Expanding teacher understanding of scaffolding for multilingual learners: A video-based observation tool incorporating a language-based approach to content instruction

Alissa Blair, Luciana C. de Oliveira, & Mary A. Avalos

Tailored for teacher education coursework and professional learning, a video-based observation tool – incorporating the language-based approach to content instruction (LACI) six Cs of Support – fosters reflection and expands teacher understanding about scaffolding for multilingual learners in general education classrooms.
Keywords: scaffolding, multilingual learners, teacher education, university coursework, professional learning, video observation, teacher reflection

> "After reviewing the six Cs of Support, it became obvious that there should have been a way to incorporate higher order thinking and reasoning skills into the lesson. I was assigning problems that simply asked them to apply what they had learned and observed in class in a very simplistic manner. Had I attempted to get the students to work out a word problem that required them to use what they had been learning in a different, more challenging manner, I believe that they would have internalized the information better and learned some valuable lessons as well."
>
> –Middle School Math Teacher

This quote illustrates a teacher's keen insights about the need for scaffolding and possible options for supporting multilingual learners (MLs) in a middle school mathematics classroom. The teacher arrived at these insights by reflecting on a video recording of his instruction using the language-based approach to content instruction (LACI) six Cs of Support Tool. Positive reception of the tool by middle and secondary content-area teachers enrolled in M.S. Ed. TESOL program coursework encouraged us to share the tool with other teacher educators and professional learning facilitators as well as the underlying principles and considerations for use.

Pre-service and in-service teachers often come into education courses and professional learning with certain ideas of scaffolding (Bunch & Lang, 2022). Many times, these ideas do not reflect the dynamic nature of language development nor the unique backgrounds, assets, and needs of MLs. In the absence of adequate teacher preparation or training to dynamically scaffold learning, many teachers overuse token strategies and underuse others, unintentionally limiting MLs' active participation in classroom discussions (Daniel et al., 2016) and conceptual sensemaking (Alvarez et al., 2023). Engaging novice teachers of MLs in reflecting on video-recorded instruction with a tool such as this addresses several important aspects of learning to scaffold, whether in teacher education coursework, professional learning, or both. The LACI six Cs of Support Tool enables teachers to recognize differences between the intended and employed scaffolding in a lesson, that is, *macro scaffolding* or scaffolding anticipated and incorporated into the front-end of instruction while lesson planning. Additionally, it enables teachers to observe how MLs respond to scaffolding, which promotes a more student-centered reflection. Moreover, it encourages teachers to be intentional about in-the-moment scaffolding decisions, also known as *micro*

scaffolding, where teachers dynamically gauge and respond to students' participation in real time.

The six Cs of support

The video observation tool is based on the LACI six Cs of Support (de Oliveira, 2016, 2020; de Oliveira et al., 2021). LACI emphasizes teaching content through language, which provides MLs with access to grade-level content while simultaneously supporting language development. The six Cs of Support encompass means to scaffold drawn from literature on language and literacy development in classroom-based contexts with culturally and linguistically diverse students as well as culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.

The C of *connection* refers to the ways in which teachers connect pedagogy and curriculum to students' prior knowledge, backgrounds, experiences, and interests including points covered in class (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Teachers may draw on students' knowledge in ways that make content explicit, creating a more inclusive, engaging learning environment and supporting MLs in understanding new content while developing their language skills (e.g., Blair et al., 2018; Keefer et al., 2020).

The C of *culture* enables students to build on prior knowledge by accessing cultural and linguistic resources (Moll et al., 1992). Students' "funds of knowledge," that is, their linguistic and cultural resources rooted in home communities, are used to support academic learning as MLs develop new resources to be able to participate in new situations, thereby enhancing opportunities for students to learn and fostering connections between home and school (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019).

The C of *code-breaking* involves explicitly teaching ways of doing school, academic literacy, and disciplinary, linguistic, and cultural codes of content learning (Fang, 2023; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014). This C of Support highlights the integration of language and content as inseparable instructional components. The focus on academic literacy as a process of making academic dimensions of content transparent for MLs includes bridging everyday and academic language as essential for understanding of content and occurring on a continuum (Gui & de Oliveira, 2024; Molle et al., 2021).

The C of *challenge* relates to classroom goals and activities that explore disciplinary literacy and higher-order thinking and reasoning. Classroom instruction should be targeted at a balance of high challenge and high support. Teachers need to set high expectations and standards for what is possible for MLs to achieve, focusing on productive, targeted supports to engage them in challenging curriculum (Athanases, 2012; Hammond, 2009).

The C of *community and collaboration* refers to joint productive activity in which students co-construct knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teachers create communities of learners where all students participate in activities to socially construct knowledge (Cooper & Slavin, 2001; Nieto, 2000).

The C of *classroom interactions* refers to what teachers can do to increase MLs' engagement in teacher-student interactions, especially during teacher-led question-and-answer sequences. With interactional scaffolding, teachers gauge MLs' needs and adapt their facilitation of classroom

discourse in the moment so MLs at all English language proficiency levels are able to share ideas, discuss content, and participate in classroom interactions.

