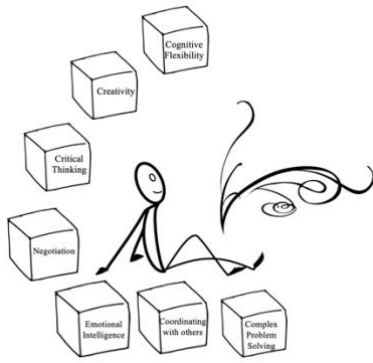


Scaffolding Texts through Verbal Deliberation (Primary)

Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.



theory behind the 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 story or text 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 from the chart below.)

Example:

Text	Verbal Deliberation (two students taking turns)
1. Mongolia is a cold country in Asia.	This is very simple language. I'm glad that I understand it. I feel cold reading that Mongolia is cold!
2. In Mongolia, about half the population are nomads.	I don't know what 'nomads' are. Maybe the author will explain that in the next sentence.
3. They move around the country with their animals.	I guess a 'nomad' is someone who moves around the country with their animals. That sounds interesting. Are their animals cold? Where do they eat? What do they live in?
4. Their traditional house is a yurt. The Mongolian name is ger.	They live in houses? What does a 'yurt' look like? How do you pronounce 'ger'? Every sentence gives me more questions.
5. Yurts are very warm in winter and cool in summer.	Does 'cool' mean 'cold'? What is the difference? My house in the mountains is warm in the winter and cold in the summer. We are very lucky.

8. *Formative Evaluation/Reflection:* Answer the following questions inspired by the [Question Continuum](#). These questions ideally address content and methodology.



- Are all Mongolians nomads?
- Which season is best to live in a *yurt* - the summer or winter?
- Who identified the most interesting elements during your verbal deliberation?
- When is it most effective to use the dynamic of verbal deliberation?
- Where is Mongolia?
- What is the purpose of verbal deliberation?
- How could you identify a tribe of Mongolians?
- Why are there different interpretations of the same sentences?

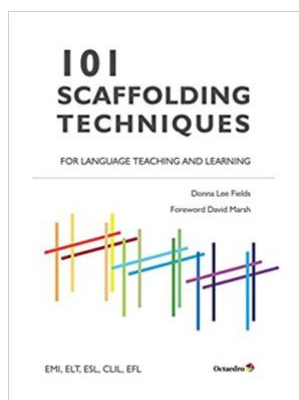
- What if you could have read the text without verbalising it with your partner. Do you think you would understand it in the same way? Explain.

* [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)

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