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Hey everyone, this is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the Education Table, a micro podcast where I tackle your questions about inclusive education in 10 minutes or less. Today, we're diving into scaffolds. What they are, why they're essential in the UDL framework, and how to use them in your practice. I'll start with a story about my days as a pretty awesome high school hurdler and how scaffolds like need races, coaching, and video feedback helped me to improve. From there, we'll explore the research behind scaffolding and the three main types you can use in your classroom. Let's jump in. Back in high school, I was a competitive hurdler. I loved the challenge, but I wasn't naturally great at it. I needed a lot of support to get better.

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First of all, I had to wear a knee brace because my knees were not built for hurdling. I had juvenile arthritis, which made it a little bit tricky, but I nailed it. Second, I had an incredible coach I love you, Coach Seal, who believed in me and gave me specific, actionable feedback about how to position my body to clear the hurdles faster. And third, we used a lot of video analysis to watch ourselves hurdling over and over so we could see what were doing well and what we needed to fix. Here's the thing. Many people talk about scaffold as being temporary, but not all scaffolds are meant to disappear entirely. While I eventually stopped needing a knee brace, I still rely on video analysis when I want to tighten my technique, whether it's for skiing or watching myself to present.

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And while my coach isn't there to hover anymore, I know when and how to seek out feedback to improve. The same goes for students. Scaffolds are not about creating dependency. They're about providing the right support to build confidence and skills. And then, over time, students learn to independently access and create their own scaffolds if they need them. They still may choose to use some of the tools and strategies long after they can do the work independently. Scaffolds give students access to learning so they can take ownership of their progress. So let's talk about the research behind this and why scaffolds are so critical in a universally designed class. Scaffolding is a concept based on Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which refers to the support provided to learners to help them accomplish tasks that they wouldn't be able to do independently.

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Now, research consistently shows that scaffolds play a really critical role in helping Students develop independence over time. In the UDL framework, scaffolds are essential because they ensure that all students have access to really rigorous learning opportunities. Without scaffolds, some students will face barriers, whether linguistic, conceptual, or sociocultural, and then are left out of the learning process. So what are the different types of scaffolds and how do we use them effectively? Let's break it down. First, we have our linguistic scaffolds, and these support students who may struggle with language barriers or may need help processing verbal or written information. These include sentence starters, explicit vocabulary instruction, word banks, and multimodal instruction. Like verbal instruction with visual support, it can also be tools like Google, Read and write, or text to Speech to support understanding of expressive language.

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The next type are the conceptual scaffolds, and these help students to understand complex ideas by breaking them down into measurable parts and giving examples. So this can include teacher modeling like explicit instruction, graphic organizers, rubrics, and exemplars. Lastly, we have our sociocultural scaffolds, and these build on the power of collaboration and community to support learning. Examples of sociocultural scaffolds include small group instruction, peer review, cooperative learning, or discussion protocols. Basically, we're leveraging the collective expertise of a group of people to build competency. All of these scaffolds benefit from explicit instruction on how to use the scaffolds and lots of feedback so students know which supports they're learning and how they're going to

use the tools as they move to more independent learning. So where do you start in putting scaffolds into your practice? Let's dive into those strategies.

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Now that you know the different types of scaffolds, there are three tips for using them effectively in your classroom. First, start small and targeted. Scaffolds do not need to be overwhelming. You might want to start with one or two scaffolds that address your students most immediate needs. It is not enough just to make them available. We have to model how to use them so students truly recognize their value. So it's not just about handing out a graphic organizer. It's about explicitly teaching how to use a graphic organizer. It's about giving lots of examples of graphic organizers, really giving feedback on students as they create their graphic organizers. That is where the real value is. The next step is to incorporate student voice and choice. How do we know what scaffold students are going to need? We can ask them.

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We can use learning profiles to ask students to share which tools help them learn. Now, you may have students try a couple of different tools first because they're not going to know what works for them and what doesn't if they don't have an opportunity to explore. But ultimately, once students have an opportunity to try different tools, you can facilitate a class discussion or ask them which supports are helpful. For example, a math. Imagine if you're teaching a narrative writing unit as a English teacher. You might ask students what's really helpful when you're writing. And maybe students ask for an exemplar and a graphic organizer. Now, ultimately, again, you would need someone to introduce these before students would know that is helpful. So if you're early elementary, you're going to be introducing these. And as students get older, you want to elevate their voices.

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Now, whenever possible, ask students to think about the scaffolds that they find most helpful. So you could ask your students what tool or supports would help you to complete this task at a really high level. This fosters agency and ensures that students understand that the scaffolds are actually meeting their needs. Now, the last tip is to gradually release responsibility as students gain confidence and competence. We want to gradually remove the level of support that we are providing. So if students initially rely on graphic organizers that we hand out, we might encourage them to create their own as they become more familiar with the process. As another example, students might start with teacher provided sentence starters, but eventually maybe they learn to craft their own.

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Or maybe at first they may use text to speech tools, but then they develop strategies to process written text more autonomously over time because ultimately some of these are going to be things that students fade out of. By fostering this independence, we're really empowering students to take ownership of their learning and rely less on direct teacher provided scaffolds. Now, some students may push back on being student led. And it's important to acknowledge this discomfort and emphasize that this shift is part of growing as a learner. It's a part of lifelong skills such as problem solving and self regulation. And we need to reassure students that the supports are there to guide them.

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But ultimately, over time, the expectation is that as their confidence grows, they're going to have more opportunities to make decisions for themselves because those are the skills that'll allow them to be really successful in life. They have to be able to understand what they need, find those resources, and essentially they need to solve the problems that prevent them from learning at really high levels. And we can do that if we provide them with enough opportunities to figure out how they learn best, what they need, and how to advocate for that themselves. This gradual release of responsibility helps them understand that independence doesn't necessarily mean they're doing it alone, but they're becoming self reliant and capable of finding the tools they need to manage their learning in ways

that work best for them. So there it is.

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Now you know the different types of scaffolds, why they are important, and you have some strategies to begin to optimize voice and choice as you support student to access the scaffolds and then ultimately internalize them to support their success. By incorporating scaffolds into teaching, we can ensure that every student has access to rigorous, meaningful learning experiences as well as the tools to support them through the experience. Thank you so much for tuning in to the education table. Do not forget to check out the show notes for additional resources on scaffolding in the UDL framework. And if you haven't already, tune in to episode 23 to learn how to scaffold learner agency. As always, onward.