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Planning for Instruction using a Language-Based Approach to Content Instruction for Multilingual Learners

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Planning for Instruction Using a Language-Based Approach to Content Instruction for Multilingual Learners

Teaching multilingual learners (MLs) in schools is a topic of great interest in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Because of increasing numbers of MLs in schools, all teachers need to find appropriate approaches for reaching this student population. A language-based approach to content instruction (LACI; de Oliveira, 2016, 2017, 2020; Honigsfeld et al., 2018) is one approach developed to focus on language learning in the content area classroom. We focus this article on planning for instruction using LACI, a critical area in TESOL.

The kind of support that multilingual learners need in content area classrooms needs to be language-based. Without a focus on language, MLs may not have all of the opportunities to engage with content that they should have. This engagement is highly dependent on language, as language and content are inseparable. Prior research on LACI has identified its potential in teaching science, mathematics, and social studies (see de Oliveira, 2016, 2017; Honigsfeld et al., 2018). This article, therefore, provides examples from English language arts to add to the research base on this approach.

A Language-Based Approach to Content Instruction: Six Cs of Support

With this approach, teachers emphasize both language and content simultaneously as inseparable components of teaching MLs. LACI helps teachers plan for instruction for MLs in meaningful ways in general education, content area classrooms. One of the main ideas developed in this approach is *access* to disciplinary language, or the language developed in different content areas, not by simplifying content but by enabling MLs to manipulate language as it is written, without simplification. In LACI, the notion of making content *accessible* means providing *access*

to the academic language that constructs disciplinary knowledge. The goal is to raise teachers' awareness about the challenges of learning content and to enable them to more effectively contribute to the language development of MLs. We provide teachers with ways of scaffolding instruction for MLs in meaningful ways.

The Six Cs of support to provide scaffolding include specific elements of instructional activities for MLs that serve to guide LACI implementation in general education classrooms (see Figure 1). The C of *connection* connects pedagogy and curriculum to students' backgrounds and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2012). The C of *culture* enables students to build on prior knowledge by accessing cultural and linguistic resources, or their "funds of knowledge" from home communities (Moll et al., 1992), and are used to support academic learning as MLs develop new resources to participate in new situations, bridging home and school (Valenzuela, 1999).

Through *code-breaking*, teachers address academic and disciplinary literacies to break the codes of content learning (Fang, 2006; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004). This C of support integrates language and content as inseparable instructional components. Academic literacy development is a process of making academic dimensions of content transparent for MLs which includes bridging every day and academic language as essential for understanding of content (Gibbons, 2006).

Principles of a meaning-based theory of language, systemic-functional linguistics (SFL; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), are used within this C of support to help teachers address language and content as language is the realization of meaning in context. We emphasize content knowledge development to help teachers understand how language works to construct knowledge in the discipline. Code-breaking enables a focus on language from each of these three

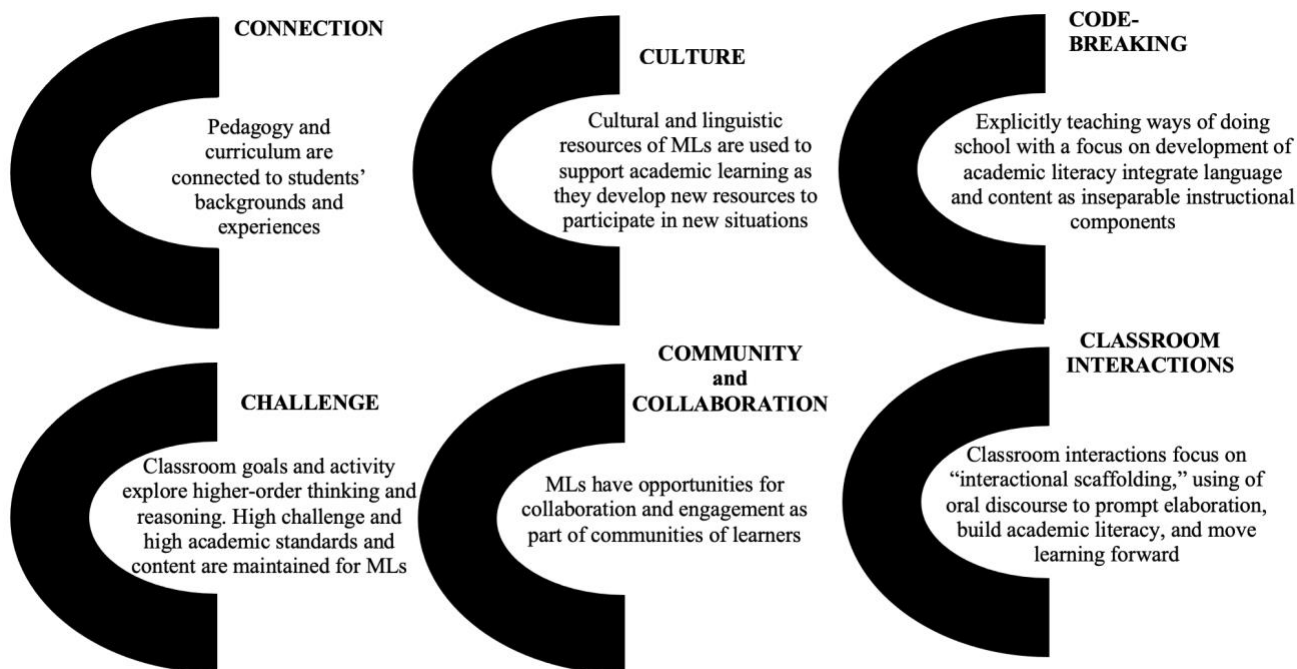
angles: presenting ideas, enacting a relationship with the reader or listener, and constructing a cohesive message (de Oliveira & Schleppegrell, 2015). To present ideas, we focus on the content of the message, looking at verbal and visual resources that construct the content presented in the nouns, verbs, prepositional phrases, and adverbs. To enact a relationship with the reader or listener, we identify language resources that indicate the kind of relationship we are enacting; whether it is formal or informal, close or distant, and whether it includes attitudes of various kinds. To construct a cohesive message, we identify language choices that construct a message that holds together and explore the verbal and visual resources that organize the information and elements of texts and images used to present content in a cohesive way.

