

Nine Dimensions of Scaffolding for Multilingual Learners

*For Dr. Rita Dunn, a dear mentor we all shared and from
whom we learned so much!
We are forever grateful for her guidance.
Her legacy lives on in all we do.*

Nine Dimensions of Scaffolding for Multilingual Learners

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Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019
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Sage Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-0719-1998-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025027187

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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25 26 27 28 29 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

We would like to offer our heartfelt gratitude to our brilliant former editor, Dan Alpert, now enjoying a well-earned retirement. Dan, you believed in two unknown authors, Maria and Andrea, many years ago, taking us under your wing with unwavering faith in our potential. Your mentorship, wisdom, and keen awareness of what the field needed to hear propelled our work forward and gave us the courage to believe in ourselves. You championed our voices, guided us with care, and left an indelible mark on both our journey and the field of teaching multilingual learners. We are forever grateful for your counsel and your ability to see what was possible. We miss our frequent emails and phone calls and carry your lessons with us always.

We wish to thank Megan Bedell, our acquisitions editor, Mia Rodriguez, our content development editor, Lucas Schleicher, content development manager, and the entire Corwin team for their support and guidance throughout this process. Your efforts have helped shape and refine our work, ensuring this book is positioned to make the greatest possible impact. We appreciate your professionalism, collaboration, and patience in bringing this project to completion, and we are grateful for the role each of you has played in making it a reality.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Sherry Liptak for her invaluable assistance with the final readthrough of the page proofs. Your meticulous attention to detail and thoughtful input have helped us ensure the clarity and quality of our work, and we are truly grateful for your support during this critical stage of the process.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the educators who contributed to this work. Your insights, experiences, and dedication to the profession have enriched this project in countless ways. Your willingness to share your practices and perspectives with us has been instrumental in shaping the ideas presented here, and we are deeply inspired by your commitment to making a difference in the lives of multilingual learners:

Brianna Adachi, Kandice Adams, Yonique Benn, Andrea Bitner, Kristie Budich, Grace Campbell-Sheran, Dr. Hyonsuk Cho, Elizabeth Choi, Kristin Chouinard, Kelly Cray, Tamara Coburn, Rachel Cutter, Melissa Dinelli, Melissa Dishart, Dr. Elena Dokshansky, Dominique Donnelly, Dr. Amy Eckelmann, Jennifer Edwards, Sarah Elia, Holly Ellis, Sasha Engelsman, Sarah Forbes, Michelle Gill, Courtney Gilpin, Mariel Gómez de la Torre–Cerfontaine,

Claribel González, Yulissa Gutierrez, Crystal Hafner, Amanda Haleiko, Louise Herington, Erin Holtkamp, Tan Huynh, Kristina Jackson, Adile Jones, Sarah Kawzenuk, Dr. Nadia Khan-Roopnarine, Cierra LaBounty, Claudia Leon, Katie Leven, Sherry Liptak, Christine Lopez, Jenna Maneri, Migdalia Marco, Samantha Marengo, Hannah McGoff, Maria Neckonoff, Alycia Owen, Selvi Oyola, Amy Peabody-Chieffo, Natalie Pecoraro, Dr. Sinelia Espindola Peixoto, Lani Perez-Santana, Mary Sue Ragsdale, Jason Raymond, James Ridgely, Heather Rubin, Mary Sandoval, Holly Sawyer, Adeline Scibelli, Dr. Victoria Seelinger, Pushpanjali Sengupta, Kimberly Shorey, Nicole Sibiski, Holly Siggins, Marni Smith, Emily Smyth, Kanako Suwa, Dr. Katie Toppel, Alexis Tucker, Jessica Vest, Nick Villani, Nancy Weng, and Rosemary Zavaglia Rutigliano.

Finally, to our families, friends, and colleagues who have supported us through the years, we cannot thank you enough for your patience, encouragement, and belief in us. Your unwavering support has been a source of strength. To everyone who played a part in bringing this project to life, we are profoundly grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

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Why Scaffolding?

"We reject the idea that English language learners have less promise than others. What is true, however, is that they have much more to learn than do their English-proficient peers . . ."
Aída Walqui & Leo van Lier, 2010, p. 24

Scaffolding instruction is not just another teaching approach to learning—it is a critical nonnegotiable for multilingual learners. It is a lifeline to language development, academic achievement, and a profound sense of belonging. Without it, multilingual learners are at risk of being left behind, caught in a cycle of limited success and marginalized in classrooms due to a lack of opportunities that foster their full engagement and expression.

