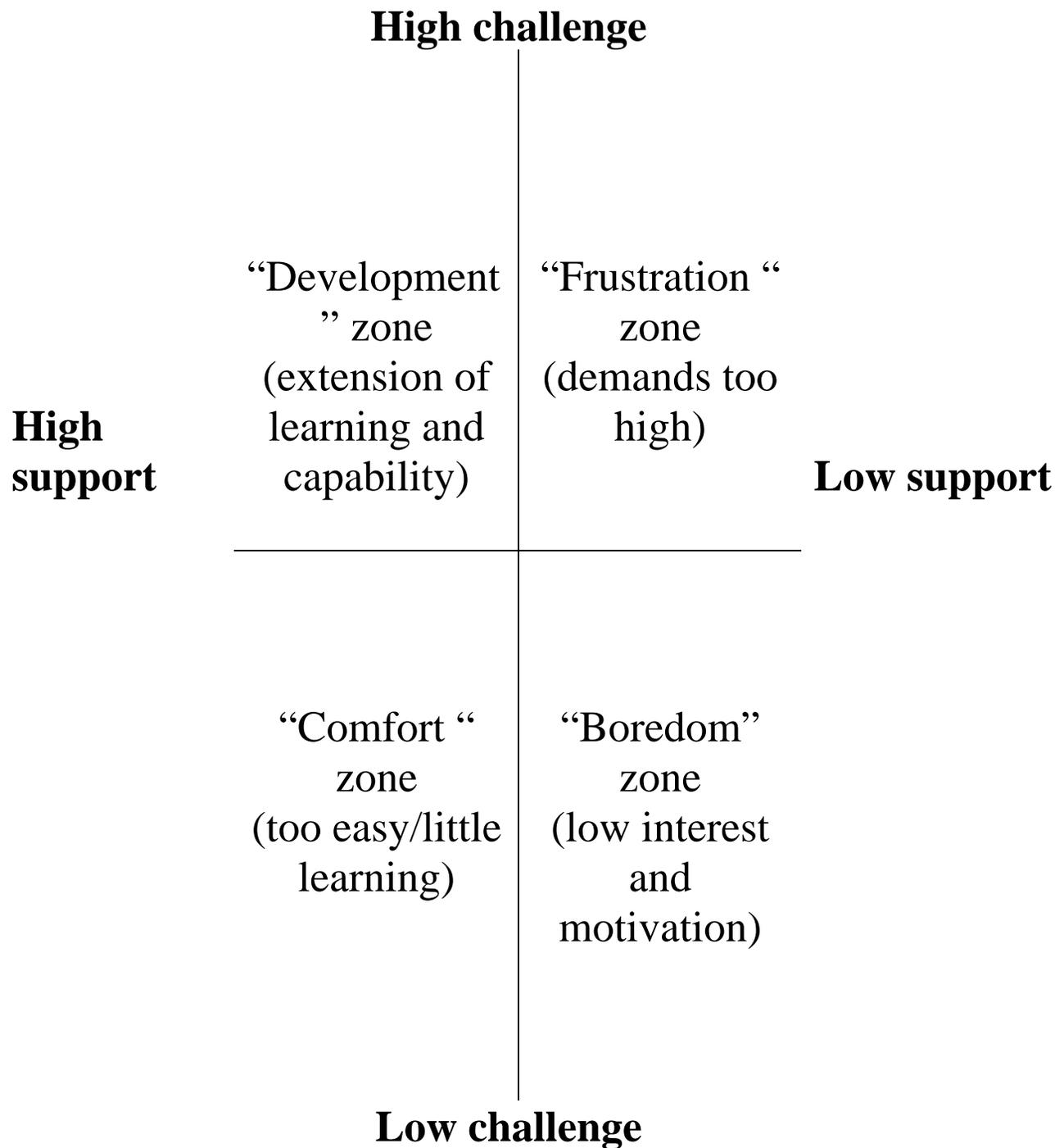
Theoretical concepts and principles

Bruner

Key principles drawn from Brunerian theory:

- Effective scaffolding is tuned to the needs of learners and constantly adjusted in response to what they are able to do

- Support is gradually reduced as skills and knowledge are acquired

- Learners are more likely to be successful when tasks are broken down into achievable parts

- Demonstration and modelling are important aspects of scaffolding learning

- Focusing continually towards the whole task and the goals to be achieved is central to effective scaffolding

- Learners gain success with new tasks when they are located within formats and routines that are already familiar.

A model of classroom support and challenge (Mariani, 1997)

High challenge

High support

"Development" zone (extension of learning and capability)

"Frustration" zone (demands too high)

Low support

"Comfort" zone (too easy/little learning)

"Boredom" zone (low interest and motivation)

Low challenge

Adapted from Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. *Perspectives*, 23(2).

Professional development resource

- An overview of the project (Chapter 1)

- Theoretical ideas on the concepts of scaffolding and explicit teaching, and suggestions for further reading (Chapters 1 and 2)

- An introduction to action research (Chapter 3)

- Accounts of classroom activities and materials to support reading and writing development from beginner to high intermediate level by five classroom teachers (Chapters 4-8)

- A DVD showing each of the teachers in action in their classrooms.

- Reflection points – tasks for teachers to:
- reflect on their own beliefs/practices
- discuss key theoretical and practical ideas
- find out more about a particular issue.

- Action points - mini-action research for teachers to:
- try out the activities used in the project
- collect information about what happens
- reflect on findings or changes