

Scaffolding disciplinary literacy

Chris Davison,
School of Education, University of New South
Wales

- The metaphor of “scaffolding” in student learning refers to the temporary and timely support provided by an “expert” to effectively assist students to complete a task or develop new understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone.
- The term *scaffolding* was first introduced in the late 1950s by Jerome Bruner. He used the term to describe how parents instinctively provide their young children with structures to learn a language when they first start learning to speak.

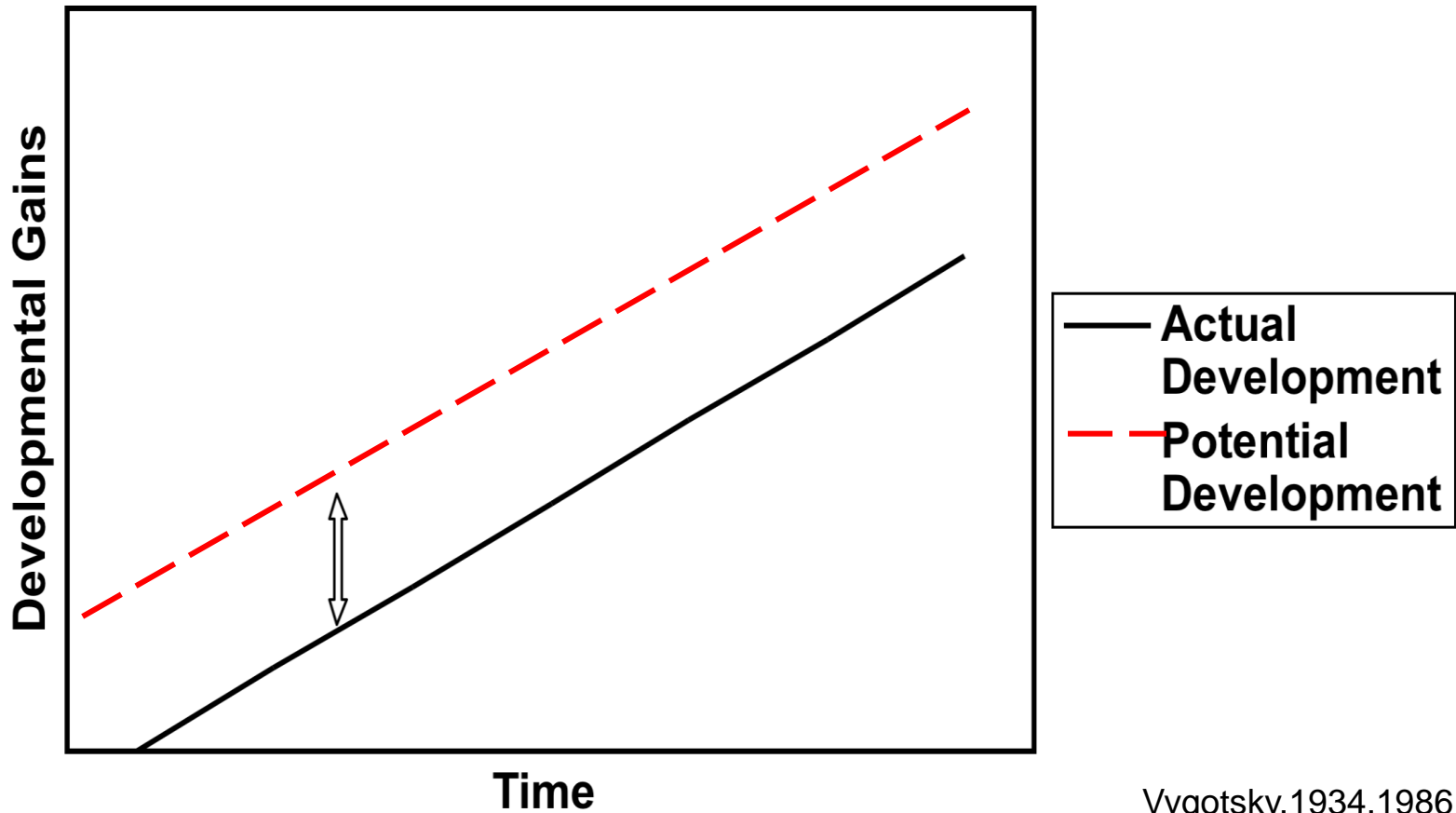
- Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) adopted the idea of scaffolding stimulated by the work of Vygotsky. They defined scaffolding as the support given to a younger learner by an older, more experienced adult that enables the child to do something beyond his or her independent efforts, then is gradually withdrawn.

