

A Secondary English
Teacher's Guide to

Teaching in the Zone

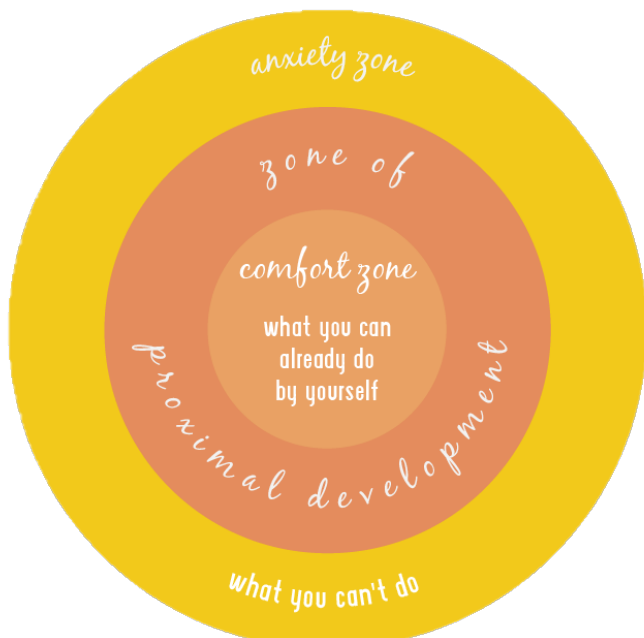


Drury University 2015

Introduction

As a high school teacher, you have 6 or more classes a day. Each class is composed of a diverse group of students, and each individual student has a diverse set of strengths and weaknesses. Some students may struggle with the organization of a paper, while others look bored to death as you teach about introductory and body paragraphs. However, this white paper is here to help.

This white paper is a guide to help teachers, specifically secondary English teachers, provide individualized and meaningful instruction to every student. This can be done through locating and teaching within each student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



What is the Zone of Proximal Development?

The Zone of Proximal Development was first identified by psychologist Lev Vygotsky. One way to think about the **Zone of Proximal Development** is that it is, "the difference between what a child can do independently, and what he or she is capable of doing with targeted assistance," (Lui, 2012).

The ZPD is the level of difficulty at which a student is challenged enough to be motivated. It is not so easy that it bores the student, and it is not so difficult that the student gives up. The most effective teaching occurs in the ZPD (Vavilis, 2003).

Determining a Student's ZPD

It is important to locate each student's ZPD because it will help you plan more targeted lessons for the whole class, small groups, and individual work (Iju, 2007). Ideally, you will get to know your students. This will make identifying each student's ZPD an easier task.

To determine a student's ZPD, you need know what a student can successfully do with guided practice and focus on that area. This will most likely be identified through formative assessments: questioning during class, exit slips, homework, etc. For

example, if a student always turns in well-organized papers, do not make him or her work on organization. However, say that same student only can properly place commas when working in a group, or with you – that is where you should focus. That is in that student's ZPD.

Teaching in the ZPD

The key to teaching within your students' ZPDs is to utilize scaffolding.

Scaffolding is the process of slowly taking away adult/peer guidance until the child is able to do the work on their own (Smit, 2013). Another definition of scaffolding is, "the ultimate transfer of responsibility for the task to the child as adult support decreases and child capability increases," (Lui, 2012).

Think about scaffolding like learning to ride a bike. At first, a child has training wheels and a parent walking with them. Slowly but surely, the training wheels raise, the parent backs off, and the child is riding a bike.

According to a 2014 Edutopia article, some ways to scaffold a lesson include:

- Modeling
- Tapping into prior knowledge
- Giving time to talk
- Using visual aids
- Trying something new

It is important to remember that success looks different for every

student. Students who are below grade level are going to have much different successes than students who are above grade level. The chart below on the next page (page 4) shows what English students at each level might look like for a lesson on identifying noun phrase subjects and verb phrase predicate.

The Importance and Benefits of Scaffolding

Scaffolding is important because it promotes teaching to each student's ZPD. When a student is being taught within his/her ZPD, they are most receptive to the instruction, thereby the most successful (Liu, 2012). If you want your students to learn, you need to acknowledge where they are at (whether this be at, below, or above grade level). For example, you cannot expect a student to write a paragraph if he or she cannot properly construct a sentence.

Scaffolding also benefits teachers because it allows teachers to better understand their students, discover unique thought process, and helps to tailor the learning for each class (Lui, 2014).

The most important part is that when scaffolding is used in a classroom, and students are taught within their ZPDs, every student is able to feel success.

Student's Level	How he/she might Struggle	How to Scaffold for that Student
Below Grade Level	<p>A student who is below grade level might not have the prerequisite skills required for the current lesson's objective.</p> <p>Example: Sydney has trouble identifying where the verb phrase begins because he never received the foundational information on verbs.</p>	<p>Provide the student with supplementary materials that are easy to understand and applicable to the assignment.</p> <p>Example: Give Sydney a verb cheat sheet while she is beginning to learn. While she understands action verbs, she needs help identifying linking and transitive verbs.</p>
At Grade Level	<p>A student who is at grade level will have the necessary pre requisite skills, but may not be interested in the lesson.</p> <p>Example: Shelby understands how to divide a sentence into the noun phrase subject and verb phrase predicate, but does not see the purpose and is not interested in participating.</p>	<p>Encourage and allow the student to connect the lesson with something that he/she is interested in.</p> <p>Example: Have Shelby bring in an excerpt from her favorite book. Have her dissect those sentences instead of the ones on the handout.</p>
Above Grade Level	<p>A student who is above grade level may master the lesson's objective on the first exercise, and simply be bored the rest of the lesson.</p> <p>Example: Cody could easily identify noun phrase subjects and verb phrase predicates during the first class exercise, and is visibly bored and frustrated.</p>	<p>Allow student to challenge him/herself by helping another student (like Sydney).</p> <p>Example: Cody could help Sydney learn to identify different types of verbs, while working through the exercises with her.</p>