Do Scaffolding Interactions Exist in the Thai Classroom?

Patcharee - Scheb-Buenner
pat.scheb-buenner@hotmail.de
Didyasarin International College, Hatyai University

ABSTRACT

This study reports on how five Thai teachers in a private university scaffold their students in an EFL classroom. The context of this study is teacher-fronted instruction and low proficiency students. A case study using an observation method is employed. The study reveals basic types of instructional activities: focus on form and focus on meaning. Scaffolding is explored using frameworks adopted from Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and van Lier (1996). The findings illustrate that the verbal interaction of Thai teachers with their students reflects scaffolding features described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) while slightly reflecting van Lier's description. The study summarizes the features of scaffolding in the teacher-fronted instruction. This embraces all the findings in relation to form and meaning-focused activities. Scaffolding in the form-focused activities displays long sequentiality, less contingency, and less contextual support, while scaffolding in the meaning-focused activities consists of short sequentiality, more contingency, and contextual support. The study offers the EFL teachers teaching in a university level and dealing with low proficiency learners and teacher-fronted instruction an approach to teach and earn their learners' engagement. The teachers who employ scaffolding should be aware of the usefulness of it by combining the strengths of form-focused and meaning-focused activities. Scaffolding attributes should be gradually provided in order that low proficiency students can engage in interaction with the teachers. Most importantly, the teachers who adopt scaffolding in their teaching should be aware of the concepts of both frameworks which will make scaffolding a practical and effective approach.

Keywords: scaffolding; teacher-fronted instruction; low proficiency learners; engagement; verbal interactions

INTRODUCTION

Punthumasen (2008) reveals the characteristics of Thai students that they have low proficiency in English and low responsibility. Whole-class instruction takes place, with a focus on lecturing, lack of group discussion, students taking notes or copying from a whiteboard, and student memorisation (Jimakorn & Singhasiri, 2006). Saengboon (2002) and Wongsothorn, Hiranburana and Chinnawongs (2002) also provide an in-depth critique of English classrooms in Thailand; for instance, they argue that there is too much content in the curriculum, that there is inadequate preparation and teachers are overloaded with responsibilities, and that class sizes are too large and students are not able to achieve the desired standard required for real-life situations. They also describe teacher-fronted styles, an emphasis on accuracy more than fluency, and the explanation of grammar rules using only the Thai language. McDonough and Chaikitimongkol (2007) also state that a public university in northern Thailand used a focus-on-forms approach. Teacher-fronted instruction was also found among all teacher participants in Sinprajakpol's (2004) study.

The situation above features Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Thailand (EFL) which may explain why Thai students are low proficiency in English at both national and international standard levels (Wiriyachitra, 2001; Prappal, 2002; Wiriyachitra, 2010;

Bowonrattanapat, 2012). The students may not be able to become sufficiently independent to learn by themselves outside classroom because they are familiar with teacher-fronted style. They need substantial support to enforce them to learn, especially to learn in the classroom. Scaffolding which helps young kids to learn since they are dependent on their parents may also be useful to help low proficiency and inactive students to learn more effectively in the classrooms. The teacher-fronted approach prevalently found in the Thai classrooms may reflect the features of scaffolding and how the students respond to the way their teachers are doing should be observed. As an educator and language teacher, the researcher aims to reveal the teaching styles in Thai classroom and identify some positive pedagogical practices under the framework of scaffolding.

OBJECTIVES

This study is an exploration of scaffolding interactions between Thai teachers and students to understand how scaffolding interaction has been created and how the interactions facilitate learning and create students' engagement. Having identified such interaction, the researcher proposes an appropriate teaching approach which fits the context of EFL in Thailand as described. To achieve the aims, the study will find out how the scaffolding interactions of Thai teachers of English reflect Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and van Lier's (1996) descriptions and how students react to scaffolding interactions.

WHAT IS SCAFFOLDING?

Scaffolding is the concept that is commonly related to the sociocultural perspective on teaching and learning. This concept was introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), in which scaffolding was defined as the tutorial assistance an adult provided for a child for learning that is beyond the child's capabilities. The aim of scaffolding is to build the child's or learner's knowledge in order that they are able to complete a task, and complete the same task without assistance in the future. The mother or the teacher takes responsibilities for controlling the elements which are initially beyond the child's or learner's capacity (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Similarly Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) suggests that learners should be guided or scaffolded by a more capable peer to carry out a task. Ge and Land (2003) pinpoint that these notions of scaffolding emphasize the role of dialogue and social interaction to foster comprehension-monitoring strategies. It is implied that scaffolding interaction or process can be achieved through different strategies. There are many strategies in scaffolding learners; for example, modelling (Waiqui, 2006; Yelland & Masters, 2007; Mertzman, 2008), prompting (Forman, 2005, 2008), questioning (McCormick, 1997; Mertzman, 2008; Sharpe, 2008), gesture and action clues (Anton, 1999; Ohta, 1999), and feedback provision (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000), high support and low support scaffolds (Pentimonti & Justice (2010), as well as scaffolded digital literacy environment which is the integration of scaffolding in digital learning environment (Proctor, Dalton & Grisham, 2007).

