

AWAKENING CHILDREN'S MINDS

---

How Parents and Teachers  
Can Make a Difference

*Laura E. Berk*

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2001

**OXFORD**

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York  
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá  
Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam  
Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi  
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne  
Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi Paris São Paulo Shanghai  
Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw  
and associated companies in  
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 2001 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,  
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Berk, Laura E.

Awakening children's minds : how parents and teachers can make a difference /

Laura E. Berk.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-512485-5

1. Child development.

2. Socialization

3. Early childhood education—Parent participation.

4. Parenting.

I. Title.

HQ767.9 .B465 20001

649'.1—dc21 00-140080

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper

Anselmo's resulting disorganized behavior and dependency prompt additional parental vacillation—sometimes refusals to help, at other times maladaptive helping—along with exasperation and criticism. Talia and Jim can be heard saying impatiently, “You aren't any good at this!” “Can't you do anything?”<sup>11</sup> Soon a barrier forms between Anselmo and the task he had previously wanted to master, and his motivation wanes.

In classrooms, the same sequence of events prevails. Teachers' communication plays a vital role in children's effort and learning. Consider a recent study, in which 1,600 elementary- and middle-school pupils were followed over a 3-year period. Those who viewed their teachers as warm and as providing helpful learning conditions—by making expectations clear and checking that the child understood—worked harder on assignments and participated more in class. Effort and participation, in turn, predicted better academic performance, which sustained the child's willingness to try hard in the future. In contrast, children who regarded their teachers as unsupportive were more likely to disengage, stop trying, and show declines in achievement. These negative outcomes led children to doubt their own ability, which perpetuated their reduced effort.<sup>12</sup>

How can adults build interdependent relationships with children that foster the development of culturally meaningful skills and mature, autonomous behavior? To answer this question, Vygotsky proposed a special concept: the *zone of proximal development*. Keeping it in mind can help parents and teachers interact with children in ways that lead their development forward.

#### THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Take a few moments to list five or six competencies of a child you know well. If you are a parent, do so for your own child; if you are a teacher, choose a child in your class. Perhaps your list looks much like this one, recorded by Jessica, mother of 3-year-old Tyrone:

- Just learned to cut paper with scissors.
- Counts to four.
- Looks at picture books and names many pictures.
- Remembered two of the animals we saw at the zoo last Sunday.
- Puts together puzzles with eight pieces.
- Can sort shapes into categories.

Now indicate whether the skills on your list are ones that the child can do by himself, or whether they are ones that the child displays only when assisted by another person. Jessica, like most parents and teachers completing this exercise, limited her list to Tyrone's already acquired abilities—ones he can do alone.

Vygotsky pointed out that we are used to thinking of the child's capacities in static or "fossilized" terms—as finished achievements. In doing so, we look toward the past. What we should do, he advised, is to move beyond what children can do by themselves to what they can do with expert assistance and, therefore, have the potential to learn. In this way, we focus on the future—on the cognitive processes of today or tomorrow rather than those of yesterday, which are already mastered.<sup>13</sup>

Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as the distance between the child's actual development (the tasks the child can do individually) and the child's potential development, "determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."<sup>14</sup> The "zone," as I'll call it from now on, is the dynamic region in which new capacities form as children tackle culturally meaningful tasks with a mentor's assistance. Had Jessica been thinking about Tyrone's "zone," she might have framed the items on her list this way:

Just learned to cut paper with scissors. If I hold the paper while he cuts and prompt him, he can cut along straight or curved lines. He cut out a square and a circle with help today. I asked him which animals we saw at the zoo, and he mentioned giraffe and zebra. When I reminded him of the bird and pachyderm houses, he remembered a lot more: the flamingos, parrots, swans, elephants, hippos, and rhinos.

For Vygotsky, a crucial aspect of parenting and the central aim of education is to provide children with experiences in their "zone"—activities that challenge them but that can be accomplished with sensitive adult guidance. Consequently, parents and teachers carry much responsibility for ensuring that children's learning is maximized—for actively leading them along the developmental pathway. Rather than transmitting ready-made knowledge to a passive child or giving a child tasks for which he or she already has the requisite skills, the adult's role is to engage in dialogue with the child—by observing, conversing, questioning, assisting, and encouraging. During that dialogue, the adult continually assesses the child's progress and creates the "zone" by keeping the task "proximal"—slightly above the child's level of independent functioning. In this way, the adult "rouses to life" those cognitive processes that are just

emerging in the child,<sup>15</sup> sustaining them socially so they can be refined and internalized as part of the child's psychological world.