- Two types of scaffolding commonly identified: *contingent (soft)* and *embedded (hard)*
- An example of *contingent scaffolding* is when a teacher circulates the room and converses with his or her students. The teacher may spontaneously question 2-3 students' approach to a difficult problem and if needed, provide constructive feedback. Whole-class teacher-led contingent scaffolding is also now common. The type and amount of contingent support changes, depending on the needs of the students at the time of instruction (Van Lier, 1996).

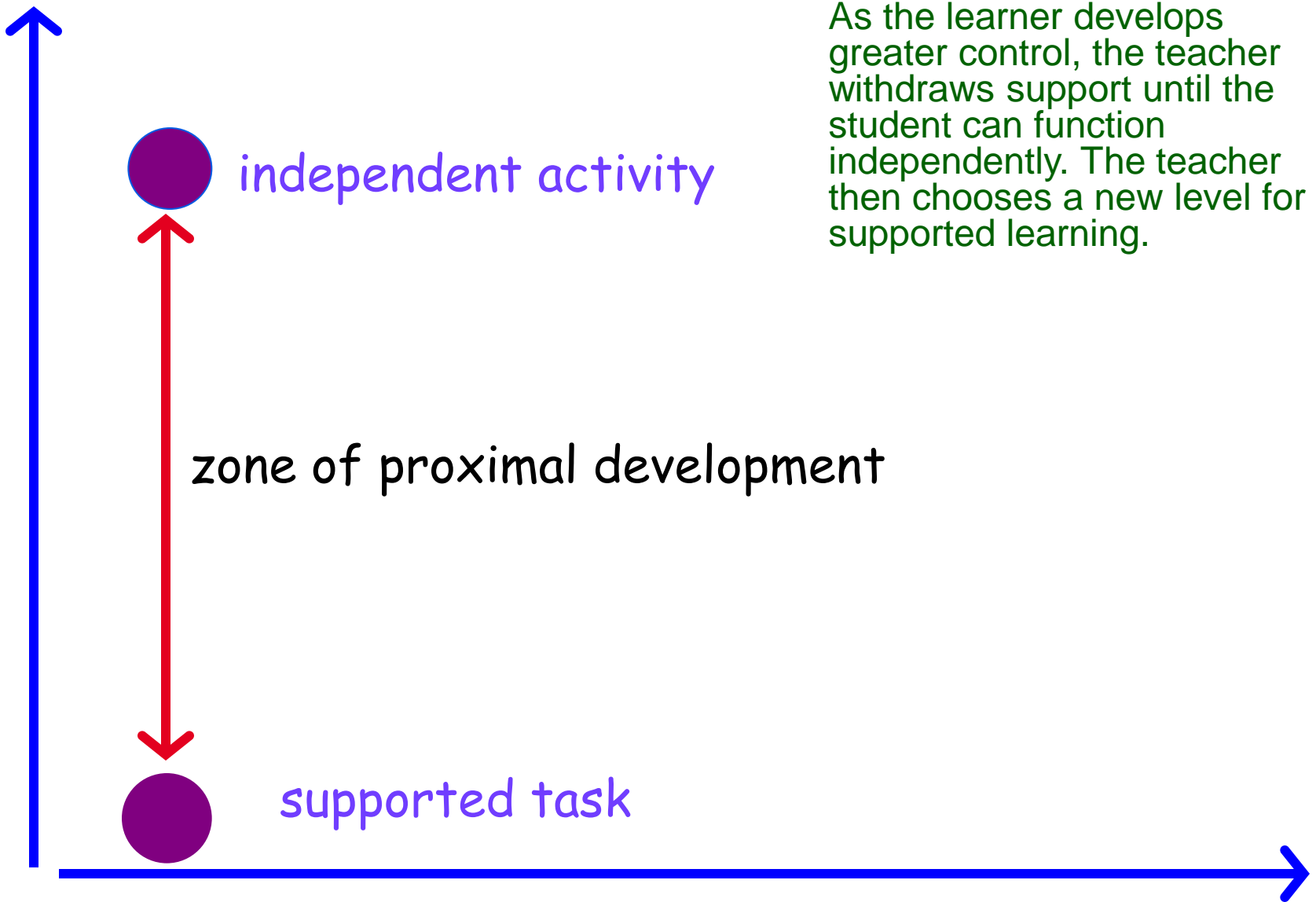
- In contrast with *contingent or soft scaffolding*, *embedded or hard scaffolding* is planned in advance to help students with a learning task that is known to be difficult (Saye & Brush, 2002).
- In both situations, "expert scaffolding" is being implemented (Holton & Clarke, 2006), with the teacher as expert responsible for providing scaffolding for the students.
- According to Vygotsky, students develop higher-level thinking skills when such scaffolding occurs with an adult expert or with a peer of higher capabilities (Stone, 1998).