FEATURES OF SCAFFOLDING

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) originally studied scaffolding in parental tutoring for children in their early years. They did an empirical study of scaffolding processes by demonstrating how the mother provided scaffolding for the young child's needs, to keep her focused, protect her from distractions, and reduce degrees of freedom. They also distinguished scaffolding from other forms of help in that scaffolding is help given in the pursuit of a specific learning task which has a finite goal. They stress that the expert is a domain expert and a facilitator.

The expert not only helps motivate the learner by providing enough support to enable the learner to achieve a goal, but also provides support in the form of modelling and hints to help the learner to reflect. There are six main functions of scaffolding which the expert processes to assist the learner to accomplish a particular task, which are: Recruitment (R), Reduction in Degrees of Freedom (RDF), Direction Maintenance (DM), Marking Critical Features (MCF), Frustration Control (FC), and Demonstration (D).

The aforementioned features describe scaffolding in a way which gradually exhibits varying degrees of help from one to six along with psychological help (frustration control). For example, reducing or simplifying a task makes a problem easier for learners. The easier problem or task may come down to the actual competence level of the learners. This scaffolding also concerns human interpersonal relationships since it describes one of the scaffolding features in "frustration control". Teachers who can identify that frustration may be able to help the students at the critical moment effectively. The last feature of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) (op cit) functions exhibits ultimate help which reveals a maximum or the highest degree of help. Additionally, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) also mention this scaffolding in terms of temporary support and gradual withdrawal when learners become independent. Scaffolding by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) appears oversimplified. Each function seems to be restricted in its definitions. The functions of scaffolding described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) do not appear sufficient to clarify the situations in real classroom regarding unexpected or unprepared for situations, or the variations in the students' proficiency. Another point of concern is that this scaffolding does not reflect the reciprocal roles between teachers and students. Obviously the features described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) are prominent in what teachers should do, but constrained in relation to the students' activity or engagement. There are a number of studies that adopted Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) framework; for example, Donato (1994), Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), McCormick (1997), Nassaji and Swain (2000).

van Lier (1996) also describes the features of pedagogical scaffolding in terms of six principles: continuity, contextual support, intersubjectivity, contingency, handover, and flow. Continuity refers to where scaffolding recurs over a period of time, and involves a combination of repetition and variation. Contextual support refers to the activity which is structured in order to create a safe, but challenging environment for learners. The participation of the learners is encouraged without force, and errors are tolerated. Intersubjectivity emphasizes mutual engagement among all parties in the interaction. Contingency means that elements in the activity can be changed, not fixed or scripted, and is able to be changed based on a moment by moment situation to handle a problem at hand. Handover refers to when the expert is aware when to hand over the task to the novice when the novice shows signs of being ready for part of the task. Flow is actions which all participants are jointly orchestrated so that the interaction flows in a natural way. The contribution comes from all participants.

In contrast to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) (op cit) description of scaffolding, van Lier (1996) highlights what scaffolding looks like rather than how to provide it. Scaffolding should be provided repetitively. The principle of "contextual support" in part overlaps with "frustration control" stated in Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). They both aim to create a safe and secure environment for learners to be able to maintain participation. Interestingly scaffolding is about timing regarding the term "handover". This implies that an expert or a teacher should be aware of when to remove scaffolding assistance when it is not necessary. This notion of van Lier's does not appear in Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) description. Handover seems to be complementary with Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) description with respect to a lack of reciprocity between teachers and students. However both scaffolding

notions reflect its functions that include not only cognitive, but social, motivational and emotional aspects.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative-based. It is principally based on videotaped recordings in EFL classrooms at a private university in Thailand. This study is a case study which aims to explore the concept of scaffolding in the Thai classrooms which reflect the stereotype of Thai classrooms as mentioned at the beginning. The sampling of participants for this study is highly specific in terms of its location, numbers, and demographic data. Five Thai teachers were selected by convenience sampling. This convenience sampling strategy means that the persons in the study are chosen because they are readily available (Patton, 2002, p. 265). Such sampling is also beneficial to the study because the participants and the researcher already knew each other, which would reduce the possibility of an unfriendly or hostile environment. These five teachers were chosen because they all taught general English courses for students in the Faculty of Business Administration which is the biggest faculty in the University. The five teachers of average ages of 32 years old had similar teaching experiences between 3-5 years. The classes chosen studied English II and III taught by the five participant teachers. Each class had approximately 40-50 students. Their English proficiency was low as evidenced by the low scores obtained from their previous English course. In general they were at a beginning level.

The five teachers had been observed in their normal classrooms four times for one month. The data collected which are comprised of 18 recordings of teaching observations totalling 36.5 hours, teacher interviews and field notes. The recordings were transcribed and were later analysed for features of scaffolding.

RESULTS

Regarding the transcribed observational data, the coding step also identified activity types of the teacher-fronted instruction which consisted of grammar lesson, grammar exercise, vocabulary exercise, reading exercise, listening exercise, speaking exercise and greeting session. This overview helps understanding process and patterns of scaffolding the teachers were providing to their students in associated with their activities.