### CREATING THE "ZONE"

What features of adult-child shared activity forge the "zone"? Research documents several communicative ingredients that consistently foster development, in children of diverse ages and across a wide range of tasks.

#### *Shared Understanding*

For information, ideas, and skills to move from the social-interactive plane to the internal-thinking plane, the adult and child must strive for a common approach to the situation. They must desire genuine communication and work toward attaining it.

In sociocultural theory, this joint, mutual focus is called *intersubjectivity*, or shared understanding.<sup>16</sup> As the word suggests, each participant in the dialogue strives to grasp the subjective perspective of the other, an effort that results in a "meeting of minds," in which the partners' thoughts make contact, connect, and coincide. Intersubjectivity reaches its pinnacle in a love affair, where shared understanding is readily achieved through a glance, a touch, or a comment. Lovers in close psychological contact grasp one another's meanings quickly because each is on the lookout for and tries to satisfy the other's needs.<sup>17</sup> The opposite of intersubjectivity is total misunderstanding. In a failed love affair, widely divergent views of the same experiences cause people to say, "You don't understand me. You've become a stranger. We can't find common ground. We've grown apart."

The image of lovers communicating helps us appreciate the circumstances in which intersubjectivity is most likely to occur: in close relationships. Children most often attain it with parents, other family members, teachers, and eventually in friendships with peers. Of course, partners in teaching and learning do not need to attain the intersubjective heights of lovers to accomplish their goals. But a certain degree of intersubjectivity is necessary for any dialogue to be successful, and the love affair analogy reminds us that joint understanding, whether established in face-to-face interaction or as individuals work on a common task, combines both verbal and nonverbal cues. Sensitive emotional messages conveyed through gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice are basic to it.<sup>18</sup>

Intersubjectivity is itself a developmental process. Since infants and young children are still acquiring communication skills, the younger the child, the greater the adult's responsibility for making mental contact and sustaining the interaction. Nevertheless, children of all ages actively join in, striving for a shared view of the world. Their participation results in gains in thought, language, and social skills. Gradually, the child takes increasing responsibility for attaining intersubjectivity, until both parties make similar contributions to the shared mental state that fuels children's learning in the "zone."<sup>19</sup> Let's see how, with adult support, the child's intersubjective competence increases.

**INFANCY AND TODDLERHOOD.** Some researchers believe that the infant's capacity to share meaning with others is innate. Others think it is learned—that parents respond to infants' facial expressions, vocalizations, cries, and body movements as if they have meaning, and out of those responses infants pick up the meanings and expressive rhythms of human signals.<sup>20</sup> But all experts agree that subtle, sensitive, and mutually rewarding exchanges between parent and baby serve as the earliest context for intersubjectivity.

From the start, infants are equipped with capacities that draw adults into social exchanges with them. Newborn babies, for example, can make eye contact, and they prefer to look at people and to listen to human voices—especially their mother's familiar voice, to which they became accustomed during the months before birth.<sup>21</sup> Newborns also have a rudimentary ability to imitate facial expressions, opening their mouths or pursing their lips after an adult does so.<sup>22</sup> Their responsiveness encourages parents to look at, talk to, and imitate in return. Between 4 and 6 weeks of age, babies begin to smile at people, an irresistible signal that evokes smiles, cuddles, pats, and friendly, gentle verbalizations from their social world.<sup>23</sup> As cooing and babbling appear in the first half-year, adults again respond in kind, vocalizing and waiting for the baby to vocalize back.