- In contrast, *reciprocal scaffolding*, a method first coined by Holton and Thomas, involves a group of two or more students collaboratively working together. In this situation, the group can learn from each other's experiences and knowledge. The scaffolding is shared by each member and changes constantly as the group works on a task (Holton and Clarke, 2006).
- Note scaffolds do not change the nature or ultimate level of the task, but just allow the student to successfully complete the task.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

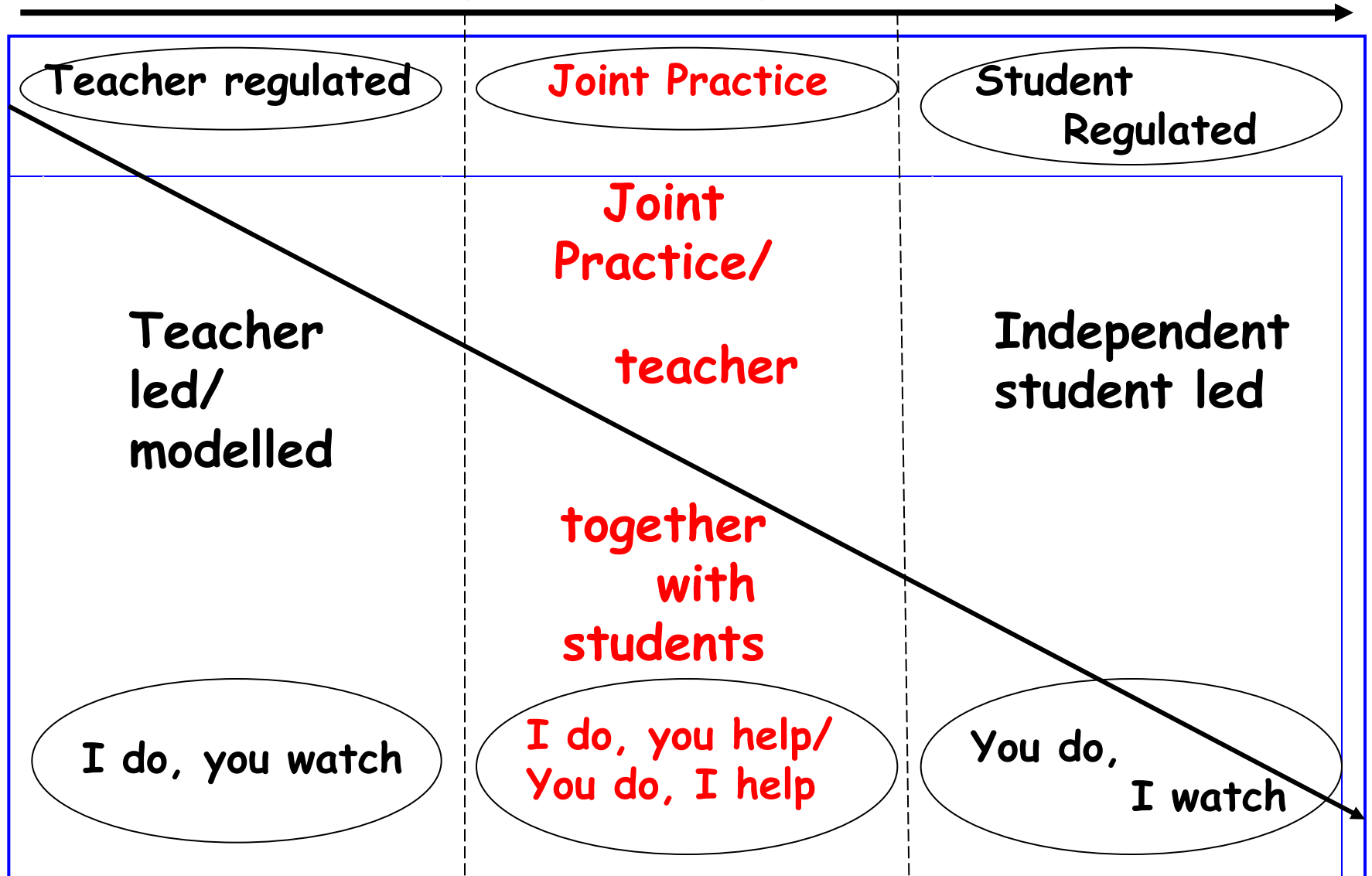


Vygotsky, 1934, 1986



As the learner develops greater control, the teacher withdraws support until the student can function independently. The teacher then chooses a new level for supported learning.

Scaffolding Learning in Context



Adapted from:

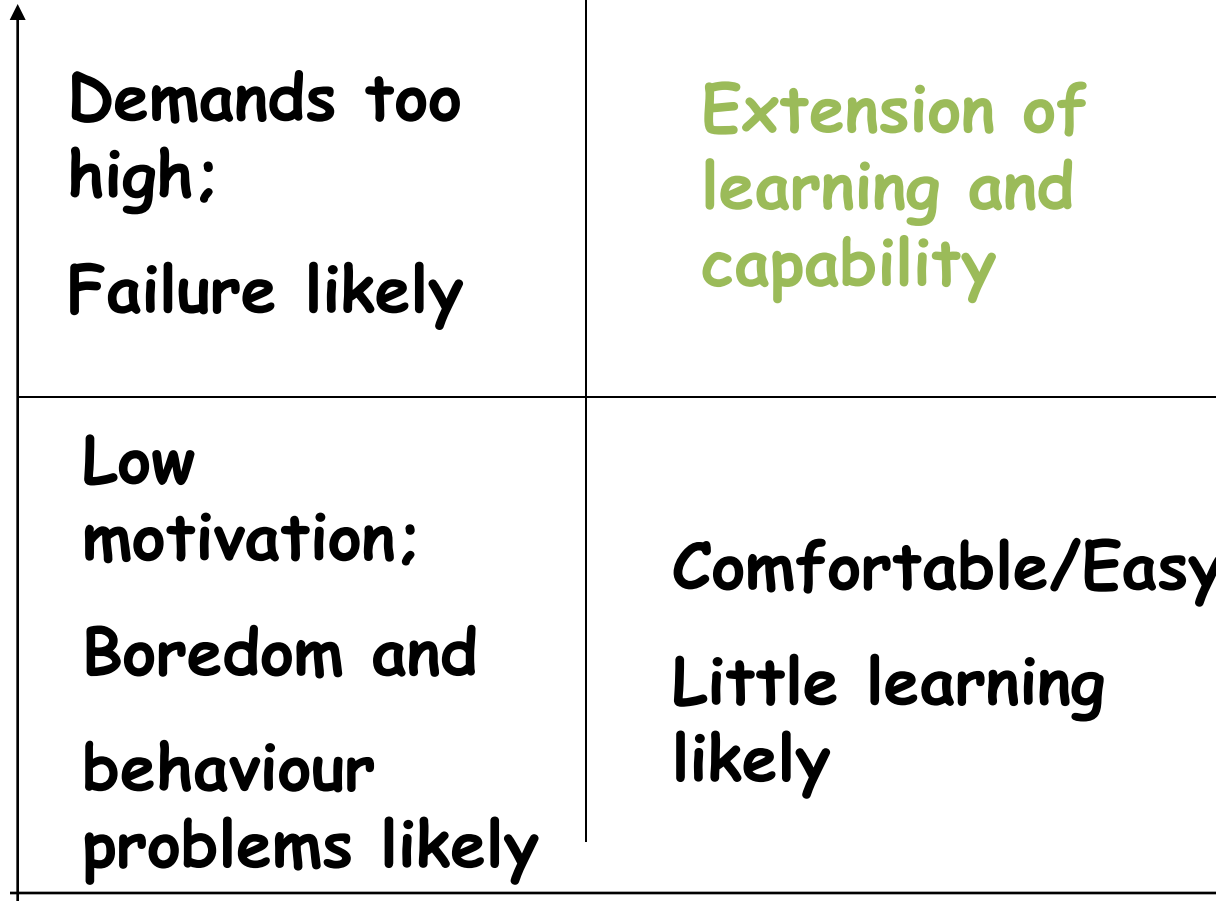
Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy by Jeffrey Wilhelm, Tanya Baker, and Julie Dube. Copyright © 2001

Why scaffolding ?

- High challenge, high support allows all students to achieve common standards.
- Scaffolds adjusted to suit range and level of students
- Not a magic bullet, works best when complemented by focus on differentiated instruction, assessment for learning etc

