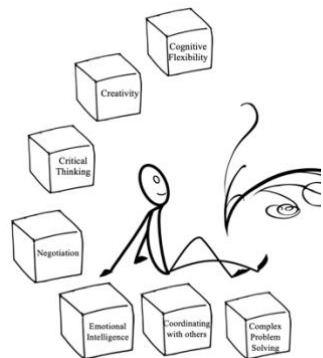# Scaffolding Academic Language by Identifying Visual Differences (Higher Education)

Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.

theory behind the scaffold...

Studies show that while memorising academic language is effective in the short term - to pass exams, for instance, in the long-term it is an ineffective way of learning terms that students can use in context*. Without having analysed, compared, categorised, and defended their own ideas through the use of these terms, most students will forget their meanings as quickly as they learned them.

What can we do? The solution is easy. We create opportunities for our students to analyse, compare, categorise, and defend their own ideas through the use of these terms.

And let's add one more element: writing. According to experts, writing is the most difficult skill for language learners to master. The challenge lies not only in our students using their cognitive skills to generat and organise their thoughts, but also in transferring their ideas into comprehensible prose – all this, and in the classroom language as well!

The meta-skills involved in writing are highly complex. When language learners compose their thoughts to put into writing, not only do they have to attend to the lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, etc , but of the higher level skills, including planning and organising, plus expressing themselves in the classroom language.The challenge becomes even more pronounced if even proficiency in their home language is weak.**

This scaffold combines the development of visual, verbal and writing skills to raise the assimilation of academic language, so that students' linguistic development is supported on three rising levels. We suggest the added inclusion of *translanguaging* (judiciously using translations of students' home language to clarify terms), to surround the student with as many support beams as possible, thus making the successful assimilation of difficult terms more likely - in the classroom *and* homelanguage.

At its base, this scaffold makes the learning points visible to students, which is a key component in encouraging our students to interact more enthusiastically in their own learning.***

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* Zwiers, Jeff (2011), *Academic Conversations* Stenhouse Publishers
** *Richards, Jack C. and Renandya, Willy A. (2002). Methodology in Language Teaching, New York, Cambridge University Press.*
*** *Hattie, John Visible Learning*

step by step...

The concept of this scaffold is to distinguish between two ostensibly identical images - that originate from your students' books or any resource you may be using. Some images appear in different places on the two copies, so that students are motivated to verbalise, negotiate and later write the differences between the two.

You want to choose and manipulate those images that highlight key vocabulary, terms, and/or phrases from the unit so that students are using, repeating and clarifying these terms, thus deepening their knowledge of their meaning.