TABLE 1. Overview of activity episodes

Teacher	Teacher Chutamas (EN II)	Teacher Thirayu (EN III)	Teacher Nisakorn (EN III)	Teacher Praman (EN II)	Teacher Thayida (EN III)
Total observation	3	5	3	4	3
Total episode	23	13	16	25	19
Total scaffolding utterances	762	479	560	801	704
Average utterances/episode	33	37	35	32	37
Reading comprehension	5 (21%)	6(46%)	2 (12%)	8 (32%)	10 (52%)
Vocabulary	3(13%)	1(8%)	5(31%)	3(12%)	-
Grammar lesson	6(26%)	4(30%)	8(50%)	4(16%)	5(26%)
Grammar exercise	2(7%)	1(8%)	1(6%)	5(20%)	2(10%)
Speaking exercise	2(7%)	-	-	-	1(5%)
Greeting or small talk	2(7%)	1(8%)	-	-	1(5%)
Listening comprehension	3 (13%)	-	-	5(20%)	-

EN = English courses which each teacher teaches

The table reports a holistic perspective on the total data set, indicating types of activity or episodes across an individual teacher. The seven different activities fall into two main types: form-focused and meaning-focused. Form-focused activities refers to grammar exercises and lectures which are mainly aimed to teach structures of language rules while meaning-focused activities are aimed at developing comprehension such as listening, reading, vocabulary exercises. Table 1 presents 33%-56% of grammar or form-focused type activities which include grammar lesson and grammar exercise among five teachers. Meaning-focused activities combining reading comprehension and vocabulary exercise take up 33%-54% of all activities and others are 8%-27% of all activities among five teachers. Accordingly these percentages advocate two dominant activities in classroom in this study. This table indicates that activities in the classroom can be divided into two types since they were found across five teachers. These two types of classroom activities will guide the analysis based on the frameworks chosen.

SCAFFOLDING USING WOOD, BRUNER, ROSS AND VAN LIER'S FRAMEWORK

The findings show the teachers' verbal interactions with the students' express features of scaffoldings as described earlier. The teachers employed recruitments (R) for different purposes i.e. for pedagogical (RP), contextual (RC) and managerial (RM) purposes. A series of Reduce Degree of Freedom (RDF) was found where the most common used RDF by five teachers was giving choices. Two Direction Maintenance (DMs) strategies were discovered: DM for clarification (DMCR) and DM for comprehension check (DMCC). DMCR is used when a teacher was not clear about the students' answers or any utterances while DMCC is highly relevant to the ongoing lessons or exercise. DMCC is a more proactive action from the teachers to check whether the students' understand the lessons being taught. Marking Critical Feature (MCF) consists of different key questions such as "what does it mean?", "why?" or using translation into Thai.

MCF strategies sometimes overlap with RDF. This example is coded as both MCF and RDF. Having characterized both codes, this utterance provides the students two possible choices of which one is the correct word. At the same time this utterance also functions to simplify the task. The teachers employed different strategies to comfort or control frustration (FC); for example, asking a question "are you confused?", making a joke or being playful" and praising. The last feature of scaffolding from Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) is Demonstration (D). Simple Demonstration (DS) is used when short answers or explanation were provided such as "yes/no", "true/not correct". Elaborate Demonstration (DE) is a detailed explanation from the teachers.

Scaffolding described by van Lier (1996) consists of continuity, flow, intersubjectivity, contextual, handover, and contingency. To analyse the scaffolding instruction in relation to this framework, the researcher needed to look at the whole interaction. This analysis helps the study gain insight and understanding of how the teacher participants perform scaffolding through a holistic lens.

SCAFFOLDING IN A GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

TABLE 2. Transcript for a grammar lesson

1	T	First of all, today I want all of you to be able to make your own sentence.	RP
2	T	Anyone can tell me one sentence of past simple tense n positive form.	RP
3	T	For example I was at school yesterday. /I was at school yesterday/. This is an affirmative or positive sentence.	RDF
4	T	Can you give me one sentence?	DMCC
5	S1	I went to Rattaphume last week.	

6	T	Very good, you used a correct form of tense, past tense. You cannot use go. Because this situation was already past. You have to use past tense. /I went to Rataphum last week/.	DE
7	T	These two sentences are positive.	DMCC
8	T	Now I'd like you to make them negative sentences.	DMCC
9	T	Negative, we need one word to make a negative sentence.	MCF RDF
10	SS	Not	
11	T	Yes, not. Right.	DS
12	T	Can you change these sentences into a negative form?	DMCC
13	S2	I was not.	
14	T	Very good I was not at school yesterday. /I was not at school yesterday/.	DS
15	T	How about the second sentence?	DM
16	T	I went to … how do you make it a negative form?	DMCC
17	T	I	RDF
18	SS	Did not	
19	T	Err, I did not	DS
20	T	When you already us "did", don't forget to	MCF
21	T	How would you change it? I did not went	DMCC
22	S3	Go	
23	T	Haa, I didn't go. Don't forget to change it back to the infinitive form.	DE MCF
24	T	Any question for this? No, right? It's still easy.	FC

T = teacher, s = student (Teacher Chutamas)

This episode represents a form-focused activity. A lesson goal of this activity is to enable the students to form a Past Simple sentence. Teacher Chutamas first stated a lesson goal as RP scaffolding. In line 4, the teacher asked the students to check their comprehension about the Past Simple tense (DMCC) since this lesson was previously taught. Subsequently a student answered correctly in line 5 and the teacher praised the student.

