

Scaffolding

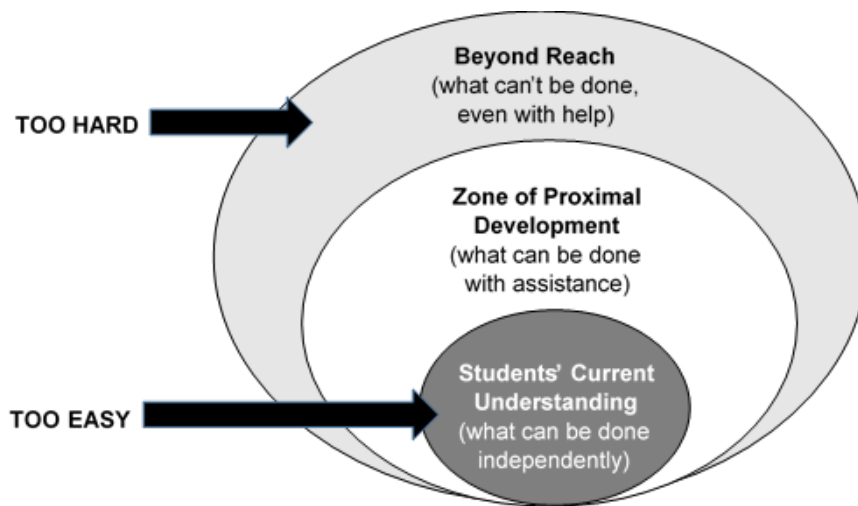
- [What is it?](#)
- [Why do it?](#)

Resource created by M. Martin (2020)

What is it?

Scaffolding refers to external supports provided by an instructor and adjusted to a learner's current level of ability to help the learner develop a particular skill.

Scaffolding is a pedagogical technique stemming from the Vygotskian theory of social constructivism (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This approach views learning as happening within what is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the area [of skill] *between* what a learner can do on their own and what they can't do, even with assistance. That in-between space – the ZPD – represents what students are capable of when they are being supported by someone more knowledgeable. In order to effectively support learning, an instructor needs to find that "sweet spot" between what is too easy (and, therefore, not stretching students to learn something new) and what is too hard (and will likely lead students to be frustrated, rather than optimally challenged). This is supported by a set of practical strategies for scaffolding within the ZPD.



Why do it?

1. Students perform better
2. Students feel more connected to you and to the course content
3. Students rate their online learning experience as being better
4. Students don't email you *quite* as many questions
5. If done well, it can foster a more inclusive classroom - especially for students who are less familiar with or less fluent in navigating online spaces