Becoming proficient in another language is no small feat, but scaffolded instruction for multilingual learners can transform this journey into a pathway of steady progress with exciting discoveries and manageable steps along the way. Imagine being surrounded by a language you do not understand and cannot yet grasp—what would you need to gain function and facility in that language to learn new academic content? Scaffolding bridges the gap between a learner's current language abilities and the proficiency required to more fully access and engage with it. To this end, providing support through targeted strategies and rich educational environments makes learning accessible. When scaffolded strategies are incorporated as essential supports for multilingual learners, they sustain their progress and drive their success. They provide the structure and guidance that makes language and content learning attainable.

Scaffolding cracks open the door to general education curricula. Without it, grade-level content can feel insurmountable. However, through thoughtful instructional planning, multilingual learners can be provided with the footholds they need. These practices do not just assist students in keeping up; they help them truly demonstrate their abilities through hands-on learning, engaging with peers, and showcasing their strengths—including their cultural and linguistic assets—in meaningful, interactive ways. Scaffolded instruction ensures multilingual learners do not just sit on the

sidelines but take their rightful place front and center with their classmates, ready to assume the academic rigor of grade-level study.

Most critically, scaffolding fosters belonging. By enabling multilingual learners to work significantly alongside their peers—whether through group projects, technology integration, discussions, or peer work—scaffolding dismantles barriers to learning. It empowers all students to contribute, connect, and take pride in their progress and personal growth. Without scaffolding, multilingual learners are denied the opportunities they deserve, but with it, they can soar! For these reasons, scaffolding instruction is not an option. It is a practice that transforms classrooms into spaces of equity, possibility, and hope, beautifully captured by Claribel González’s sketchnote (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 • What is Scaffolding for Multilingual Learners?



Source: Claribel Gonzalez. Used with permission.

WHAT IS SCAFFOLDING?

Creating learning environments that effectively support all students is a significant challenge for today’s educators. While most students enter school expecting to engage in meaningful experiences that lead to academic success, their learning needs are diverse and complex. How can schools ensure

that grade-appropriate curricula are accessible and purposeful for every student? Moreover, how can curricula, instruction, and assessment be thoughtfully designed to address the unique and varied needs of multilingual learners? Scaffolding instruction addresses these challenges.

Scaffolding is commonly defined as a temporary support system designed to help students acquire new knowledge and skills, enabling them to engage fully in age- or grade-appropriate instruction. It involves identifying the skills and knowledge students need, assessing what they already know and can do independently, and providing the necessary support. In one of the earliest definitions available, Bruner (1978) described scaffolding as “the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task[s] so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring” (p. 19). We do not quite view scaffolding instruction as limiting a child’s freedom; in fact, we believe scaffolding offers enhanced guidance and support that increases students’ choices, options, and possible ways for learning, particularly when scaffolding approaches are co-constructed with the learner. All in all, the goal of scaffolding learning is to foster independent learners who can:

- Internalize essential skills and strategies
- Select the approaches to learning they need
- Achieve through a gradual transfer of responsibility
- Complete tasks on their own

We believe scaffolded instruction should be viewed as a mindset—a particular way of thinking about how planning instruction begins with the student in mind and not the subject matter. When teachers consistently focus on the unique needs of individual learners, scaffolding instruction—providing students with the support they need to acquire new information, develop a new skill, work as a team, use oral and written language effectively, complete an assigned task, and so on—becomes second nature. By adopting a mindset built on scaffolding, teachers embrace the idea of providing learners with the right amount of support at the right time.



WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT SCAFFOLDING STUDENT LEARNING

When scaffolds as temporary supports are put in place, we bridge the gap between where students are currently and where we want them to go. The decision on how much scaffolding will be used depends on their current level of language skills and knowledge of the content area, but the ultimate goal is for students to feel that success is attainable. To me, it's applying the growth mindset to my teaching every day. So, I tell my students:

I know you can get there successfully. Here's this extra guidance and/or support to help you get there easier. With practice, you'll be able to get there on your own in the future!

You can do this! I know you can, but as you're learning language and content, let me support you by making this into a manageable chunk. Later on, you're going to amaze me, your other teachers, and ultimately yourself at what you can do on your own!

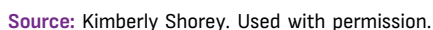
—Katie Leven, itinerant English as a new language (ENL) teacher, Orleans/Niagara
BOCES, New York

THE PRICE OF ONE-SIZE-FITS ALL INSTRUCTION

A single-track teaching method, in which all students are taught in the same way, often leads to an overreliance on remedial programs for multilingual learners that pull them from general education classrooms for instruction. This practice, though well-intentioned, fragments students' schedules, isolates them from their English-proficient peers, and reinforces a deficit view of their abilities. Instead of addressing the diverse needs of multilingual learners within the classroom, this approach places the burden on students to adapt to disjointed schedules for their learning rather than empowering teachers through instructional methods to meet students where they are.