In line 8, Teacher Chutamas assigned a new task to the students as she requested a negative form sentence of the Past Simple tense. Following she provided MCF/RDF scaffolding by pointing out a critical feature of a negative sentence in line 9. Having received a correct response, the teacher asked the students to change two previous sentences to a negative form in line 12. Another student answered correctly in the following line. The teacher continued to the second sentence. The students answered, but not completely. Therefore the teacher reminded them of the use of a critical feature, "did", in line 20. Then the students offered a correct answer in 22. The teacher then followed up the students' answer by emphasizing the rule of the infinitive form. In the last line of this episode, the teacher ended with comforting words (FC).

This episode expresses a variety of scaffolding employed; RDF, MCF, DMCC. Repetitions of these scaffoldings evidence the feature of handover. It means that the teacher made attempts to engage the students in the interaction by providing several questions and assistance. Subsequently, intersubjectivity was created. Along this episode, contextual support was not found.

SCAFFOLDING IN A VOCABULARY LESSON

TABLE 3. Transcript of scaffolding in a vocabulary lesson

1	T	Next we learn about parts of a house.	RP
2		What does it mean? Parts of something.	DMCR
3	T	For example, window is part of a house. A roof is also part of a house.	RDF
4	T	คือออะไรคะ (*What is it?*)	RDF
5	SS	((Silent))	
6	T	Or part of your body. My hair is part of my body, my eyes are part of my body.	RDF

7	S1	ส่วนประกอบ (*Component*)	
8	T	ส่วนประกอบ (*Component*)	DS
9	T	Balcony, what does it mean?	MCF
10	T	A balcony is outside of the house where you can walk, just only a short walk.	DS
11	T	Balcony ก็คือเป็นระเบียงสั้น ๆ (*Balcony is a small area with a wall or bars and it is joined to outside wall of the building.*)	DS
12	T	What else? What words describing part of a house?	DM
13	S2	Garage	
14	T	Yes	DS
15	S3	Cottage	
16	T	No	DS
17	S4	An ensuite bedroom	
18	T	What is this?	DMCC
19	SS	Silent	
20	T	It means a bathroom is in a bedroom.	DS
21	SS	ห้องน้ำที่อยู่ในห้องนอน (*An ensuite bathroom*)	
22	T	ห้องน้ำที่อยู่ในห้องนอน (*An ensuite bathroom*)	DS
23	T	What else is talking about part of a house?	DMCC
24	S5	Fitted kitchen	
25	T	เป็นอย่างไร Fitted kitchen (*What does fitted kitchen look like?*)	MCF
26	T	What does it look like?	DMCC
27	T	Kitchen is where you cook your lunch, your dinner or breakfast.	RDF
28	T	So fitted kitchen. It describes a kitchen with cupboards. Cupboards are already installed in the kitchen เป็น built-in หรือ สำเร็จรูปทุกอย่าง (*Or built-in style*)	DE
29	T	A basement and cellar.	
30	T	A cellar, it is a place where you keep your wine. It is usually under the house. เอาไว้เก็บ wine, w-i-n-e (*to keep wine*)	DE
31	T	Wine, you know, a red wine and white wine.	RC
32	T	What's difference between a basement and a cellar? ต่างกันยังไง Between these twos? (*What is the difference?*)	MCF
33	SS	((inaudible))	
34	T	Basement is below the ground level.	DS
35	T	A basement is a big area, while a cellar is just a room.	DS
36	T	Cellar ก็จะเป็นห้องเก็บ wine เหมือนในหนังฝรั่ง มีห้อง ไว้เก็บ wine แต่ถ้าเป็น basement ก็จะเป็นห้องข้างล่างเป็นบริเวณใหญ่ (*Cellar is for storing wine, like in western movies, there is a room for storing wine. Basement is a large area under the ground floor*).	DE

T= teacher, S= student (Teacher Nisakorn)

This episode involves a vocabulary lesson about parts of the house. This is a continuing lesson after the students had learned about different types of houses. Teacher Nisakorn started recruiting her students' attention with a sentence, "next, we will learn about..." in line 1 (RP). The teacher then posed a question to check whether the students understood the topic of the lesson (line 2). A simplification was offered by giving an example of the meaning of the word "part" in line 3. At this moment the students were seemingly handed over the responsibility to answer. Yet it was not as successful as indicated by students' silence (line 5). The teacher made another attempt by giving another RDF by offering an example in line 6. This example proved more easily understood by the students since it was about a body part, "eye", which the students knew the meaning of, rather than the word "roof". This attempt was productive because the students could give a meaning to the key word "part" in line 7. The two attempts of RDF reflect contextual-related scaffolding since the words "roof" and "eyes" are topics or matters which the students could understand because the teacher also used gestures alongside, and the words "roof" and "eye" are simple to understand. This contexualised "part" by giving example sounds added familiarity to the students. The teacher subsequently repeated the word as an indication of demonstration without elaboration in line 8.

