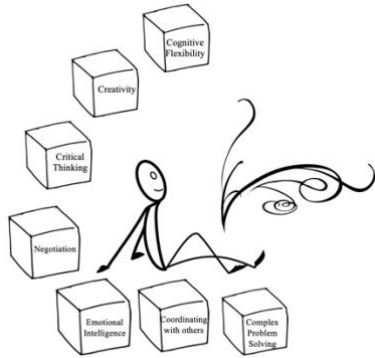


Scaffolding Academic Language with Rhythm (Primary)



theory behind the scaffold...

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Helping our shy or underperforming students to participate verbally in a language or content class is often challenging. Many times, the underlying reason for their reluctance is simply not wanting to expose their lack of knowledge of the subject or - more likely - because they don't believe they will express themselves well.

These types of students often have backgrounds that have not prepared them for mainstream schooling's way of learning, speaking, reading and thinking.* The result is that they feel inferior when expected to participate in classroom activities that:

- are based on a foundation of knowledge they have not yet achieved;
- require higher order thinking skills strategies that they have not yet developed;
- assume that they have verbal abilities (in both their home and classroom languages) which, in fact, they lack.

It is essential, therefore, that we remember to incorporate language outcomes in our lessons, especially because, while we almost always remember to include the content objectives, we usually forget or didn't know how important it was to include language objectives – those skills that will help our students to express themselves with the appropriate academic language of the topic. We have the opportunity to give our students a strong foundation and help them feel more confident about their verbal abilities.

One way to achieve this is to present academic language through music. Rhythm helps students to develop key brain functions that not only enhance musical learning but also academic and social skills. It builds and strengthens connections between brain cells and improves memory and the ability to differentiate sounds and speech. It nourishes the process of learning, which includes:

- sensory integration
- attention
- critical thinking
- emotional maturity
- motor capacities **

Memorising academic language works only as long as it takes students to take an exam and then forget. On the other hand, this scaffold addresses

academic language in three ways: through linguistics, images and rhythm. It assures the deeper assimilation of key knowledge and terminology so that students are more confident in what they know and the meaning behind the knowledge.

As an extension, you can include higher-order thinking questions so that students use the academic language in meaningful ways – and personalize that knowledge. The example we give here is from a natural science unit, and you'll see how you can adapt the activity to any subject you work in.

* [\(Zeiers, 2008\)](#)

** [Konrad, R.R. \(200\), 'Empathy, Arts and Social Studies'.](#)

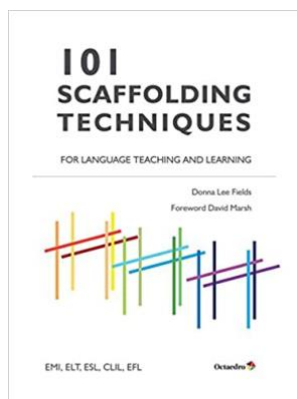


Step by Step:

1. Create 4-5 textboxes (or the number of groups of students you have) in which you will place sentences, images and questions.
2. Choose 10-15 sentences from the unit you are about to begin, that describe key knowledge – from various pages of a unit if you want. Divide them amongst the textboxes.
3. Find images from key words from each of the sentences and find images that represent them. Place the images in the textbox with spaces for students to write the appropriate term below them.
4. Record or find recordings of the sentences or terms and insert these in the appropriate places.
5. Write 2-3 higher-order thinking questions (to give students the opportunity to use the academic language in their own words and regarding something from their own lives).
6. Give groups of students one of the textboxes. (Download the [template](#) here.)
7. Students do the following:
 - identify the clipart by writing the appropriate term under each
 - repeat the audios of the sentences
 - invent rhythm for the sentences, using whatever tools/instruments they wish (hands, feet, musical instruments, rulers, pencils, desks, etc.)
 - record themselves repeating the sentences with the rhythm they have invented
 - play their recordings or say the sentences live in front of their classmates. (In this way, they are teaching each other the academic language from the unit.)
 - answer [higher-order thinking questions](#) that you've included.

8. *Formative Assessment:* Students ask each other to put the terms in their own words and/or show images of the terms and other groups have to identify them and explain what they are – with the rhythm invented by that group.
9. *Reflection:* Students write 75-100 words on how it felt to interact with the information through rhythm.

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