The C of *challenge* puts a focus on high challenge and high support as high academic standards and content are maintained for MLs (Hammond, 2006). Classroom goals and activities explore disciplinary literacy and higher-order thinking and reasoning. The C of *community and collaboration* emphasizes the creation of communities of learners where all students participate in activities to socially co-construct knowledge (Nieto, 2000), as aspects of joint productive activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The C of *classroom interactions* relates to “interactional scaffolding,” the use of oral discourse to prompt elaboration, build academic literacy, and move discourse and learning forward (de Oliveira & Smith, 2019; de Oliveira et al., 2020; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Interactional scaffolding includes three main processes: (a) Linking to prior experience, pointing to new experiences, and recapping refers to teachers’ ability to target a specific learning area to MLs’ current levels of knowledge and their English language abilities; (b) Appropriating and recasting students’ contributions, typically during discussions or elicitations, in which the teacher directs students’ contributions by means of recasting their words into more content, language, context appropriate discourse; and (c) Using the Initiation,

Response, Feedback (IRF) sequence so teachers can offer strong verbal or gestural hints about expected responses, especially targeting specific students for specific purposes so they can say more and reflect on their understanding, that is, teachers ask for clarifications, probe a student’s response, or ask to explain a particular point in detail.

Figure 1

LACI’s Six Cs of Support for Scaffolding for Multilingual Learners



Planning Guide with a Language-Based Approach to Content Instruction

To implement LACI in the classroom, it is important to have a planning guide that helps teachers clearly focus on the six Cs of scaffolding for MLs. The planning guide presents each C of support along with questions, examples, and a column for teachers to plan how they would

address the six Cs of support and structure content area instruction for MLs. Teachers use this guide to focus on the six Cs of support.

Table 1

Planning Guide with LACI's Six Cs of Support for Multilingual Learners

C of Support <i>Guiding Question</i>	Examples	Planning
<p>Connection <i>What will you do to connect the lesson to students' prior academic learning, backgrounds, and experiences?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to previous discussion • Connect to previous lesson • Encourage recall of prior learning • Question to connect experiences to lesson 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use connection in your lesson:</p>
<p>Culture <i>How will you link the new content skills and concepts to students' cultural and linguistic resources to support academic learning?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use home language support • Draw on students' cultural and linguistic resources • Connect to students' life experiences 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use culture in your lesson:</p>
<p>Code-breaking <i>What will you do to explicitly teach ways of doing school, academic literacy, and disciplinary, linguistic, and cultural codes of content learning? How will you model the language forms/vocabulary/function/skills?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore verbal resources, visual resources, other multimodal means of presenting content: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the text/image about? 2. What are the key concepts developed in the text/image? • Identify the nature of interaction with the content (e.g., formal vs. informal; close vs. distant; attitude; judgment); focus on enacting a relationship with the reader: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What is the author's perspective? 4. How does the author of this text/image interact with the reader/viewer? • Identify the organization of information, including connections between sentences and paragraphs (e.g., reference devices; repetition of words and phrases); focus on constructing a cohesive message: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. How is the text/image organized? 6. How does the text/image construct a cohesive message? 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use code-breaking in your lesson:</p>