In brief it can be drawn upon from these two episodes that the teachers' scaffolding expresses variety, recurrence or continuity. In comparison, more variation can be seen in the RDF in Teacher Nisakorn than that of Teacher Chutamas. Teacher Nisakorn used different questions or topics (lines 4, 6, and 25). Involvement from the students can be found from time to time in both episodes which indicated the flow of interaction. The teachers failed to draw the students' attention on many occasions. As evidenced, there are 5:19 and 6:30 responses of students and teachers in the interactions of Teacher Chutamas and Teacher Nisakorn respectively; or 20% of the students' responses in the interactions of Teacher Chutamas and 16% in those of Teacher Nisakorn. These low percentages of turns from the students may reflect a low volume of involvement. This low involvement may be attributed to limited attempts of the teachers to emphasize intersubjectivity in the interaction. The low volume of intersubjectivity may also be an indication of lack of flow and handover.

SCAFFOLDING IN A READING LESSON

TABLE 4. Transcript of scaffolding in a reading lesson

1	T	Right now, please turn to the previous page. You'll see a picture. The poster of a movie. Remember what this movie is…	RP
2	SS	James Bond	
3	T	Ha James Bond 007, I m sure everyone knows James Bond. But did you know that James Bond is actually based on a true story. It means the real person's life, not only the movie.	DE
4	T	This article tells you about the real James Bond.	DS
5	T	I would like you to read the article; you can probably spend 5 minutes to read James Bond. Anyway I have to ask you first.	RP
6	T	What do you know about James Bond?	DMCR
7	T	Who is James Bond? I'm sure you know it is a movie.	RDF
8	SS	…((silent))	
9	SS	…สายลับ (Spy)	
10	T	Haa…YES... how do you call in English?	DMCR
11	T	Begin with letter S…S	RDF
12	S1	…spy…	
13	T	Again please	DM
14	S1	Spy	
15	T	Very good	FC
16	T	James Bond is a spy, right?	DS
17	T	Now spend time reading the article. After you finish the reading I'd like you to choose the best article for this title.	RP
18	T	Look at this, this article hasn't got the title yet. The name of the story. You can choose one from three of them.	RP
19	T	OKay, finish? Right?	RP
20	T	If you have to choose the title for this article, which one do you prefer? The first one around the world, the second one the school boy, or the last one movie star. Which one you like? One, two or three.	FC
21	SS	((Silent))	
22	T	For the article, which one do you like? In your opinion	FC
23	S2	No 2	
24	T	No 2, any other answers?	DM
25	T	How about you?	RP
26	SS	((Silent)) , three	
27	T	Three?	DM
28	T	How about you?	RP
29	SS	No 3	
30	T	No 3, how about you?	RP
			DM
31	T	How about no. one? Anyone chose no. 1?	DMCR

32	SS	No.	
33	T	So we have numbers two and three. Okay let's see the answer.	RDF
34	T	Actually the second one, From school boy to spy, right?	DS
35	T	If you read the text or article again, you will see that the article talks about life of James Bond from when he was a child until he became a spy. So I think the second one should be the best title.	DE
36	T	Title, you know what does it mean? Every article should have a title, right?	MCF
37	SS	((Inaudible))	
38	T	Okay, yes, similar to a topic, but not a topic. We call title.	DE
39	T	Okay any questions? No, right?	FC
40	SS	((Laughter))	
41	T	Okay just move to …..	RP

T= teacher, S= student (Teacher Chutamas)

This episode is a reading lesson introduced the students to James Bond. The first five lines belonged to the teachers. Apparently the teacher used RDF to obtain the students' response. The RDF employed used a specific question. Teacher Chutamas also used another RDF which was giving a cue to vocabulary. It can be observed that the teachers employed DMCR and RDF repetitively. This repetition features the characteristic of continuity stated by van Lier (1996). The teacher provided DMCR to signal the students what the lesson was about. Data also revealed these two sequences (lines 31 and 33). When the teacher asked if anyone chose answer no. 1 in order to clarify what she wanted to know, the students replied "No". Next the teacher narrowed down the answers to no. 2 and 3. The teacher did not provide RDF in line 33 because she did not give the students a chance to answer. She elaborated the answer in line 35. Subsequently the teacher led the students to an important point of this reading exercise which was to find the appropriate "title" of the passage. FC was also found when the teacher asked the students' opinions in lines 20 and 22, rather the correct answer. It appeared that Teacher Chutamas highly focused on directing the students to complete the reading task while using a number of RPs (6 times out of 30 scaffolding turn or 20%) without other recruitments.