By age 3 months, a complex communication system is in place in which parent and baby each respond in an appropriate and carefully timed fashion to the other's cues. As a result, babies experience and practice the give-and-take of human conversation. Disrupt this exchange of signals, and young babies' striving for connection with others becomes crystal clear. In several studies, researchers had the parent assume either a still-faced, unreactive pose or a depressed emotional state. Infants tried all manner of signals—facial expressions, vocalizations, and body movements—to get their mother or father to respond again. When these efforts failed, they reacted to the parent's sad, vacant gaze by turning away, frowning, and crying.<sup>24</sup> American, Canadian, and Chinese 3- to 6-month-olds

respond to a parent's still face identically, suggesting a common, built-in protest response to caregivers' lack of engagement.<sup>25</sup>

When parents are attentive, patient, and interested in the baby's activities, their social signals sustain the infant's attention, essential for a shared focus. Around 4 months, infants begin to gaze in the same direction adults are looking, although their initial efforts are imperfect. Parents follow the baby's line of vision as well, often commenting on what the infant sees. This joint attention to objects and events fosters early language development. Mothers who maintain high levels of it during play have infants who comprehend more language, produce meaningful gestures and words earlier, and show faster vocabulary development between 1 and 2 years of age.<sup>26</sup>

Between 9 and 15 months, the capacity for intersubjectivity takes a giant leap forward. Toddlers use gestures to share their experiences with others. They touch an object, hold it up, or point to it while looking at another person to make sure he or she notices. Or they try to get another person to do something—to hand them an object or help them perform a task—by reaching, pointing, and making sounds at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

Look closely at these behaviors, and notice how toddlers *intentionally* try to establish common ground with another person by combining their interest in objects and events with communication.<sup>28</sup> When adults respond to their reaching and pointing gestures and also label them (“That’s a kitty, isn’t it?” “Oh, you want a cracker!”), toddlers learn that using language can quickly lead to a joint focus and desired results—the pleasurable object or experience the child wanted.<sup>29</sup> Soon the child utters words along with gestures, the gestures recede, and language is under way.

EARLY CHILDHOOD. Spoken language brings vastly expanded potential for attaining intersubjectivity because it allows much greater clarification of purpose between participants in a dialogue. When a toddler points and reaches but cannot say what he means, the adult may need to search for the child’s meaning, as this exchange between a mother and her 14-month-old son, Jordan, illustrates:

Jordan: (*Points to one of the objects on the counter*)

Mother: “Do you want this?” (*Holds up milk container*)

Jordan: (*Shakes his head “no”; continues to point; two more tries*)

Mother: “This?” (*Picks up sponge*)

Jordan: (*Leans back in highchair, puts arms down, tension leaves body*)

Mother: (*Hands Jordan sponge*)<sup>30</sup>

As language competence increases, shared meaning is established quickly, as when the child says, "Get the sponge, Mom. I need to wipe this up!" Then a joint focus becomes the springboard for achieving greater understanding, with children playing a strong, contributing role. This is evident in the impressive conversational skills of even young preschoolers. By 2 to 3 years, children take turns, make eye contact, and respond in a timely and relevant fashion to their partner's remarks.<sup>31</sup>

These capacities improve with conversational experience. Children become better at taking the perspective of their partner, especially a partner who adjusts his or her communication to the child's level and observes the child closely to assess his or her comprehension. By stretching up to grasp the adult's viewpoint, children acquire new knowledge, the basis for further growth. And with age, children exert greater effort to understand another person, a capacity first cultivated in adult-child interaction and then extended to peers. For example, in the following conversation, notice how 4-year-old Sammy assists his friend, Leah, in attaining intersubjectivity:

*(Leah tells the teacher that she caught a fish while on vacation, when Sammy enters the conversation.)*

Teacher: Did you have to scale the fish as well?

Leah: No, we eated them. *(The child misunderstands the meaning of the word "scale.")*

Sammy: You need to peel them . . . peel them. *(Sammy tries to clarify.)*

Teacher: *(Confirming Sammy's meaning)* You need to take the scales off, don't you?

Sammy: You can't do it with your hands; you need a peeler.

Teacher: Or a knife . . . a really sharp fishing knife.

Leah: They peeled the fishes with a fork. *(Leah now shares meaning with the teacher and Sammy.)*<sup>32</sup>

Between 3 and 5 years of age, preschoolers increasingly strive for intersubjectivity in dialogues with peers. They more often affirm playmates' messages, add new information to playmates' ideas, and make contributions to ongoing play to sustain it further.<sup>33</sup> They can also be heard making such statements as, "I think [this way]. What do you think?"—clear evidence of a willingness to share viewpoints, which assists preschoolers greatly when conflicts arise that must be resolved for play to continue.<sup>34</sup>

