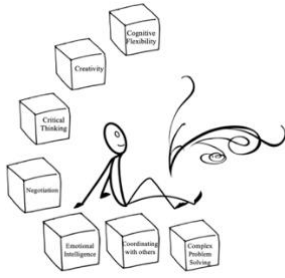


# Scaffolding Texts through Verbal Deliberation (Higher Education)

Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.



*theory behind scaffold...*

Language is the most powerful, most readily available tool we have to paint a portrait, landscape, still life and history of what we experience - realistic and abstract all at once - and one to send out to the world to represent ourselves.\* When we show our students how to use language – not only to understand it and analyse it – but to embrace it as a means with which they become connected to understanding and internalising different perspectives in texts, then we've given them a critical reading tool they'll have for life.

Excerpts used in most textbooks are written in the passive, and so often devoid of a personal voice. Because of this, being able to connect to them to build empathy or to form a personal connection with the prose – a dynamic that helps the reader assimilate new knowledge more readily - becomes challenging.

This scaffold helps students to become personally involved in whatever text they are asked to read. The technique includes transforming a passive tense into active connection, by using verbal reasoning to aid in the reading of new material. In this way, the reader has the opportunity to build a mental representation of the text by thinking critically and deliberately. The stress on creating an active dialogue helps students to maintain active nodes (that might otherwise be passive). The construct of knowledge, therefore, becomes stronger and can be accessed longer.

Students who have never been formally taught critical reading skills, are challenged with, among other elements, a restricted vocabulary, a decidedly limited knowledge base, a literal (and so limited) interpretation of texts, and an unawareness of how they can monitor their own understanding of what they read.\*\*

The technique presented in this scaffold will serve, to a large extent, to fill in these gaps. The idea is to simulate a social exchange with the absent author.\*\*\* The example we give here is from a text in a language book about different homes, and you'll see how you can adapt it to whatever text you are going to present.

*step by step...*

1. Choose a text or article that your students need to read.



2. Your students read the text and verbalise their thoughts. You'll ask them to include, for example:
  - any and all linguistic clues – deliberate and subversive – that might help them to contextualise the text for themselves.
  - grammar, vocabulary, tone of voice, personalisation or lack of, etc.
3. While students read the text sentence-by-sentence, you want to encourage them to have a continual dialogue about any and all elements they can identify.
4. Students take notes during their deliberations. (See example of a verbal deliberation below.)

[Example:](#)

## ARTICLE

One of the first and most fundamental lessons that a student of modern Anglo-American land law must learn is that land does not matter in private legal disputes over land.<sup>1</sup> The law regards land as no more than a ‘thing’, and against a more ‘intuitive’<sup>2</sup> perspective, ‘things’ have been largely irrelevant to law since at least the time of Jeremy Bentham<sup>3</sup> according to the ‘dephysicalised’<sup>4</sup> concept of property that characterises modern private law. Disputes over land, as the law teacher explains it, are not over ‘things’ at all—they are over ‘rights’.<sup>5</sup> Rights, the teacher continues, are the abstract entitlements that constitute property in its entirety. Land, should it figure at all, will appear only as the ‘thing’ over which the ‘right’ is held. This minor detail cannot obscure the relevant analysis of the relativity of the competing ‘rights’ in disputes of private law concerning land—unless the dispute concerns some public law restriction of that right, in which case it may indeed be a dispute between different categories of law: private and public.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, at law, at least in its category of private law (which underpins the market economy) land is a ‘thing’, a fungible and tradeable commodity, indistinguishable from other ‘things’. The contention of this article is, to the contrary, that land is not a thing. The dephysicalisation of land in law has adverse and material consequences that relate to the environmental unsustainability of the status quo.<sup>7</sup> Teaching law as though land is a ‘thing’ implicates legal education in the reproduction of existing conditions.

## VERBAL DELIBERATION

1. The text tries to immediately polarize Anglo-American law and those laws that recognise the rights of inanimate subjects.’
2. The voice assumes the reader is more of a proponent of treating the land as a plaintiff with feelings and rights, and the tone is one of ridicule for those that think in this way.
3. There is a condescension for those who did not know that there was switch in thinking at a determined period of time, and that that time was defined by the presentation of dephysicalised’ concept by Jeremy Bentham.
4. The adjective ‘minor’ when referring to ‘detail’ is also leading, as it again contextualizes the knowledge into something that the reader should already have known, and the insinuation is that that lack of knowledge is a flagrant demonstration of ignorance.
5. Again, the adjectives used here – ‘fungible’, ‘tradeable’, ‘indistinguishable’ when referring to land – add emphasis to the idea that the reader should exempt this subject from any anthropomorphic setting or perspective.
6. The continual passive tense aids the author(s) in the depersonalization of the subject. With no personal voice to connect to, the reader is almost hypnotized into viewing the land in a disconnected manner – exactly what the crux of the article is trying to support.
7. Etc.

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5. *Formative Evaluation/Reflection*: Students write 2 lower-level questions and 2 higher-order level questions and share them with their classmates. These questions ideally address content and methodology.



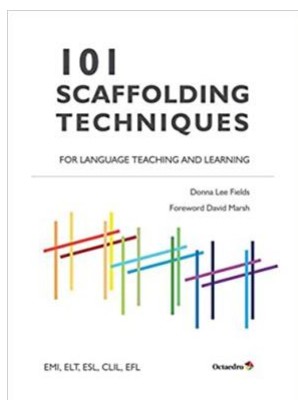
\* [National Council of Teachers of English \[NCTE\] & International Reading Association \[IRA\], 1996, p. 12](#)

\*\*[Toward a Definition of Verbal Reasoning in Higher Education](#) (pp. 10-11)

\*\*\*[Historical Thinking and other Unnatural Acts](#) (p. 72)

\*\*\*\*[Benefits of concept maps as assessments](#)

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