These three episodes demonstrate that scaffolding provided to the students covered most of scaffolding features as Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) described, but not all of the scaffolding features as van Lier described. Continuity was found in all episodes. Contextual support, contingency, intersubjectivity, handover and flow on the other hand were not much demonstrated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS A MICRO VIEW: FEATURES OF SCAFFOLDING BASED ON WOOD, BRUNER AND ROSS

The findings indicated that there were features of scaffolding interactions which showed the teachers' control over the lessons along with their utterances making efforts to encourage the students' engagement and ultimately their learning. Sharpe (2006) suggests that this kind of help offered by experts to novices is supportive and built upon interaction, and it is an active process that enables meaning to be constructed through various strategies. In this context, the teachers played the role of experts and employed language to mediate and construct knowledge of English content with their students. The teachers and the students achieved lesson or exercise goals or desired answers as evidenced from correct answers from the students or positive feedback from the teachers, as seen in the episodes. This suggests that the teachers and the students create interaction and co-construct knowledge cooperatively. In doing so the teachers used different strategies as language tools to mediate the students to achieve the goals.

The findings revealed that the teachers scaffolded the students through a variation of strategies which were adapted from the six features stated by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) (op cit). As evidenced from the data, the teachers in each episode spent a great deal of time providing scaffolding aids one after another in a sequential and logical manner. Help is provided from minimal to maximal level through both short and long sequences of scaffolding.

A MACRO VIEW: FEATURES OF SCAFFOLDING REGARDING VAN LIER

To date, not many studies have attempted to look at a holistic view of scaffolding. van Lier's (1996) framework provides a holistic view to understand the characteristics of scaffolding. Accordingly, the researcher applied the term "macro" view to this analysis. This macro view of scaffolding indicated that the scaffolding provided by the five teachers did not significantly reflect all attributes described by van Lier (op cit). The episodes showed consistent continuity, while contextual support, contingency, intersubjectivity, flow and handover were occasionally found across the episodes. Continuity illuminated variation and repeating which referred to different strategies employed in R, RDF, DM, MCF, FC, and D. The variation and repeating of strategies employed in the scaffolding were discussed previously.

Continuity, contextual support and contingency are attributes showing quality of scaffolding while handover, flow and intersubjectivity illuminate how well scaffolding assistance is provided. Continuity occured when repeating and a variation of help are maintained. Contextual support by the teachers in this study was provided when localising or personalising a topic was being discussed. As van Lier suggests, giving contextual support is aimed to create a safe but challenging environment for the students. Therefore social interaction combined with contextual support possibly makes the students feel safe and psychologically enables them to contribute to the interaction. Moreover the topics the teacher localized posed a challenge for the students, which might encourage them to participate. The teachers in this study perceived their learners' background, experience, or interests; therefore, they could localize and personalize the topics they dealt with. The teacher knew or perceived this because they shared the same cultures, lived in the same community and knew what was going on in the community or the country. They were also aware of the students' lifestyle. In turn the students were able to co-construct knowledge or had something to share. Another explanation for contextual support is that a big class of 30-50 students may reflect heterogeneity among students. In this study, some students did not join the interaction directly, but were able and eager to contribute when the teachers provided a wide range of topics to share. Not every episode showed teachers giving contextual support due to different activities. Activities focusing on vocabulary or reading comprehension may potentially enable the teachers to provide contextual support to the students.

Being contingent is related to socially-constructed knowledge. The researcher believes that awareness and being sensitive are important to provide contingent help. The findings showed that Teacher Praman expressed his scaffolding with contingency when he realized the students could not give the answers, due to their silence. Also a teacher in Forman's (2005) study may not have provided contingent scaffold if he or she did not realise that hot weather could impede learning or distract learners To be sensitive to understand the context appears important if a teacher aims to be contingent. Whether in the overall teaching context, or narrowed down to an individual classroom, teaching is an ongoing process which is dynamic. The findings which revealed silences, wrong answers or inaudible speech among the students may signal to the teachers to continue providing more help. Once the teachers become aware of these signals, they may make attempts to provide help at that moment. The

study, however, did not find contingency in most of the interactions. This might be due to the teachers concentrating on completing a lesson from the textbook, and trying to keep to time. In addition, the context of this study was a relatively big class hence it was unlikely that the teachers would recognize the students' needs individually when teaching a class of 30-50 students. There was not much contribution from the students in the interaction. From this perspective the findings suggested that the teachers did not scaffold the students in a way which brought about much of handover, flow and intersubjectivity in the interaction. As noted before these three attributes are interconnected. The low volume of engagement might be caused by the students' low proficiency in English. The teacher participants were aware of this as evidenced from the interview about their difficulties in teaching in general. Therefore the students became very dependent on the teachers, and tended not to contribute much to co-construct what they were required to learn. Not all attributes of scaffolding described by van Lier (1996) were found in this study, because in particular, the students had low proficiency, which the teachers were aware of, and made attempts to address as discussed in the previous section. The low proficiency obstructed the students to participate in the interaction. It was noted that the students' motivation or affective factors played a significant role as well; however, it was not analyzed in this study. Another explanation is the reliance on textbooks. This meant that, as seen in the episodes, the teachers spent most of their teaching time to follow the exercises in the textbook. Contents in the textbook may hinder to some degree the opportunities to be contingent and to provide contextual support since the teachers focused to complete the exercises in the textbook. Given all of these the scaffolding did not reflect all attributes described by van Lier (1996).