As the excerpts we have considered illustrate, participants in a dialogue may not attain intersubjectivity on a first try, and interaction between most people,

whether adults or children, is not perfectly “in sync.”<sup>35</sup> But by the preschool years, children can take a more active role in helping a partner reach a state of shared thinking and in correcting “misses” when they do occur.<sup>36</sup>

The communicative competence inherent in intersubjectivity blossoms within a zone of proximal development in which parents and other significant adults are “stimulating, attentive, confirmatory, interpretive, and highly supportive.”<sup>37</sup> Parent–child intersubjectivity makes a vital contribution to the development of attachment, attention, language, and understanding of others’ perspectives. These capacities, in turn, ease the task of establishing an intersubjective connection, and that connection provides the platform for the creation of additional “zones,” enabling children to master complex, culturally adaptive skills.

### *Building a Support System for Acquiring New Knowledge and Skills*

Intersubjectivity makes possible a second essential ingredient for creating the “zone”: a support system that offers new ways of thinking about a situation. The quality of adult support varies with the type of joint activity. As we will see, a helpful parent or teacher interacts differently when assisting the child with tasks having clear learning goals, such as working a puzzle or mastering a homework assignment; when engaging the child in an open-ended conversation; and when enlisting the child in duties and routines of everyday living. But regardless of the activity, the adult adapts his or her support so the child can make use of it. As the child gains competence, adult support changes accordingly, granting the child a larger role.

**CREATING A SCAFFOLD.** The metaphor of a *scaffold* has been used to describe effective adult support as children work on tasks that teach culturally valued concepts and skills.<sup>38</sup> The learning goal might be built into the task materials, as when a child turns a crank to make a jack-in-the-box pop out, puts together a puzzle, or builds a structure out of blocks. Alternatively, the parent or teacher might specify the goal, as in matching shapes and colors, solving an arithmetic problem, or batting a ball.

In scaffolding, the child is viewed as a building—actively under construction. The adult provides a dynamic, flexible scaffold—or framework—that assists the child in mastering new competencies. To promote development, the adult varies his or her assistance to fit the child’s changing level of performance, with the goal of keeping the child in the “zone.” This is usually done in two ways: (1) by adjusting the task so the demands on the child at any given

moment are appropriately challenging, and (2) tailoring the degree of adult intervention to the child's current learning needs.<sup>39</sup>

When a task is very new, the child may not yet be aware of its goal and need to be shown what to do, through demonstration. Consider, for example, a 9-month-old infant who has never before seen a jack-in-the-box. At first, the adult tries to capture the child's attention by working the toy and, as the clown emerges, exclaiming, "Pop! What happened?" Gradually, the adult redirects interaction toward how to use the jack-in-the-box. When the infant reaches for the toy, the adult guides the child's hand in turning the crank and pushing the clown down in the box. As motor, cognitive, and language skills improve in the second year, the toddler intentionally tries to turn the crank, looking at the adult or otherwise beckoning for assistance. The child's greater knowledge and communicative competence permit the adult to reduce her physical directiveness. Now the adult can help from a distance by using verbal instructions ("Turn, just a little more!") and gestures, such as a rotating hand resembling a turning motion, while the toddler tries to make the toy work.<sup>40</sup>

As children move into the preschool years, scaffolding becomes increasingly verbal and takes on the advantages of language—more ready attainment of intersubjectivity; flexible, efficient representation of meanings; and a powerful tool through which minds meet and the child adopts meanings into mental life. To illustrate, let's listen in as a father assists his 5-year-old daughter, Sydney, in putting together a difficult puzzle:

Sydney: I can't get this one in. (*Tries to insert a piece in the wrong place*)

Father: Which piece might go down here? (*Points to the bottom of the puzzle*)

Sydney: His shoes. (*Looks for a piece resembling the clown's shoes but tries the wrong one*)

Father: Well, find a piece that looks like this shape and matches this color. (*Points again to the bottom of the puzzle*)

Sydney: The brown one. (*Tries it and it fits; then attempts another piece and looks at her father*)

Father: There you have it! Now try turning that piece just a little. (*Gestures to show her*)

Sydney: There! (*Puts in several more pieces while commenting to herself, "Now a green piece to match," "Turn it [meaning the puzzle piece]," as the adult watches*)

Father: Now, Sydney, watch. Suppose I put this piece here. Will that work? (*Places a blue piece next to a second blue piece, but the space is too small and the wrong shape*)

Sydney: You can't do it that way. The piece is too big.

