

# Scaffolding Academic Language with 'What's Missing?' (Primary) Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.

*theory behind the scaffold...*



'Intelligence is not necessarily hereditary. Education can transform a child' asserts Karl Witte\*, a pioneer in blended learning. We have the tools, he says, to help our students to change the course of their academic and then professional lives, no matter the level of their abilities before they enter our classes. First we have to believe this concept (have high expectations), and then we need to be proactive in presenting the appropriate tools to our students. We fill our lessons with activities and techniques that will give them opportunities to build a solid foundation of knowledge upon which they construct their thinking. We identify and elucidate academic language before beginning a lesson, unit or project, and create exercises geared toward developing verbal, oral, and aural skills.

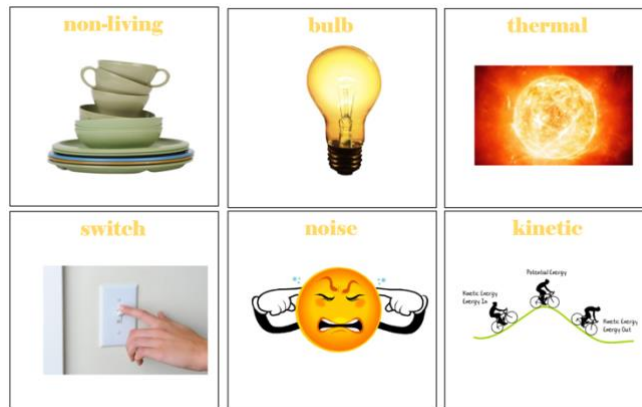
Academic language is so important that experts assert that the warehouse of words a person has stored away is directly connected to their quality of thinking: higher quality of words equals higher quality of thinking.\*\* In this age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the quality of thinking our students reach in our classes, will be the difference between being qualified for jobs that technology is (still) not capable of performing, and watching the world from the sidelines.

While evidence shows that passive vocabulary programs work in the short-term - to pass exams or to understand a text in the moment - these programs are ineffective in the long-term and in raising overall comprehension. Our students need to interact with first-, second- and third-tier words,\*\*\* through activities that gently push the from basic to more sophisticated vocabulary and phrases.

This scaffold is one way of achieving this goal. You will be helping your students to feel more confident, to express themselves with more clarity, and to have more possibilities of achieving success in and out of school. Students learn concepts and definitions through interaction with images and text and high-level memorisation strategies. The example given here is from a lesson on Natural Science (energy). You'll see how you can adapt it to any topic you're about to introduce.

## Step by Step:

1. Choose 15-20 academic words, phrases or concepts from the chapter, unit, experiment, sport your students are about to begin. Place them in textboxes (see example below).
2. Choose images that correspond to each word/concept and place them below the words in the textboxes. (See example below and find template [here](#).)



3. Create a table with the academic language you've chosen, and sentences using that word, term, or phrase.
4. Create a PPT of standard definitions to share with them after they've filled out their tables. You can use [Collins COBUILD Dictionary](#) for both sentence examples and definitions.
5. Include a column for them to write their own definition of the word. (See example below and find template [here](#).)

ACADEMIC TERM	TERM USED IN SENTENCES	OUR DEFINITION OF THE TERM	STANDARD DEFINITION OF THE TERM (How close were we?!)
bulb	When I turn on the switch, the bulb lights up.	<i>A bulb is an object that projects light when it is charged with electricity.</i>	
kinetic	A bird flying shows kinetic energy.		
noise	The band made a lot of noise outside my bedroom.		
non-living	Plates are non-living things.		
switch	To turn on the light, I need to find the switch.		
thermal	The sun is one type of thermal energy.		

6. Make a set of these text boxes (cut up individually) and the table for each pair of students.

7. Students interact with the text boxes and tables in the following way:
  - a) Student ONE places six (6) text boxes face up on the desk.
  - b) Student TWO has 10 seconds to study the information in the text boxes and then closes her/his eyes (or turns away).
  - c) Student ONE removes one of the text boxes, mixes up the other five, and tells Student TWO to open her/his eyes (or turn back).
  - d) Student TWO identifies the missing text box by:
    - i) saying the word, term or phrase that is missing *or*
    - ii) by describing the image

*[Note: Students can use the sentences in the table to help them verbalise the missing text boxes.]*
8. Student TWO then adds a text box from the pile, the pair continues the activity with the same dynamic (Student ONE turns away and Student TWO removes a text box).
9. The activity continues until you are satisfied that the students have learnt the words/concepts thoroughly.
10. Give students time to fill in the third column ('Our definition of the term'.)
11. *Formative Assessment:* Show PPT with text boxes, and pairs of students take turns identifying them linguistically, describing the images, and offering their definitions of the academic terms. Share standard definitions, which they include in their table, and be as enthusiastic as possible when comparing theirs with the ones you present from a [standard source](#).
12. *Reflection:* Students write 75-100 words on the dynamic of the activity and how they feel the activity will help them remember the academic language in the future.