<p>Challenge <i>What aspects of disciplinary literacy will you address? Which higher-order thinking and reasoning skills will you focus on?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain high academic standards for MLs (while simultaneously providing high levels of support) • Include activities that require students to analyze and evaluate events or practices and/or create products 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use challenge in your lesson:</p>
<p>Community and Collaboration <i>How will you engage students in collaboration and build a community of practice?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use activities where students can work together • Implement student-centered activities • Include varied participant structures 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use community and collaboration in your lesson:</p>
<p>Classroom Interactions <i>How will you use “interactional scaffolding” in the classroom?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to prior experiences • Recap students’ contributions, rephrasing comments into language specific to the content area • Plan for use of oral discourse to prompt elaboration, build academic literacy, and move discourse and learning forward. 	<p>Please explicitly list out specific ways that you plan to use classroom interactions in your lesson:</p>

Learning Activities

The planning guide can be implemented in TESOL Methods classes by incorporating it into lesson plan formats that instructors may use to help teachers plan instruction for MLs.

Some key steps for planning a lesson for MLs, with one step being the incorporation of LACI’s planning guide:

1. Start with a lesson title and grade level.
2. Incorporate an ELD Standard(s) or WIDA Standards (e.g., WIDA or state ELD standard[s] that are the target of student learning). List the number and text of each standard that is being addressed).
3. Add a state content standard. What content standard(s) is most relevant to the learning goals?
4. Add content objectives (related to the subject matter central focus) and language objectives (related to key language function, task, or skill).
5. List prior academic knowledge and conceptions: What knowledge, skills, and concepts must students already know to be successful with this lesson?

6. Next plan the Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks: Add a description of what the teacher (you) will be doing and/or what the students will be doing. Below are some important planning components:
 - **Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks** (Description of what the teacher (you) will be doing and/or what the students will be doing)
 - Introduction
_____ Minutes
How will you start the lesson to engage and motivate students in learning?
 - Instruction
_____ Minutes
What learning activities will you include?
Here is where the “Planning Guide with LACI’s Six Cs of Support for Multilingual Learners” could be used. As a teacher, you can plan instruction using the guide. As a teacher educator, you can share the planning guide with teacher candidates and ask them to answer the guiding questions in this section.
 - Language-Focused Structured Practice and Application
_____ Minutes
How will you give students the opportunity to practice the target language so you can provide feedback?
How will students apply what they have learned?
How will you determine if students are meeting the intended language objectives?
 - Differentiation/Planned Support
How will you differentiate the task(s) for:
 - Students with different language proficiency levels
 - Whole Class
 - Groups of students with similar needs
 - Individual students
 - Students with IEPs or 504 plansHow will you engage MLs at different levels of language proficiency? Include *Leveled Questions*, questions that will differentiate instruction for different levels of language proficiency.
 - Closure
_____ Minutes
How will you evaluate and assess the students’ learning? What evidence will support your assessment?
How will you end the lesson?
What is the assessment evidence of content and language learning?

Portraits of Practice

In this section, we use examples from a fifth-grade classroom that illustrate LACI’s six Cs of support for scaffolding in action.

Description of the Learning Context

The excerpts used in this section come from two fifth-grade English language arts classes in a diverse elementary school located in a large urban district in the Southeastern United States. This school houses an International Studies Magnet Program that provides instruction in two languages (e.g., English/Spanish, English/French, English/German), with a clear focus on bilingual and biliteracy development. With over 50 countries and numerous languages represented in the student body, this school has been nicknamed a “mini United Nations.” The classes were taught by a teacher with more than 15 years of teaching experience, whom we call Ms. Cabana (all names are pseudonyms). Together, the classes were comprised of 44 students, 40 of whom spoke a language other than English at home.

In the United States, the great majority (3.6 million) of MLs speak Spanish at home (NCES, 2016), and this was reflected in Ms. Cabana’s fifth-grade classrooms where most of the bilingual students spoke Spanish and English. As part of the Spanish pathway in the international studies magnet program, many students were bilingual English/Spanish speakers; however, there were a number of other languages present as well, including French, German, Arabic, Russian, Mandarin, among others. The multilingual learners’ language proficiencies in English ranged from Level 2 to Level 6 on a 6-point scale.

