Scaffolding Specialised Language Transcript: Years 7-8 History

‘Point of need’ scaffolding involves the repetition of student remarks within a learning activity and the re-casting of these remarks by the teacher, which acknowledges the remark and modifies it so that it is more technical.

The following transcript was recorded in a Year 7-8 history class. The class took place in the first week of the school year and the teacher was apprenticing the boys into historical methodology. That is, what it means to be a historian.

To do this, the teacher began by using ‘designed in’ scaffolding, where he compared the role of the historian with that of a detective. The teacher then established a context for a murder investigation, using the death of Lady Diana, Princess of Wales.

Before the lesson, the teacher thought carefully about the key concepts students needed to understand about the processes involved in historical enquiry.

As the lesson unfolded, the teacher also provided the students with ‘point of need’ scaffolding.

Activity

Read the transcript and answer the questions below.

Transcript

Student/s: Um, they like, try to work it out; they could have, like, educated guesses.

Teacher: How do they make educated guesses? What sort, other than witnesses? What do they start to do?

Student/s: Start, like, writing down the names and working out things like –

Teacher: Alright, OK. They, if you like, double-check on the witnesses and they look for what they call collaborative evidence. OK. What else do they use other than collaborative evidence? In Diana’s death, what did they use? They talked about it ad infinitum on the news . . .

Student/s: Look in the car.

Teacher: Look at objects.

Student/s: They examine.
Teacher: They examine, let’s call it, scene of the crime. OK. How do they do that? Ask . . . what sort of things do . . . they looked in the car. So why are they looking in the car? Who knows, what’s in the car? What do they use?

Student/s: Um, computers.

Teacher: Yeah, they can . . . yeah in actual fact, they can use witnesses for a computer reconstruction to explain what happened in the tunnel as they careened through it – a car that explains –

Student/s: How it happened.

Teacher: What else? Who does it?

Student/s: Police scientist.

Teacher: Police scientists, yes. Forensic scientist, forensic experts, etcetera, etcetera.

Student/s: They hypothesise.

Teacher: They hypothesise. Yeah, they do that too. What other references do they use?

Student/s: Check with the paparazzi.

Teacher: yes, they try to . . . look at photos. What else . . . scientific evidence . . . what else?

Student/s: Fingerprints.

Teacher: They took the blood alcohol level of the driver and all sort of thing. So all that scientific evidence to try and piece it together. What sort of sources would a historian use? Because we’re now talking about an event that is something that’s taken place. We may have eyewitnesses, we may not. So other than eyewitnesses, what else does a historian use?

Questions

Look at the transcript carefully and annotate any of the following examples of ‘point of need’ scaffolding that you can find:

1. Highlight any examples of the teacher repeating the student/s’ remarks.

2. Underline any examples of recasting that you can find. Recasting involves acknowledging the students’ remarks and then modifying it so that it is more technical. For example:
Student: Um, computers.
Teacher: . . . computer reconstruction

3. Make a list of the key concepts you think the teacher planned to teach before the lesson began ('designed in' scaffolding)?