5. Choose a page with an image from a lesson, unit or project you are about to begin, that has an overview of the academic concepts included. (See example below.)
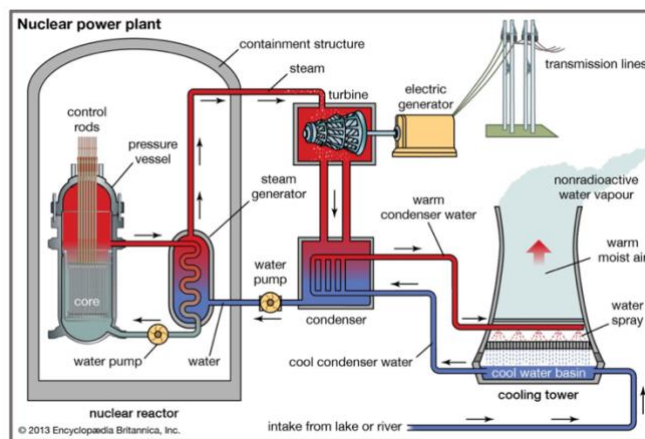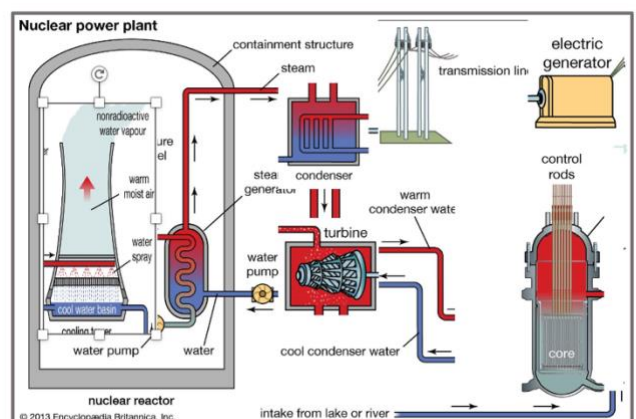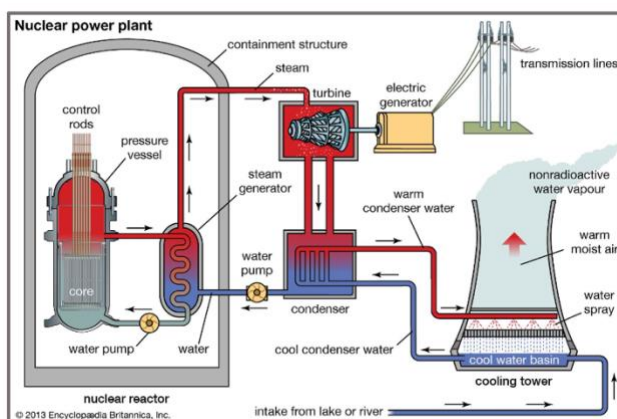

6. Enlarge the image and make two copies of it.

7. Choose images from the main image, copy them, and paste them in another place on the duplicated image. *(See example below.)*

Original   Manipulated

4. Prepare and give your students a list of prepositions of location, and cardinal numbers.

to the right of...	1st first
to the left of...	2nd second

in the upper right-hand corner	3rd...third
in the bottom left-hand corner	4th...fourth
upside down	5th...fifth
switch places	6th...sixth
at the top	7th...seventh
at the bottom	8th...eighth
	9th...ninth
	10th...tenth

5. Explain that they will work together in pairs to verbalise the differences they see between the two copies. They repeat everything each of them says (thus reinforcing academic language and prepositions of location.)

   Example:

   Student 1:   First difference: In the original image, the control rods are on the left, a part of the nuclear reactor, and connected to the water pump. On the manipulated image, the control rods are on the bottom right-hand corner.

   Student 2:   Yes. I see that. (repeating)... In the image on the left, the control rods are on the left, a part of the nuclear reactor, and connected to the water pump. On the image on the left, the control rods are on the bottom right-hand corner.
   Second difference: In the original image, the turbine is at the top centre and connected to the electric generator. In the manipulated image, the turbine is at the bottom entre.

   Student 1:   Yes. I see that. (repeating)... In the original image, the turbine is at the top centre and connected to the electric generator. In the manipulated image, the turbine is at the bottom entre.
   Third difference: etc.

   (Remember - **we need to maintain high expectations**. These sentences are not extremely complicated, they are simply putting together all the information that the students have in front of them. If we model doing this, they will be able to - maybe not the first or second time, but by the third time, you'll see how proud your students are of their ability to form these extended sentences.)

8. *Formative Assessment:* In pairs, students write 8-10 points on the main connections of a nuclear power plant.

9. *Reflection*: Students answer the following questions from the Question Continuum. (*Remember, some questions reflect content and others reflect methodology thus augmenting even further* self-efficacy.)