When multilingual learners are frequently pulled out for separate instruction, they may miss valuable opportunities to access grade-level material, engage in peer learning, build meaningful relationships within their general education classrooms, and learn from the content-area expert. This fragmented approach to instruction for multilingual learners can leave them feeling marginalized and disconnected from their classroom community. Furthermore, the emphasis on remediation often focuses narrowly on language skills, sidelining students' strengths, prior knowledge and experience, and potential to contribute meaningfully within their grade-level classes. Being caught in a cycle of remediation limits the academic growth of students and hinders their development of social-emotional skills alongside peers.

Teachers who rely on one-size-fits-all instruction fail to create equitable learning environments. Scaffolding allows multilingual learners access to grade-level content by providing tailored support. Without these supports, these students are often left to struggle through content that assumes prior knowledge and linguistic proficiency they have not yet acquired. By providing scaffolded instruction, multilingual learners can remain engaged in meaningful, grade-level work while learning alongside their peers and developing content-specific language and disciplinary literacy skills. See Figures 1.2 and 1.3 for how Kimberly Shorey, a third-grade




WAYS to REPRESENT fractions

PARTS OF A WHOLE




What fraction of the whole is shaded?

PARTS OF A SET



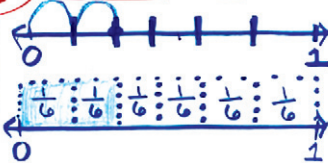
What fraction of the set is shaded?

STRIP DIAGRAM



What fraction of the strip diagram is shaded?

NUMBER LINE



What point on the number line represents a fraction?

Chapter 1 • Why Scaffolding? 5

teacher in Framingham, Massachusetts, effectively utilizes rotating anchor charts to provide visual support for all students while enhancing multilingual learners' understanding of content and precise academic language use and fostering an inclusive classroom environment at the same time. This approach not only addresses academic needs but also fosters a sense of belonging, equity, and collaboration. The cost of neglecting scaffolding is great—it perpetuates inequities that hinder student success.

IS IT A SCAFFOLD OR IS IT A STRATEGY?

We are often asked how to differentiate between when a strategy serves as a scaffold and when a strategy itself requires scaffolding for multilingual learners. The simple answer is that sometimes a strategy is a scaffold, and sometimes a strategy needs to be scaffolded. The relationship between strategies and scaffolding instruction is nuanced, as strategies can function as scaffolds or may themselves require scaffolding to be effective. Understanding this distinction is critical for designing instruction that meets diverse student needs.

Sometimes, a strategy is a scaffold. In this case, the strategy serves as a support between what students currently know and what they are expected to learn or do. For example, using graphic organizers to help students establish their thoughts before writing is a scaffold. The organizer provides structure and guidance, enabling students to focus on generating ideas and developing their writing skills. Over time, as students gain confidence and proficiency, the need for the organizer may diminish, or they might incorporate and apply it independently as a tool they regularly use to organize ideas for writing.

Other times, a strategy needs to be scaffolded, meaning the strategy itself is complex or unfamiliar and must be broken down into manageable steps for students to use effectively. For instance, teaching students to write an argumentative essay may involve introducing mentor texts—examples or exemplars of student writing—as a strategy for teaching evidence-based claims. Using mentor texts requires scaffolding through think-alouds, guided practice in analyzing evidence, and collaborative discussions to help students effectively link the evidence in the text to what is claimed. Without such scaffolding, students may struggle to understand or apply what is being taught, especially if it demands higher-order thinking or language skills they are still developing.

The distinction between these roles highlights the importance of tailoring instruction to meet students where they are. Teachers must assess whether a strategy can serve as an immediate scaffold or whether it requires scaffolding itself to ensure accessibility. By recognizing this dynamic, more effective learning experiences can be

planned, equipping students with the tools they need to succeed while gradually fostering their independence.

WHAT ARE SOME REQUIREMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING SCAFFOLDED APPROACHES TO LEARNING?

Purposeful instruction requires intentional planning and a deep understanding of students' needs. Scaffolding is *not* a one-size-fits-all strategy; it demands flexibility and adaptability to provide the right level and kind of support at the right time. Educators must consider factors such as students' prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic abilities to design scaffolds that are both effective and meaningful. Additionally, scaffolding involves a commitment to fostering independence, ensuring that support empowers students to take ownership of their learning. By thoughtfully applying scaffolding strategies, teachers can create inclusive and rigorous learning environments that enable all students to succeed.