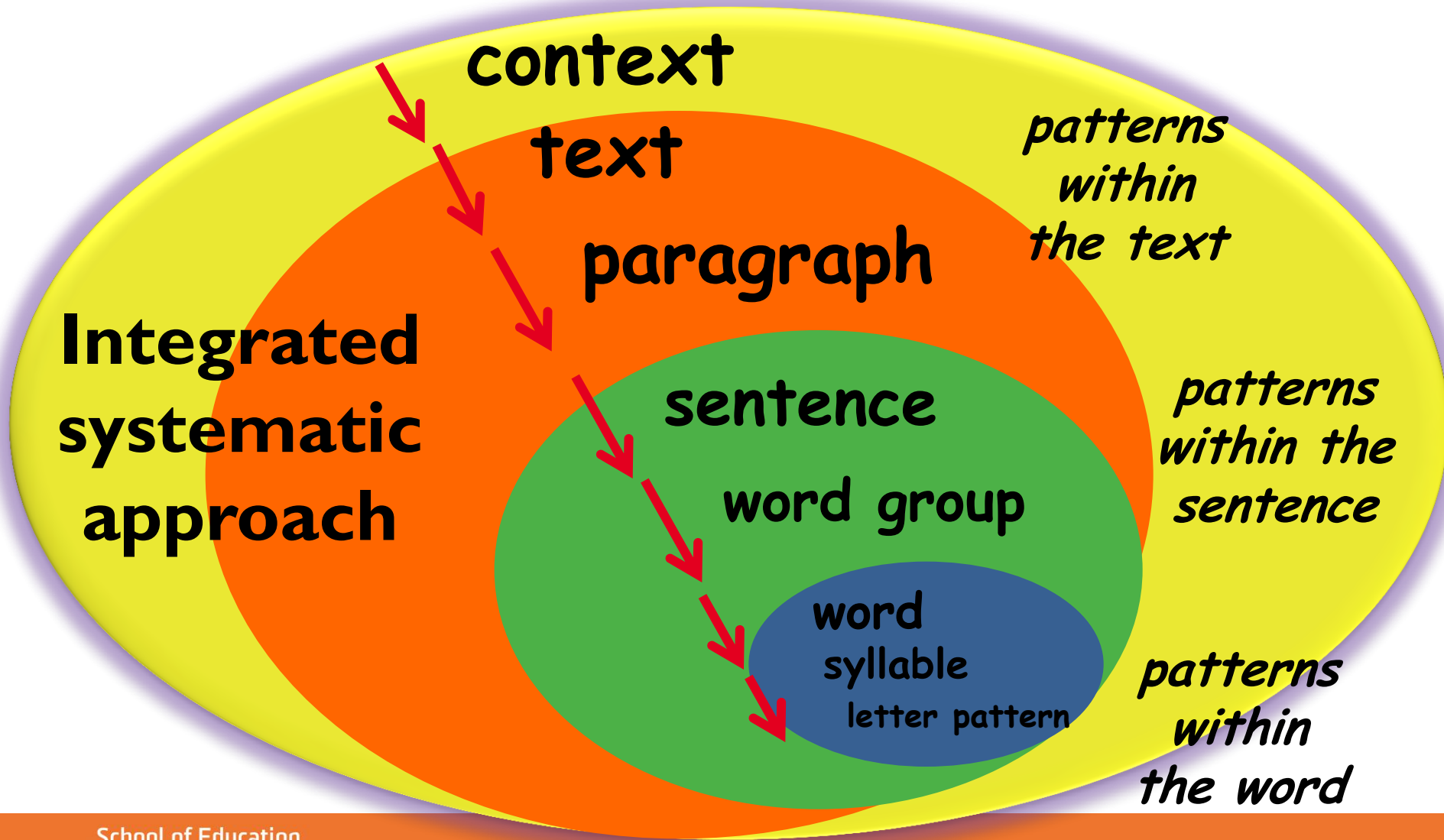
Adapted from
Mariani, L, (1997),

Challenge



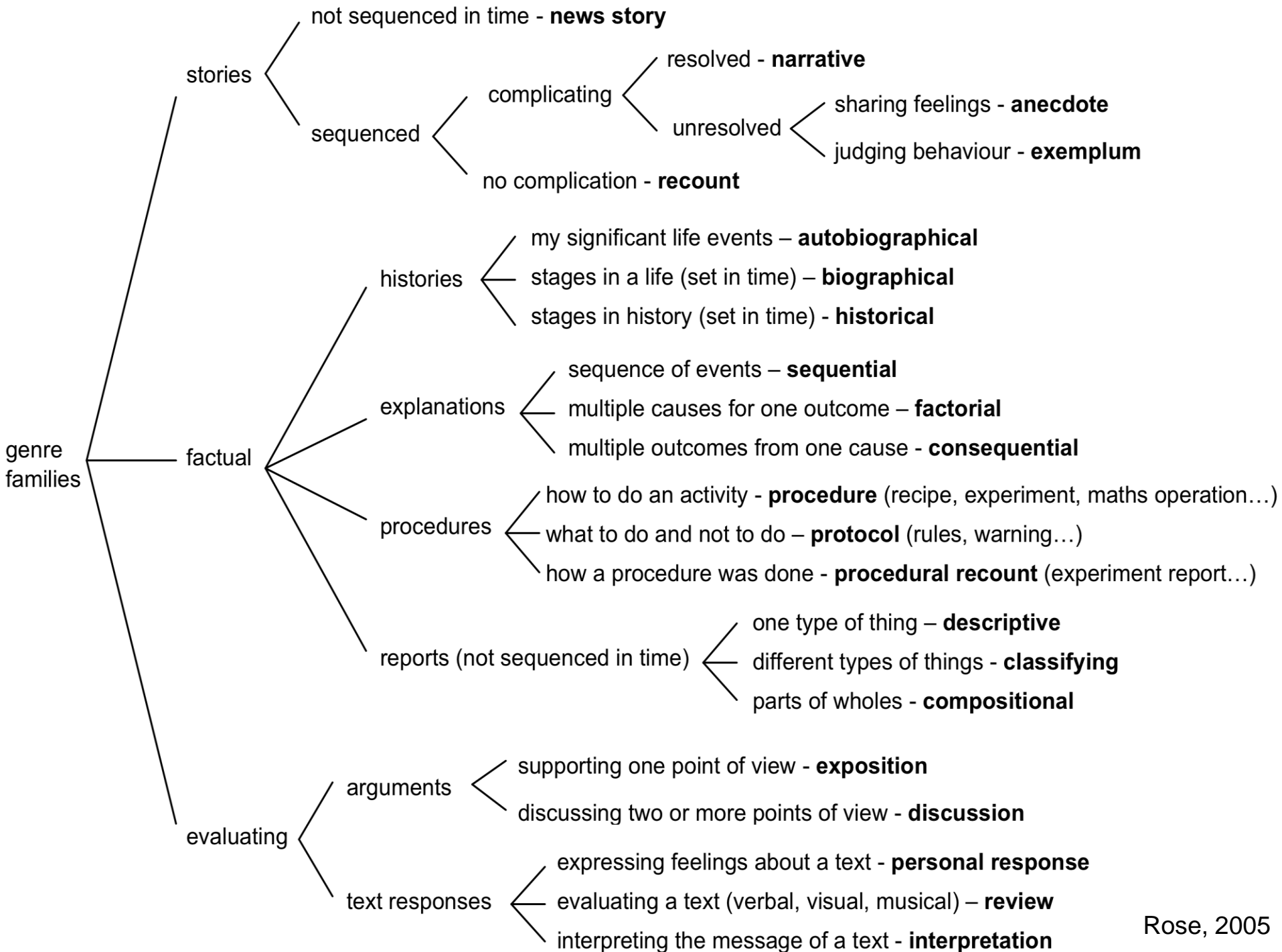
Support

Functional model of language in context



Analyzing Academic Language

Genre	Language function	Language Features
Represents the content, form, and technique related to the language used within a particular subject: <i>recount, narrative, analytic, expository, argument, etc.</i>	Indicates how language will be used or processed: <i>describe, compare and contrast, discuss, summarize, etc.</i>	Vocabulary and vocabulary usage Language control Linguistic complexity



Scaffolding disciplinary literacy

1. Check what you already know about your students' strengths and their learning needs
2. Identify the language, skills and concepts that are central to the particular topic you plan to teach
3. Select the key language and concepts/skills on which you will focus.
4. Design or choose activities that provide graduated support for students from whole class teacher-led modeling and interaction, to small group guided practice and reciprocal teaching to independent activity and self-assessment

Look at the following excerpt of a lesson from a Year 5/6 class:

- How does the teacher scaffold and support the development of students' disciplinary literacy?

i.e., Teacher as *Activator* (Hattie, 2009)

- Reciprocal teaching .74
- Feedback .72
- Self-verbalization .67
- Meta-cognition strategies .67
- Direct instruction .59
- Mastery learning .57
- Challenging goals .56
- Behavioral organizers .41

More importantly, scaffolding ensures students' intellectual and emotional engagement in disciplinary literacy learning as

- They understand what they are doing
- Their attention is focused on what the teacher wants them to learn
- They feel in control
- They are enthusiastic and keep working
- They take responsibility for the outcomes achieved