A Tale of Two Classrooms

Two Fourth Grade Classes Learn about the Great Depression
Ms. Johnson’s 4th Grade Class

- Read chapter independently
- Answered end-of-the-chapter review questions independently
- Reviewed answers as a group
  - As the students answered, Ms. J ignored incorrect replies and wrote correct responses on a transparency
- Watched documentary
- End-of-unit quiz
Ms. Reed’s Fourth Grade Class

- Introduced visitors who had lived through the Great Depression
  - shared pictures, stories, memories as a group
  - Informal discussions

- The goal: collaborate in creating a multimedia presentation of GD from a local perspective
Ms. Reed’s Class *continued*

- Assigned to read chapter and brainstorm list of questions about GD
- Break into small groups, take turn interviewing
- Encouraged to look up additional information
- Planned and started to work on multimedia presentation
Ms. Reed’s Class continued

- Ms. R guided students in considering certain questions, organizing their thoughts and their work, and consulting resources
- Had access to technical support
- The visitors provided additional info and reactions to the project as it developed
- Memorial Day presentation, discussion and snacks
Question:

In what ways are the different approaches in these classes an example of cognitive apprenticeship?
Scaffolding in Ms. Johnson’s class

- Ms. J tends to primarily ask questions that can be answered with a word or a short phrase, such as "Franklin Delano Roosevelt," "1929," or "new jobs."

- Based on her method of assessment (short answer and multiple choice questions), it appears that discrete facts are the primary desired learning outcome for her students.

- There is no need for scaffolding with this type of presentation and assessment.
Scaffolding in Ms. Reed’s class

- Key scaffolds: the multimedia presentation, interviews with Depression survivors, & teacher-led (but not teacher-dominated) discussions about the subject.

- Social context is made available through various physical artifacts, such as clothing, food stamps, & scrapbooks. These are part of the scaffolding process, because they help students understand how people in their community lived in the late 1920s and early 1930s.
Modeling in Ms. Johnson’s class

- No continuum of activities from the teacher to the students.

- Reading the answers aloud and just giving correct answers fails to give the teacher an opportunity to model thoughts about the questions while answering them. No modeling of ongoing cognitions.
Modeling in Ms. Reed’s class

- Ms. Reed conducts the class as a facilitator and collaborator in its activities.
- There is little distinction between the activities of the teacher and those of the students. The teacher can model ongoing cognitions in the natural give-and-take between student and teacher.
- The students have an opportunity to replicate the cognitions that guide the teacher’s activities.
Coaching in Ms. Johnson’s class

- Emphasis on correct answer (product, not process)
- No feedback about incorrect answers
- No discussion of why each answer is correct or incorrect
- No open-ended questions

Outcome: rote memorization, little integration of information
Coaching in Ms. Reed’s class

- Ms. Reed is available to assist them with any questions or problems they encounter and helps them organize their thoughts and work.
- She also "coaches" them toward considering certain questions and consulting particular reference sources for information.

**Outcome:** a stronger understanding of issues related to the Great Depression.
Challenges

- Cognitive apprenticeship may require highly facilitative teaching skills.
- The cognitive apprenticeship approach may result in higher levels of student anxiety and frustration.
- Cognitive apprenticeship may require more time on task.
- Cognitive apprenticeship may require additional or more sophisticated resources.
Benefits

- Cognitive apprenticeship encourages authentic activity and assessment.
- Practices of cognitive apprenticeship are motivating and engaging for learners.
- Cognitive apprenticeship may encourage greater levels of retention and transfer.
- Cognitive apprenticeship may facilitate higher order reasoning.