

Introduction

Welcome to Module 4 of Working with English Language Learners: A handbook for learning assistants (WELLS).

In this module, you will explore effective teaching practices that can be used by learning assistants and teachers who have established strong relationships with learners.

Scaffolding

Learning assistants can provide important support for learners when they encounter new vocabulary, helping them to move towards independence. **Scaffolding** is a metaphor used in education to represent the temporary support provided to learners by learning assistants or teachers. This concept of educational scaffolding draws on its original building context:

Scaffolding is placed around the outside of a new building to allow builders access to the emerging structure as it rises from the ground. Once the building can support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. The metaphor of scaffolding has been widely used to argue that in the same way that builders provide essential but temporary support, teachers need to provide temporary supporting structures that will assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As the learner develops control of these, so teachers need to withdraw that support, only to provide further support for extended or new tasks, understandings, or concepts (Hammond, 2001, p. 13-14).

This scaffolded support for effective teaching and learning is an approach that carefully supports learners in the early stages, and then over time moves towards a guided approach, and then later towards learner independence. Scaffolding is both essential and temporary. Learning assistants, with the guidance of teachers, can adjust the level of scaffolding in response to a learner's growing independence. *Scaffolding is not simply another word for help. It is a special kind of help that assists learners to move towards new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding. Scaffolding is thus the temporary assistance by which the teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10).*



Scaffolded approaches that support learners include:

- **Connecting with the prior knowledge of learners:** Connect new learning to learners' prior knowledge that comes from their lived experiences, in order to support them to understand something new.
- **Sharing learning intentions:** Clarify the purpose of the learning task and the success criteria with learners. This should be done briefly and in language that learners can understand.
- **Manageable parts:** Divide the learning task into manageable and meaningful parts with the “whole” in mind.
- **Collaborative learning:** Give learners opportunities to interact and collaborate with one another on learning tasks.
- **Opportunities to practise:** Provide opportunities for new skills to be practised in meaningful ways. Make it fun!
- **Independence:** Provide opportunities for learners to apply what they have learned independently in ways leading to success.
- **Appropriate challenge level:** Work with teachers to determine the right challenge levels for learning tasks and activities. It is important that learners have enough challenge, so they are not bored with the learning, but are not so challenged that they become frustrated. It can be tricky to find this balance, so working closely with teachers is important.

Module 4: Task 1: Planning for scaffolding

Purpose: To understand how tasks can be broken down into manageable parts to support learners toward independence.

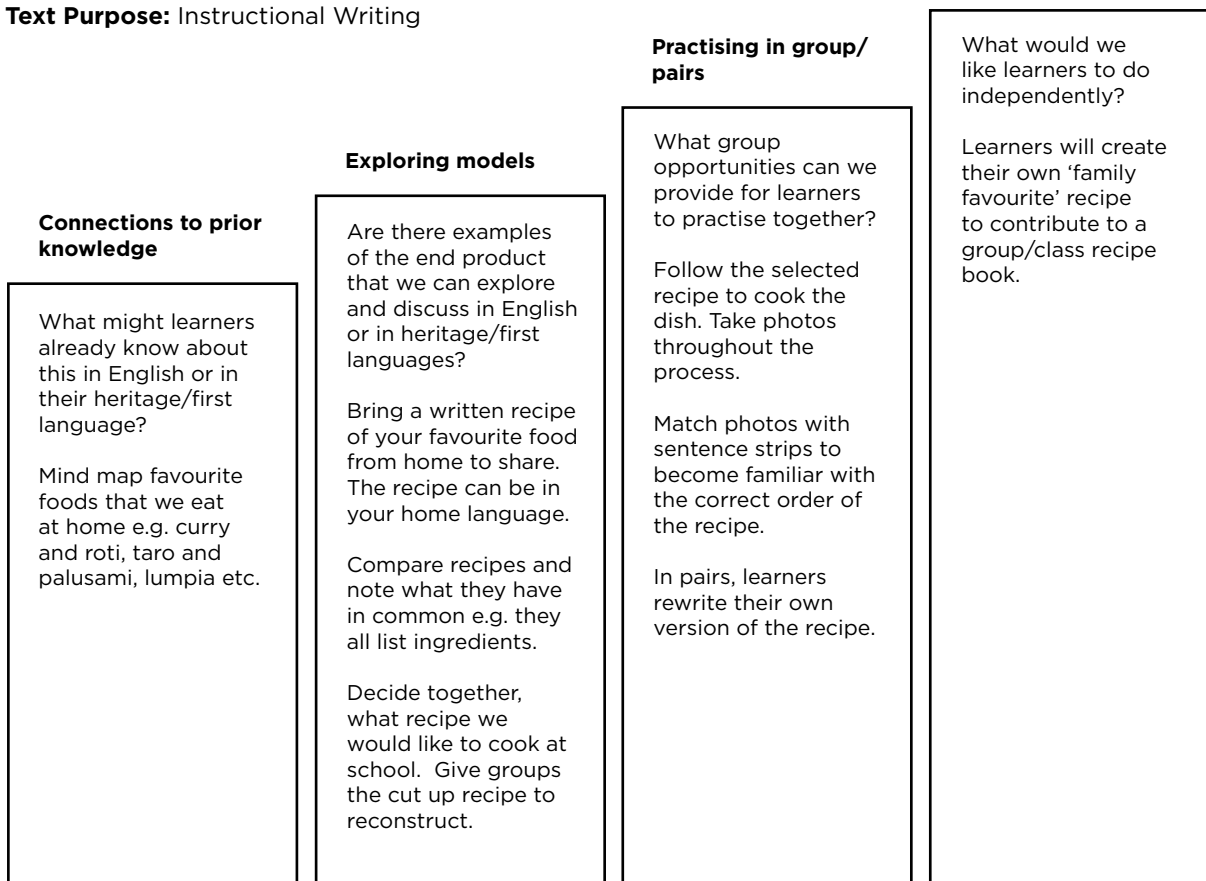
Task instructions: Think of a final product or task you would like learners to be able to do independently. Consider the previous scaffolding approaches to support you to think about the ways this task could be broken down into manageable steps or parts. Record your thoughts on the following graphic organiser.

Module 4: Task 1: Planning for Scaffolding

Topic: Exploring our Cultural Food

Text Purpose: Instructional Writing

Independent task



Topic:

Text Purpose:

| | | Independent task | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Connections to prior knowledge</p> <p>What might learners already know about this in English or in their heritage/first language?</p> | <p>Exploring models</p> <p>Are there examples of the end product that we can explore and discuss in English or in heritage/first languages?</p> | <p>Practising in group/pairs</p> <p>What group opportunities can we provide for learners to practise together?</p> | <p>What would we like learners to do independently?</p> |

Recapping Key Vocabulary: Module 4

| Term | Definition |
|------------------------|--|
| Scaffolding | A metaphor used in education to represent temporary support provided to learners |
| Models | Another word for examples or exemplars |
| Collaborative learning | Working together with others to problem solve or to complete a task |

Coming up: Module 5

Module 5 is about ways to support learners' oral language and vocabulary development.

Preparation: Ask your classroom teacher about how they support learners to engage in meaningful talk and to learn new vocabulary.