The six Cs of support video observation tool

The tool was designed to guide teachers in observing, taking notes, and reflecting on a video clip of a content-focused lesson with the six Cs of Support as a lens to analyze instruction. The design of the tool is based on the following principles about engaging teachers in acquiring or refining an instructional practice such as scaffolding:

1. We have to break down a practice into manageable parts in order to fully recognize or implement the practice in its entirety (Grossman et al., 2009).
2. Reflection requires systematic inquiry of a problem of practice to ensure deeper insight into underlying causes and potential improvements (Senese, 2017).
3. Video affords the ability to capture and (re)view lesson activities, anchoring teachers' observations in evidence and prompting them to substantiate their insights (Grant & Kline, 2010).

As illustrated below, the tool is organized by the LACI six Cs of Support and consists of broad guiding questions as well as illustrative examples for the user to closely observe the video and note in the provided spaces examples, contrary examples, and missed opportunities to scaffold instruction using the six Cs of Support as a lens (see linked document in the Appendix). This organization enables the user to systematically isolate and recognize different aspects of scaffolding. Synthesizing questions at the end promote reflection on the overall lesson, prompting the user to draw evidence from the noted successful and less-than-successful instances of scaffolding.

This tool is different from other observation tools such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The LACI six Cs of Support Tool centers the teacher in the reflection process and, in its theoretical orientation, prioritizes access to grade-level texts by discussing and manipulating language (de Oliveira, 2023). A separate resource, informed by the same foundations, was created to guide lesson planning (see de Oliveira, 2020). SIOP, on the other hand, aims to make content and language comprehensible through adapted lesson delivery and texts with instructional practices and an evaluative observation completed by an external observer (Echevarria et al., 2012).

How to use the LACI six Cs of support tool

Professional learning facilitators and instructional coaches can utilize this tool to engage groups of teachers in reflecting on their practice, and teacher educators can utilize this tool to support pre-service and in-service teachers as they learn about scaffolding within a teacher preparation program. The following are some suggestions for incorporating the tool into a focused study of scaffolding, particularly within the context of a TESOL or content-area methods course.

1. To assess teachers' current understanding of scaffolding, teacher educators could ask participants in the class to conduct a brainstorm or written reflection. This would provide a baseline by which to compare subsequent understandings of scaffolding and thus engage participants in becoming aware of their own learning process.

2. To familiarize participants with the theoretical underpinnings, the teacher educator could introduce and build students' knowledge of the LACI framework through readings and discussion and other learning activities. Deepening participants' understandings of the framework would hone their lenses for investigating scaffolding and as a problem of practice when applied to their own instructional contexts.

3. To familiarize students with the tool itself, the teacher educator and participants could observe a video-recorded lesson together using the tool. They could discuss what they observe in terms of scaffolding with video evidence, as well as how those scaffolding practices might relate to the six Cs of Support. In addition to illustrating the process, this activity could clarify the framework and generate conversation about the timing and use of scaffolding over the course of a lesson.

4. As a course assignment, observing a video-recorded clip of a lesson using the LACI six Cs of Support Tool would help participants make a connection between theory and practice, that is, the framework for emphasizing access to content through language, and their current implementation of scaffolding techniques.

5. In addition to being used as an assignment, the tool could also be used as a method of data collection to explore participants' shifting understandings of scaffolding or as evidence of the learning-teaching process.

Ultimately, the focus is not on teachers memorizing the Cs of Support or merely identifying examples of scaffolding according to this framework. Rather, the main goal is to expose teachers to a variety of scaffolding practices and enhance their ability to apply these practices to better support, challenge, and engage MLs in language-based content-area instruction. With an established theoretical foundation and design principles incorporating teacher reflection, the LACI six Cs of Support Observation Tool serves as a valuable heuristic for teacher educators tasked with preparing all teachers to serve MLs. The merits of reflection and practical application is exemplified by the insights of the middle school math teacher who recognized the need to incorporate higher-order thinking and application-based scenarios into his lessons after engaging with the LACI framework. Reflections such as these, facilitated by tools like the LACI six Cs of Support Observation Tool can lead to profound insights and improvements in instructional practices to enhance the learning experiences of MLs.

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Appendix

[LACI Six Cs of Support Tool](#)

Author bios

Alissa Blair, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Arkansas. Alissa's research examines the education of K-12 multilingual learners in relation to language and literacy development in the content-areas, bilingual education, collaborative home-school partnerships, and teacher education. Her work has appeared in peer reviewed journals including *TESOL Quarterly*, *Review of Research in Education*, *Bilingual Research Journal*, *Linguistics and Education*, and *Theory Into Practice*, among others. Alissa is passionate about working with educators and families to make schooling more just and nurturing for culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth.
contact: ab139@uark.edu

Luciana C. de Oliveira, Ph.D. is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies in the School of Education and Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research focuses on issues related to teaching multilingual learners in K-12. Dr. de Oliveira has authored or edited 30 books and has over 200 publications in various outlets. She served in the presidential line (2017-2020), served as President in 2018-2019, and was a member of the Board of Directors (2013-2016) of TESOL International Association. She was the very first Latina to serve as President of TESOL.
contact: deoliveiral@vcu.edu

Mary A. Avalos, Ph.D. is a Research Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Miami (FL), is the director of Teacher Preparation Programs, and co-directs the School of Education and Human Development's Community and Educational Well-being Research Center. Her research interests include equity-focused projects in public school and community settings and working with teachers to improve multilingual teaching and learning in reading/language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies content areas. Mary has published her work in practitioner and scholarly journals, including *Urban Review*, *The Elementary School Journal*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Bilingual Research Journal*.
contact: mavalos@miami.edu

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