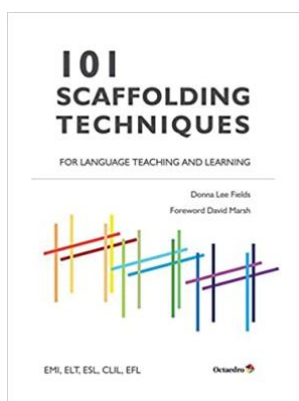
\*Witte, Karl (1914). The Education of Karl Witte: Or, The Training of the Child. New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

\*\*Zwiers, Jeff & Crawford, Marie (2011). *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings, USA*, Stenhouse Publishers.

\*\*\*Beck, Isabel L. (2008). *Creating Robust Vocabulary*, New York, Guildford Publishing.

\*\*\*\* Recommended dictionary for sentence examples: *Collins COBUILD dictionary*

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*video explanation of the scaffold...*



*transcript of video explanation...*

Hi, I'm Donna Fields and welcome to Scaffolding Video 6, a series of webinars designed to give you support for using scaffolding in your classroom.

Scaffolding is used to bridge learning gaps between what the student has learned in the past, to what they're expected to know at certain points in their education. (I say 'giving a helping hand'!)

You can find these techniques in my book *101 Scaffolding Techniques for Language Teaching and Learning* that's also been translated into Spanish.

Today's objective is to show how to use scaffolding technique #61 can be used to teach academic language. I'll give you examples for a primary and secondary class and you can adapt them to any lessons you give.

Scaffolding technique #61 helps activate more sophisticated memory skills. Instead of rote memorization, which is a practice that usually goes into short-term memory and then quickly forgotten, we want to help students embed words and terms in their long-term memory. How do we do this?

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Let's look at a secondary political science class. We're about to teach a chapter on the history Rome's government. The text is designed for secondary students; however, if you have students whose home language is different from that of the text, you'll need to give them language support so that they assimilate the content with far less stress. (Frankly, even students whose language is English, in this case, might have problems with the vocabulary if they are not well-read!)

First, we identify words and terms that might be foreign to students or that might have different meanings in different subject areas.

Second, type these words into textboxes. (I'm showing you six of the words I've chosen. I'd usually make a set of 15-20 words for this activity.)

Third, find an image to add to each textbox. Studies show that using images plus text doubles the learning impact. You can find literal images of the word and that pushes students even further to distinguish between more than one meaning of the same word.

Fourth, give the students the tools that will help them feel confident when speaking. Prepare and handout a 'decipher sheet' that shows the words you've identified, their meanings *in the context of the text they're going to read*, and sentences using those words *in that context*.\*\*\*\*

Now, the activity. Give each pair a set of the text boxes cut up individually. They place 5-6 of them down at a time. One student turns around while the other student takes one of the cards away. The first student turns back and has to remember which card is missing, say the word, describe the image, define it and use the word in a sentence. (You can decide if they can read the definition and sentence from the decipher sheet.)

The activity continues until you're convinced that the students have assimilated the meaning of the words fairly well. (I would say 15-20 minutes maximum.) You can always repeat the activity another time.

Let's try this in a primary natural science class. We're about to begin a chapter on 'Energy'. I usually go to the review pages at the end of the chapter because that's where we'll find *all* the vocabulary the students will need to know. instead of trying to find them throughout the chapter.

Same as before, we identify academic words. The obvious ones are highlighted: kinetic, electrical, chemical, light, sound, thermal. However, for students whose home language is other than the language of this text, there are more academic words that are not so obvious such as: forms, heat, non-living, knife, plug, burn, bulb, noise, switch.

- We put these words into text boxes.
- Add images.
- In primary, I'd say it's less important to stress the definition than to use the words in sentences. The images are fairly self-explanatory. Here's a table you can give them.
- Cut up the textboxes individually.
- Give a set to each pair of students.
- One student turns around, the other student takes one away one of the textboxes.
- The first student turns back and needs to remember the missing word, state the word, describe the image, and use it in a sentence.
- The activity continues until the students are more comfortable with the words and are able to use them in sentences fairly easily.

And that's it! A scaffolding technique you can try in your classes to help your students learn academic language.

So, all you SUPER TEACHERS I hope to see you next time. Please send any comments you may have.

You can find me at these sites:

<https://scaffoldingmagic.com/>

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In the meantime, have fun in your classes! Bye!