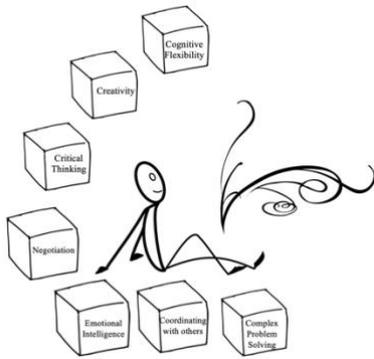


Scaffolding Texts through Verbal Deliberation (Pre-School/Lower Primary)

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theory behind the scaffold...

Language is the most powerful, most readily available tool we have for representing the world to ourselves and ourselves to the world.* Up until three years of age, children organise information visually. After this turning point, they need to verbalise knowledge to understand it.* Presenting activities that give them the opportunity to verbalise what they see, helps them to develop more language.

Much of the materials they will see in their later school years is depersonalized – that is, the texts are presented in a way that does not reach out to them, does not include them, the language is written in passive, or it ignores the reader. We can take advantage of the time we have with them as very young learners and help them learn to connect and verbalise as much of what we present to them in the classroom as possible. Most Pre-School teachers are masters at infusing material with connections; what we forget to do, however, is to let students take this responsibility, and make connections for themselves.

This scaffold encourages students to become personally involved in whatever images they see or stories that listen to. The technique includes using verbal reasoning to aid in the reading of new material – so that the Pre-Schoolers have the opportunity to build mental representations of the words connected to the images and/or stories through critical thinking and deliberation. The active dialogue while reading helps them to maintain active nodes (that might otherwise be passive), and the construct of knowledge then becomes stronger and can be accessed longer.

This scaffold fills this void. The technique uses critical thinking and verbal deliberation to make connections with what seems impersonal. Our young students will be actively dialoguing with each other while they consider images, listen to songs, or stories and this helps their brains to remain active. In this way, they'll remember the material more deeply and for longer. The example we give here is from an art lesson, and you'll see how you can adapt it to whatever story you are going to present.

Step by step:

1. Choose a story, song or images that are in the unit you're about to begin.
2. As a class, you can model the activity and then see if your students can work in pairs and repeat it together.



VERBAL DELIBERATION

Teacher: We're going to draw some pictures that are very similar to the ones we see here. What colours do you see?

Students: We see red, green, blue, yellow...

Teacher: How does red make you feel? Does it make you feel angry, calm, nervous, happy?

Students: (We feel calm.)

Teacher: (Name as many colours as you wish and repeat the question about 'how does it make you feel'. Emotions are an important way of students connecting to educational material.)

Teacher: And what type of animal do you see?

Students: It is a mouse, a girl mouse.

Teacher: Does she look happy, sad, pensive, distracted? (It's important to use sophisticated academic language with Pre-Schoolers. In this way, they will learn these words organically. You may have to explain them in the beginning, but later they will be part of their own vocabulary.)

Students: (She looks pensive.)

Teacher: What is the mouse doing?

Students: (The mouse is sitting. The mouse is thinking.)

Teacher: Does the mouse have brothers or sisters? Cousins? Aunts and uncles?

Students: (The mouse has three brothers. The mouse has ten sisters.)

Teacher: What do you think her favourite song is?

Students: (Her favourite song is ['The Power of Yet'](#)!)

Teacher: Who can tell me what her favourite book is?

Students: (My favourite book is [Going on a Bear Hunt](#).)

Teacher: Who would like to be friends with her? Why?

Students: (I want to be friends with her. She looks nice.)

Teacher: What does her house look like?

Students: (Her house is small and many colours.)

Teacher: How about we all draw her house? Everyone can draw a different house if you'd like. And then perhaps we can draw her in her house. Shall we do that?



3. *Formative assessment:* Give pairs of students a second illustration and ask them to work in pairs and repeat the above dynamic as much as possible.
4. *Reflection:* Students tell their partner if they liked inventing details about the characters they saw in the illustration (or the animals they heard in a song, or the people they heard about in a story, etc.), and why.

[* 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)