Father: What should I do?

Sydney: (*Places the piece in the correct space, using both color and shape as a guide.*)

Sydney and her father's interaction contains all the components and goals of effective scaffolding:

1. *Joint Problem Solving, Aimed at Keeping the Child in the "Zone."* Sydney and her father collaborate in overcoming obstacles that Sydney encounters. In doing so, father and daughter jointly work toward successful puzzle solution.

Sydney's father keeps the task within Sydney's "zone" by temporarily reducing the difficulty of the puzzle. He does so by breaking the task into smaller units, focusing Sydney's attention on the lower section—the part with the largest and most easily matched pieces. Then he assists with a general prompt, "Which piece might go down here?"

When Sydney's father observes that this suggestion is not sufficient for her to succeed, he offers additional support, "Find a piece that *looks like this shape and matches this color*" and "Turn it." His statements contain strategies (attending to color and shape, patiently adjusting pieces so they fit) that Sydney can use in future attempts. When Sydney experiments with the color-matching strategy and succeeds in placing the brown piece, she internalizes the technique. She applies it in subsequent efforts, regulating her behavior with self-directed language resembling her father's communication during joint problem solving. Consequently, Sydney begins to move toward independent solving of the puzzle.

Notice how, in scaffolding Sydney's puzzle solving, her father adapts the instruction he offers to Sydney's momentary competence. When Sydney has difficulty, he fortifies the scaffold, providing increased direction. Once Sydney starts to take over strategies generated during joint problem solving, her father pulls back, reducing the assistance provided.

Scaffolding provides parents and teachers with a sensible solution to the often-raised dilemma: Is it better to be directive or nondirective when helping children learn? As the scaffolding concept shows, this question has no pat answer. Rather, the intensity of adult support depends on where the task falls within the child's "zone." When a task lies at the outer edge of the child's current capabilities, more direct guidance is necessary to bring it within range of mastery. As the child's understanding and performance improve, less intervention is required.

How much assistance a child needs depends not just on cognitive maturity but also on other child characteristics. A temperamentally distractible child, an emotionally reactive child, or a fearful, inhibited child requires an especially sturdy scaffold—extra support and, at times, considerable adult perseverance to sustain a joint focus and keep the child engaged. Children who are good listeners, persistent in the face of difficulty, socially skilled, and therefore adept at attaining intersubjectivity need less adult vigilance and direction. At the same time, effective scaffolding can improve a difficult child's behavior, since it offers the child knowledge and procedures for solving problems, the security of adult support as long as it is needed, and the satisfaction of overcoming obstacles and mastering culturally valued skills.

2. *Self-regulation.* An important goal of scaffolding is to promote self-regulation—the capacity to use thought to guide behavior. The self-regulated child follows social rules; makes deliberate, well-reasoned choices and decisions; and takes responsibility for his or her own learning and behavior. Although self-regulation improves gradually throughout childhood and adolescence, early childhood is a crucial period for its development—a time when children learn to overcome impulses by thinking before they act.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, self-regulation is so important for children's cognitive and social development that we will return to it repeatedly in later chapters when we consider how other experiences—children's self-directed language, make-believe play, and learning in school—contribute to it.

How does scaffolding nurture a self-regulated child? It does so in two inter-related ways: (1) by providing children with strategies for working toward goals, and (2) by relinquishing adult control and assistance as soon as the child can work independently.<sup>42</sup>

In scaffolding, the adult encourages the child to grapple with questions and problems and, thereby, to contribute significantly to the dialogue. In this way, the adult evokes from the child his or her current knowledge and, on that basis, can scaffold more effectively. The parent or teacher intervenes only when the child is truly stuck, granting the child as much opportunity to master his or her own behavior as possible. Unless it is clear that the task is so new and obscure to the child that a demonstration would be helpful, the adult refrains from giving immediate answers to momentary difficulties. As our consideration of Anselmo and his parents revealed, doing the task for the child severely reduces learning and self-regulation.<sup>43</sup>

When adults ask children questions and make suggestions that permit them to participate in the discovery of solutions, then transfer of useful strategies to the child is maximized. By introducing language as a mediator of the child's ac-

tivity, the adult's questions and prompts prevent the child from responding impulsively. They encourage the child to step back from the immediate situation and consider alternatives—in essence, to think.