Excerpts of Classroom Discourse Illustrating LACI’s Six Cs of Support for Scaffolding

The following examples come from a lesson focused on developing students’ knowledge about idioms. Ms. Cabana re-introduces the idiom content as a review in order to build on students’ prior knowledge since this is not the first time students are engaging with idioms and their meanings. Ms. Cabana is challenging students to connect idiom examples to their everyday experiences, including, but not limited, to culture, language, and events. Students are then

expected to work together in pairs in order to create illustrations and elaborate on the meaningfulness of the idiom examples. Excerpts from the classroom are used to exemplify the six Cs of support in action.

Excerpt 1:

Teacher: Okay, so here's what you're going to do now. Everybody stands up. Tuck in your chairs. Stand up, tuck in your chairs. Stand up, tuck in your chair. Thank you to the left side of the room. Good job listening. Middle we're waiting for you, outer corner, let's go. All right so, everybody should be up. Chairs should be tucked in. Here's what you're going to do. Jonathan waiting for you. You are going to grab your paper. You are going to grab a pencil. You are calmly, calmly going to walk and find a partner. I haven't said to go yet. I haven't said to make eye contact yet. You are going to find a partner. You and your partner, you and your partner, once you get your partner, you're gonna find a spot on the outer edge of the room to sit down, sit on the floor, next to each other and what you're going to do. And if you're on a time limit here, you don't have a lot of time. You are going to read the idiom, read the definition, and together decide what you should illustrate. Both papers should match. So read the idiom, read the definition, what can you illustrate? Because you are going to write a sentence, your own original sentence using the expression. You can think about it in nautical terms when you're out of sea, or can you use this saying in everyday life? I don't know you think about your own creativity here. Are you ready?

In Excerpt 1, Ms. Cabana implemented *code-breaking* and *challenge* by having students complete an idiom assignment that required them to create visual representations of each idiom. This is an example of teaching ways to understand cultural codes and language, while implementing higher order thinking skills. Ms. Cabana explained that the pictures and sentences need to be creative and originally created after reading the definitions of each idiom. She also explained that the pictures can depict a nautical or literal explanation of the idiom. Ms. Cabana is implementing the Cs of *community and collaboration* and *classroom interactions* by giving the students an opportunity to work together in order to create sentences, illustrations, and explanations for each idiom example. She takes the time to explicitly direct students with how the partner work should take place as well as her expectations for the partner activity. In

addition, Ms. Cabana implemented student autonomy by allowing students to choose their partner(s). Students were to move quietly to their partners when instructed. She further explained that students needed to read the idiom, read the definition/explanation, then discuss with their partner(s) what the illustration should look like. She emphasized that the partners were to have identical illustrations but different sentences, due to the sentences being their own and original.

Excerpt 2:

Students: We don't understand how we could do it, so can we just do close quarters?

Teacher: No, so close quarters. If you're in close quarters, like maybe you have like a small room, so maybe you want to draw like a house, and then lots of people in it. It's tight. If you're in close quarters, you're really, really tight with each other.

Student: Like how we were this morning.

Teacher: Yes. You're right? This morning we're in close quarters, except they're not really our enemy, but yeah. Anthony, who you're working with. Are you with them? Are the 3 of you together?

Student: No.

Teacher: No? Oh. You're with them. Then come sit up here, or girls or sit up here? Yeah, yeah yeah. Sit up here. Don't know. I'm going to keep it. I was hoping, I know, but we're all teaming up. In this class, no man alone in this class.

Student: You have to draw the exact same thing as your partner. Right?

Teacher: Yes you and your partner should match. Because that way it shows that you're talking about it.

Student: You could both drawing like little mini drawings.

Teacher: You don't have a lot of time, so I think you should just pick and move. So for example, you're looking at this one. All at sea, what does all at sea mean.

Student: Like all the people are in the sea.

Teacher: So, when you look at it in a state of confusion and disorder. They're over the place.

Student: They're all over the place

Teacher: Yeah. So, what might be a situation where the people are confused and everything looks crazy?

Student: At a festival?

Teacher: At a festival.

Student: It's a lot of people.

In Excerpt 2, Ms. Cabana gave students a *classroom interaction* and *collaboration* opportunity to *connect* their *culture* and personal experiences to the idiom content by having a whole group discussion, which required students to give examples of experiences, events, and/or

places where the idioms would be applicable. In the interaction between the teacher and the student, the student gave an example of “all at sea” by *connecting* it to the chaos of being at a festival, perhaps a personal experience for him. The ability to apply content to real-life experiences and/or scenarios plays an essential role in student learning. After students would respond, Ms. Cabana would recap and rephrase what the student mentioned as a contribution to the class discussion. This is an example of implementing the move purposeful repetition (see de Oliveira et al., 2020) in order to move the conversation forward when she repeated “at a festival” after the student responded with this example.