SCAFFOLDING PATTERNS IN THE TEACHER-FRONTED APPROACH

The patterns of scaffolding are presented in a continuum in this study. This continuum reveals differences between two types of activities.

TABLE 5. The continuum of scaffolding patterns (types of activities)

Focus on form activity	Focus on meaning activity
Long sequential cycle (more RDF, MCF, and DE)	Shorter sequential cycle (less RDF, MCF, and DE)
Less contingency	More contingency
Less contextual support	More contextual support

SCAFFOLDING AND FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION

Based on the findings, the continuum explored two types of activities in teacher-fronted instruction of five Thai teachers. The form-focused activities (involving grammar lessons and exercises) illustrated long sequential cycles, which gradually became shorter sequences. This meant that the students were able to take responsibility for their learning which included ability to answer, thus requiring subsequent less scaffolding. Long sequential cycles appeared when the teacher tried several strategies to mediate the students to provide a desired answer to an exercise. Their scaffolding was described as full or complete scaffolding. Therefore all features, especially RDF, MCF, DS and DE, were found. DE was always used after DS to provide more details about rules and usages or examples.

Less contingency could be observed in this type of activity for two reasons. First the teachers exclusively worked on exercises or activities based on the textbooks. Secondly there was the teachers' lack of sensitivity in responding to the students. Being less contingent due to an overuse of textbook may reflect the characteristics of the Thai EFL classroom. Lack of sensitivity is an individual matter (this issue will be further explained in the implications).

The teacher provided less contextual support to the students when carrying on a grammar-focused exercise. This might be due to the focus on drills of structures of language in the grammar exercises. High emphasis was placed on achieving structures of grammar content, thus the teachers might have overlooked in providing contextualization. When doing the grammar exercise, the teachers normally followed the structures in the textbook and might not have sufficient time to divert from the exercise. Another reason might be that it was difficult to contextualise grammar exercises compared with reading or vocabulary exercises.

SCAFFOLDING AND FOCUS ON MEANING INSTRUCTION

With the other pattern, the opposite attributes of scaffolding are displayed. First, a shorter sequential cycle was found because the teachers did not provide many different strategies to help the students learn vocabulary or to comprehend reading. This led to short sequentiality across an exercise. This short or incomplete sequence of scaffolding took place because of two reasons. First the activity was simple and straightforward such as learning vocabulary definitions or vocabulary matching. It might not require much scaffolding. The other might be due to individual style of teaching, where some teachers did not make attempts to scaffold, or might not know how to scaffold.

The last two features of the pattern were contingency and contextual support. In my view these two attributes appeared interconnected. For example, in one of the vocabulary activities, after completing the exercise following the textbook, the teacher extended it by asking the students to think more about vocabulary in their real life situations. This is described as contingent scaffolding because the teacher felt that his students might need to acquire more vocabulary knowledge. In doing so, the teacher extended his contextual support since he asked the students to share vocabulary they knew from personal experiences. However there were evidences to show teachers not providing contextual support when dealing with a reading comprehension (Table 4). It might be a matter of time when the teachers needed to cover many lessons in a limited teaching period. However these findings support the case that the teachers need to be aware of the features described by van Lier (1996) which will make their scaffolding more effective and earn more engagement from the students.

Having analysed the scaffolding patterns in both types of activities, it is apparent that the features identified in the teachers' and students' interaction reflect Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) framework. The interaction can be viewed based on the two frameworks since they conceptually align with each other. Basically different features (such as RM, RC, RP, MCF, RDF, etc) in Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) bring about sequentially, flow and intersubjectivity. Contingency is also reflected in the different strategies found in RDF and MCF; for example, giving choices, giving an example and making a comparison are strategies of RDF. A variety of strategies may represent the teachers' attempts to cope with the students' moment-by-moment interaction. Not only does RDF and MCF reflect contingency, FC also reflects contingency. This means that any teacher tends to have interaction showing the features described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), his or her interaction is likely to reflect the scaffolding attributes described by van Lier (1996).

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

There are several pedagogical implications from this study. The findings from the study illuminate the potential usefulness of scaffolding interaction between teachers and students in the context of teacher-fronted instruction. The teacher-fronted instruction has been criticized since it leads to less participation, more -controlled, less meaning or form negotiation (Anton,

1999). The findings in this study suggest how teacher-fronted instruction can be beneficial to deal with low proficiency learners. As seen in the episodes, the students were passive, and needed a lot of varied scaffolding help to achieve an assigned task, following Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) description. When the students received sufficient encouragement by scaffolding assistance, they began to participate actively. Their verbal engagement appeared concise and not linguistically complex. Having low proficiency learners, teachers may need to be highly authoritative. Hence the first implication for pedagogical purpose is the advantage to teacher-fronted instruction in building scaffolding interaction to encourage low proficiency students' engagement. The scaffolding provided for low-proficiency students should be undertaken step by step, as described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and embrace the attributes suggested by van Lier (1996).

