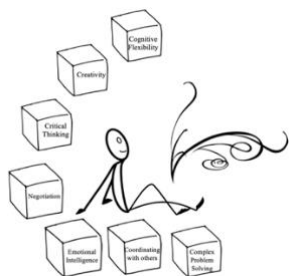


# Scaffolding Texts through Verbal Deliberation (Secondary)

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*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:

Excerpts from the Text	Verbal Deliberation on the Excerpt
1. Natural disasters can bring out the best and the worst in people.	The text begins by comparing two types of people. It feels like the author is judging me.
2. Some people take the opportunity to loot shops or steal cars or set fire to buildings.	This seems like the worst choices that we can make. I don't know what 'looting' is, but it sounds bad.
3. Others try to save lives and make a terrible situation better.	I'm glad that the text also comments on the best choices we can make. I notice that there is a superlative here ('better')
4. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in the morning of 29 <sup>th</sup> , August 2005, it was the sixth strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded, and the third most powerful to hit the USA.	What about the other 5? Why do we always hear about things that happen in the United States? Aren't people in other countries important? This is a good way to review superlatives, though ('strongest', 'most powerful')
5. John Keller, an ex-marine with military experience in Iraq, was 38 years old when the hurricane hit, over two metres tall and weighing 118 kilos.	Even though this is about an American soldier, this sounds interesting. I think he made a positive choice. I'm not sure if the 2 metres tall refers to the hurricane or John Keller. That's confusing.
6. Keller knew that he could survive. He could have simply got into a boat and paddled his way to safety.	I don't know what 'paddle' means, but it seems that Keller didn't choose to survive. I think what the author means by 'survive' is 'escape danger.'. He either died or he made another choice. I wonder what it was.

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



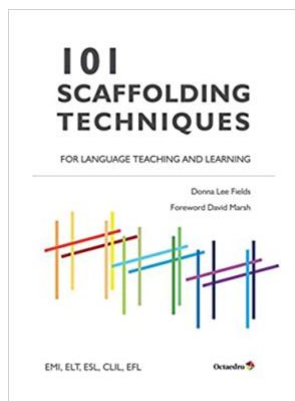
- Are all disasters caused by humans?
- Which type of natural disasters are most dangerous to humans?
- Who in your team expressed the most interesting observations while you were participating in the verbal deliberations?
- When did Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans?
- What is the purpose of verbal deliberations?
- How could you have used the activity more to your advantage?
- Why is it important to do a preliminary activity before reading a dense text?
- What if you could predict natural disasters. How would you warn the people in the corresponding areas?

\* [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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