The intention of Ms. Cabana utilizing purposeful repetition was perhaps to further elaborate on the idiom example and connection with simple and concise explanations of what the idiom means while also validating why that example is appropriate for the idiom. She also asked particular questions in order to assist the students with brainstorming idiom examples. During this activity, Ms. Cabana allowed the students to work together, demonstrating classroom *collaboration*, when creating idiom illustrations. It is very important that students are presented with and engage in “interactional scaffolding” in order to be successful with *classroom interactions* while displaying various levels of language, learning, and literacy skills.

Excerpt 3:

Student: Can I say what I drew?

Teacher: Sure.

Student: I drew three, three people at sea, and one of them say, “How did you get here?” I don't know.

Teacher: So literally out at sea, they're out at sea, they're lost and confused. How about in your real life? over here. How about in your real life? Where have you been in a situation where everybody's. All at sea, Jonathan?

Student: Really wait. So I was going to say, actually, I like...

Teacher: what about your drawing should be a representation of all at sea. I see you really did put them at sea.

Student: I also did another drawing. Because in the cartoon, when the person is like confused, that's fine. They have a little like Disney music.

Excerpt 3 illustrates *classroom interactions*. In order to make sure his understanding of the idiom is correct, one student showed his drawing of "all at sea" to Ms. Cabana and added one dialogue on the side as an explanation. Realizing the student might misunderstand the meaning of "all at sea," Ms. Cabana re-explained the meaning to move the learning forward. We use 're-explain' here because the teacher had explained the meaning of "all at sea" in the previous conversation. Following that, to ensure that other students comprehended the use of "all at sea," Ms. Cabana asked students to link the idiom to their prior experiences, an example of *connection*.

The teacher also provided further scaffolding by suggesting that students represent the idiom in the drawing. Ms. Cabana used some questioning strategies to move the conversation forward, such as "what about," "how about," and "Where have you been...". All three of these excerpts are examples of how Ms. Cabana was *code-breaking* with students, highlighting specific language features that were important for them to understand and clarifying students' ideas in the process.

These excerpts illustrate how the six Cs of support for scaffolding can guide instruction in classrooms with multilingual learners. Planning for instruction can be accomplished with the planning guide provided in this article and used in TESOL Methods courses in teacher education programs.

Discussion and Implications

Planning and delivering instruction that engages students in meaningful classroom interactions can be challenging; however, LACI's six Cs of support for scaffolding incorporated in a planning guide can be used as part of lesson plans to help teachers plan instruction for MLs.

Teachers can work to incorporate these six Cs of support to create spaces for MLs to take part in meaningful instruction. These strategies are particularly important for general education classrooms. We hope teachers find these ideas helpful as they continue to engage all students in high challenge-high support practices.

The research-based approach provided in this article, a language-based approach to content instruction and its accompanying planning guide, has several implications for the classroom. The classroom excerpts highlight how Ms. Cabana used the six Cs of support for scaffolding to *connect* to students' background and experience, to draw on their different *cultures*, to provide *code-breaking* in support of content and language development, to incorporate different participant structures to facilitate *community and collaboration* in the classroom, to *challenge* her students with higher-order thinking tasks, and to encourage *classroom interactions* so MLs could participate more in classroom discourse.

Knowledge and practical ideas about addressing the academic language needs of MLs is of critical importance for teachers as they have the dual responsibility of facilitating MLs' content learning while also supporting their ongoing English language development. This dual focus is accomplished through LACI since teachers develop ways to talk about both language and content.

Using LACI's planning guide helps support pre-service and in-service teachers as they plan instruction for MLs. Being purposeful in using the six Cs of support is important for addressing the needs of MLs in the general education classroom. Teachers can plan for incorporating the six Cs of support and anticipate what may be beneficial to include. For example, teachers can closely plan their lessons for opportunities to *connect* to students' prior knowledge and personal experiences, allowing them to prepare for ways to effectively draw on

their students' *cultures*. Purposefully incorporating times to acknowledge and validate students' cultural and linguistic resources, teachers can ensure that they do not overlook this important resource. By providing *challenging* content, teachers can go beyond current practices to simplify instruction for MLs, highlighting the importance of high challenge-high support classrooms. Providing opportunities for *classroom interactions* within *collaboration and community* is extremely important as MLs engage more deeply in discussions about specific content, learning more about language at the same time.

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