Another implication for teaching relates to teaching form-focused and meaning-focused activities. To teach grammar content, a teacher may apply scaffolding features in the same way as meaning-focused activities. Therefore more engagement from students can be made since they are scaffolded in a way where contingency and contextual support are provided to enable them to contribute in an interaction. Further research is required to specifically define the term "learning" in order to explore scaffolding more insightfully. Another way to gain a better understanding about scaffolding is to compare the differences of scaffolding between low proficiency and high proficiency students.

REFERENCES

Aljaafreh, A. & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal. Vol. 78*(4), 465-483.

Anton, M. (1999). The discourse of a learner-centred classroom: Sociocultural perspectives on teacher-learner interaction in the second language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal. Vol. 83*(3), 303-318.

Boworattanapat, S. (2012*). Need for professional development of secondary school English Teachers under Nakorrachasima Provincial Administration Organization.* Unpublished MA thesis. Srinakarintrawirot University, Thailand.

Donato, R (1994). Collective scaffolding in second language learning. In James P. Lantolf &G. Appel (Eds.). *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research* (pp. 29-52). The USA: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Forman, R. (2005). *Teaching EFL in Thailand: A Bilingual Study*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Technology, Sydney. Retrieved March 25, 2008 from http://utsescholarship.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/handle/2100/552

Ge, X. & Land, S. M. (2003). Scaffolding Students' Problem-solving Processes in an Ill-structured Task Using Question Prompts and Peer Interactions. *ETR & D. Vol. 51*(1), 21-38.

Jimakorn, P. & Singhasiri, W. (2006). Teachers' beliefs concerning large-Class English Teaching at the University Level. *KMUTT Journal of Language Education. Vol. 9,* 13-23.

McCormick, D. E. (1997). *Using Questions to Scaffold Language Learning in an ESL Classroom: A Sociocultural Case Study.* Ph.D. Thesis. University of Pittsburgh. The USA.

Mertzman, T. (2008). Individualising scaffolding: Teachers' literacy interruptions of ethnic minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Journal of Research in Reading. Vol. 31*, 183-202.

Nassaji, H. & Swain, M. (2000). Vygotskian perspective on corrective feedback in l2: The effect of random versus negotiated help on the learning of English. *Language Awareness. Vol. 9*(1), 34-51.

Ohta, A. S. (1999). Interactional routines and the socialization of international style in adult learners of Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics. Vol. 31*, 1493-1512.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd Ed. The USA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pentimonti, J. M. & Justice, L. M. (2010). Teachers' use of scaffolding during read alouds in the preschool classroom. *Early Childhood Education. Vol. 37*, 241-248.

Proctor, C. P., Dalton, B. & Grisham, L. D. (2007) Scaffolding English Language Learners and Struggling Readers in a Universal Literacy Environment with embedded strategy Instruction and Vocabulary Support. *Journal of Literacy Research. Vol. 39*, 71-93

Punthumasen, P. (2008). International program for teacher education: An approach to tackling problems of English education in Thailand. Retrieved November 24, 2008, from http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload /apeid/Conference/11thConference/papers/3C3_ Pattanida_Punthumasen.pdf

Saengboon, S. (2002). *Beliefs of Thai EFL Teachers about Communicative Language Teaching*. Ph.D. Thesis. Indiana University, The USA.

Sharpe, T. (2006). Unpacking scaffolding: Identifying discourse and multimodal strategies that support learning. *Language and Education. Vol. 26*(3), 211-220.

Sharpe, T. (2008). How can teacher talk support learning. *Linguistic and Education. Vol. 19*(2), 132-148.

Sinprajakpol, S. (2004). *Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching: The Relationship between Beliefs and Practices*. Ph.D. Thesis. The State University of New York at Buffalo, The USA.

Somsai, S. & Intaraprasert, C. (2011) Strategies for coping with face-to-face oral communication problems employed by Thai university students majoring in English. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies. Vol. 11*(3), 83-96.

Van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in The Language Curriculum: Awareness, Autonomy, and Authenticity*. London: Longman.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wiriyachitra, A. (2001). English language teaching and learning in Thailand in this decade. *TESOL Quarterly. Vol. 14*(1), 1-5.

Wiriyachitra, A. (2010). International Porgram for Teacher Education: An Approach to tackling problems of English Education in Thailand. English language teaching and learning in Thailand in this decade. *TESOL Quarterly. Vol. 14*(1), 1-5. Retrieved November 10, 2012 from http://worldedreform.com/pub/paperie13dec07

Wongsothorn, A., Hiranburana, K., & Chinnawongs, S. (2002). English language teaching in Thailand today. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Education. Vol. 22*(2), 107-116.

Wood, D., J., Bruner, J., S. & Ross, D. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. Vol. 17*, 89-100.

Yelland, N., & Masters, J. (2007). Rethinking scaffolding in the information age. *Computers & Education. Vol. 48*, 362-382.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author (PhD) is a lecturer at Didyasarin International College, Hatyai University, Thailand. She finished her degree in Education from University of Southampton, UK. Her areas of interest are teaching and learning strategies, test construction and testing.