- Do you know the main connectors of a nuclear power plant?
- Which are the most important connections in a nuclear power plant?
- Who is responsible for maintaining the security of a nuclear power plant?
- When is power from a nuclear power plant used?
- Where are nuclear power plants in your area?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a nuclear power plant?
- How do communities react when a nuclear power plant is proposed and/or constructed in their area?
- Why were nuclear power plants invented?
- What if you were given the opportunity to close all nuclear power plants? Would you support the decision and if so, how would you structure the closures and what alternative energy would you offer the communities?

find more scaffolds here...
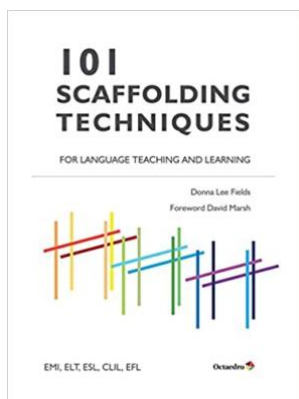
amazon.com

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video explanation...

transcript of video explanation…

Hi, I'm Donna Fields and welcome to CLIL Scaffolding 13. It's a series of webinars designed to help give you support for using scaffolding in your lessons. Today we're going to use scaffolding technique #112.

One hundred and one more of these techniques can be found in my book: *101 Scaffolding Techniques for Language Teaching and Learning* that has also been translated into Spanish.

I'm working with a school that has just turned over to student-centred learning and both the teachers and the students are getting used to the change. The scaffold I'm presenting here is intentionally not as active as some of the others, because the students aren't yet at the point where they can learn autonomously with a lot of movement and materials. We're moving towards that gradually. You'll also notice that we're going to scaffold the scaffold!

Let's start with Secondary in a language class. Here is a page the students need to read and learn. This a mixed-level class so we need to present a scaffold that will challenge the more advanced students and support the lower-level students. What can we do? We want to make the information as visible as possible because first of all text plus images doubles the learning and when we make learning visible we help the students to learn to become their own teachers, which is a crucial component in lifelong learning.

Here is a visible way of seeing the same information. You see I've taken the background photo from the page, taken language that is potentially difficult for the students, found images to represent this language and inserted it in the picture. I've done this twice. If you look at both at the same time, you'll see that there are different images in both pictures, but placed in the same locations. This means the students will have to look back and forth and focus on the differences, describe those differences, and in so doing, teach themselves the academic language that they'll find in the text they will later be responsible for reading.

How do we begin?

We begin with a short power point first, presenting the phrases the students would need to use during an oral exam. Next, we present the academic language we've made visible. We go over the academic language quickly and use translanguaging techniques if necessary to make sure that everyone has a strong understanding of the vocabulary, terms and phrasal verbs.

Our next step is to model what we expect the students to do in their pair work. We begin: Top: In the lower-left-hand corner of the photo there is a clock that says nine-thirty. Bottom: However, in the lower-left hand corner, there is a clock that says midnight.

Using a formative assessment technique** we make sure that all the students understand the task.

Then, we give the photos to each pair of students with a sheet that includes the terms we just went over plus lines where they will write their observations. Any time you can include writing in the tasks, we're helping our students to practice key writing skills: planning, drafting, revising and editing.

Let's try this with a Primary Social Science lesson. Now, this is a little different and also a bit easier because the book provides images and they are easily cut and pasted in different places.

As you see, the images on the two pages are all in different places. So again, we begin with a short Power Point and introduce the terms to identify the images the students will be talking about. We also

review the academic language they'll be using so we're sure they understand what they're talking about.

Next, we model the task so they know one way to complete the activity:

Top: The recycling plant is on the upper left.
Bottom: The recycling plant is on the lower left.

Last, we give them both photos, the academic language, and a place to write down their sentences after they've formed them orally with their partners.

And that's it! Another simple scaffolding technique that I hope you can use in your classes. And look at the skills you've helped your students work on!

So all you SUPER TEACHERS out there, I look forward to any comments you have and how you've used the techniques. I look forward to seeing you next time and have fun in your classes! Bye!

You can find me at:

https://scaffoldingmagic.com/

and

Linkedin
Pinterest
Facebook
Instagram
Tiktok (scaffoldingscaffolds)

* Richards, Jack C. and Renandya, Willy A. (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
** Wiliam, Dylan (2011). *Embedded Formative Assessment*. Bloomington, IN. Solution Tree Press.