Look at Sydney and her father's dialogue once again. When he asks, "Which piece might go down here?" he evokes Sydney's present strategic thinking, finding that it is still tied to immediate objects in the situation. Sydney looks for the clown's shoes but fails to find them. Then her father introduces a special form of strategic thinking called *distancing*. This method helps children move beyond concrete objects by looking for higher-order relationships—in Sydney's case, categorizing puzzle pieces by color and shape. Once Sydney succeeds in using color, her father encourages further distancing from the most obvious features of the clown image.<sup>44</sup> He places a piece incorrectly (by matching only on color) and queries, "Will that work?" In doing so, he helps Sydney analyze an error, consider how to correct it (by matching on both color and shape), and try out her conjecture. Sydney gains practice in applying strategies flexibly—in generating ideas to overcome obstacles. As a result, she acquires reasoning skills and can take initiative when faced with future problems.

3. *Warmth, Responsiveness, and Encouragement.* To work well, the emotional tone of scaffolding must be warm, sympathetic, and responsive. Children who experience warm adult relationships want to preserve that spirit of affection and cooperation—by joining in dialogues with adult partners and acquiring culturally valued skills.<sup>45</sup>

The standards for maturity parents set for young children vary widely, in ways that reflect family and cultural values. For example, Chinese-American immigrant parents report spending nearly ten times as much time as do Caucasian-American parents scaffolding their school-age children's mastery of reading, math, music, and drawing skills<sup>46</sup>—teaching that is undoubtedly a strong contributor to Chinese children's high achievement in both academic and artistic endeavors. Influenced by the Confucian belief in strict discipline to nurture socially desirable behavior, many Chinese and other Asian parents expect a great deal of their children and structure their time extensively.<sup>47</sup> But research indicates that their demands are imbued with warmth and caring—with deep concern for and involvement in their children's lives.

In a study of parenting in 180 societies, anthropologists Ronald and Evelyn Rohner found that warmth combined with at least moderate expectations for mature behavior and accomplishment is the most common child-rearing style around the world.<sup>48</sup> Why do so many cultures mingle concern and affection with guidance and control—a blend known as *authoritative parenting* in the

child-rearing literature? Certainly because they sense its effectiveness, borne out by decades of research.

Authoritative parenting, whether assessed through direct observation or older children's ratings of their parents' communication, is linked to many aspects of competence. In early childhood, it predicts positive mood, self-confidence and independence in mastery of new tasks, cooperativeness, and resistance to engaging in disruptive behavior.<sup>49</sup> And in middle childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, it is related to high self-esteem, social and moral maturity, academic achievement, and educational attainment.<sup>50</sup>

A major contributor to these favorable outcomes is the fuel that warmth grants to adult expectations. Warm, caring adults offer explanations and justifications for their demands. In doing so, they invite children to judge the appropriateness of their requirements. When children view demands as fair and reasonable, they are far more likely to heed and internalize them. A warm, involved adult is also more likely to be an effective reinforcing agent, praising children for striving to meet high standards. And when children stray from goals that a parent or teacher regards as important and it is necessary to be firm and disapproving, a warm adult has a much greater chance of changing the child's behavior than does an adult who has been indifferent or negative. Children of involved, caring parents find the interruption in parental affection that accompanies a reprimand to be especially unpleasant. They want to regain their parents' warmth and approval as quickly as possible.

In sum, scaffolding is a warm, sympathetic collaboration between a teacher and a learner on a challenging, goal-directed task that the adult helps bring within the child's "zone." Observations of adult-child pairs reveal that the diverse ingredients of scaffolding—matching the adult's assistance to the child's changing needs, suggesting effective strategies, posing questions that encourage children to think about higher-order relationships, and interacting warmly and praising children for competent performance—consistently relate to children's task engagement and learning.<sup>51</sup>

**THE POWER OF CONVERSATION.** The instructional mode of communication inherent in scaffolding is well suited for tasks with clearly defined goals. Conversations, in which adult and child reflect on everyday events, are more free-ranging. They can dwell on virtually any aspect of experience—of living and working together. This makes them an especially powerful tool for assisting children in building an internal mental life infused with a cultural worldview.