Providing learning support for multilingual learners requires five basic elements. They are:

1. understanding the strengths and needs of multilingual learners,
2. scaffolding content and language integration,
3. flexibility and adaptability with scaffolding approaches,
4. ongoing assessment and feedback, and
5. fostering independence and student agency through scaffolded instruction.

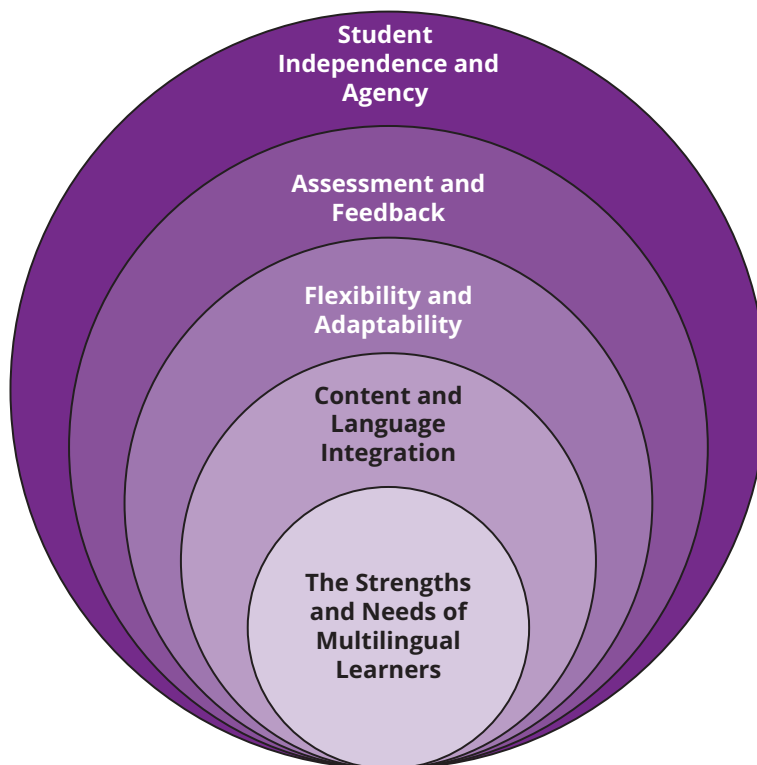
Figure 1.4 illustrates how each of these elements is essentially interconnected and builds on one another to create a comprehensive system of support. Attending to students' needs is at the framework's core, whereas ensuring student independence and autonomy occupies the outermost layer, suggesting that everything we do begins and ends with our students.

UNDERSTANDING THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Let's agree to always start with an asset-based approach. Fully understanding the many gifts, talents, funds of knowledge, and richly lived experiences students bring from home is essential when working with multilingual learners. At the same time, we must also take a comprehensive approach to mapping out strategies and responses to their unique needs. We frequently ask the in-service teachers and practicing educators

we work with in our graduate courses and workshops what they perceive multilingual learners need to be successful. Here are the results of their typical answers captured as a Mentimeter word cloud (see Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.4 • Scaffolding Implementation



Available for download at <https://companion.corwin.com/take/NineDimensionsofScaffoldingforML>

FIGURE 1.5 • Teacher Responses to What Multilingual Learners Need to Be Successful



Although multilingual learners need patient and caring teachers, they also need teachers who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to plan accessible, effective instruction tailored to their unique needs. Masoumi, Bourbour, and Lindqvist (2024) determined that “. . . strengthening teachers’ pedagogical, technological, and content knowledge can further support teachers in their skills to scaffold children’s learning” (p. 1220). While a welcoming and supportive classroom environment is essential, it must be paired with intentional teaching practices grounded in understanding how multilingual learners acquire language, develop literacy, and learn content concepts and skills simultaneously.

To succeed, multilingual learners need instruction that builds on their existing strengths and backgrounds while addressing the challenges of navigating academic content, cultural norms, and school expectations in a new language. This type of instruction requires teachers who value their students’ diverse linguistic and cultural experiences and possess the expertise to design scaffolds that make complex learning attainable. Multilingual learners benefit from varied strategies—images, realia, sentence frames, word walls, and so on—as well as opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers. These approaches require careful planning and a genuine understanding of how language and literacy are developed alongside content learning.

Additionally, multilingual learners thrive when their teachers recognize that they are not just learning English but also learning through English. This dual focus demands that teachers integrate language objectives with content objectives, ensuring students develop both the academic language and subject-specific knowledge necessary for success.

All in all, multilingual learners need teachers who combine patience and care with the ability to plan, implement, and adapt research-based strategies. This pairing of support and expertise empowers students to access grade-level content, build their persistence to learn, and fully participate in their class communities. When teachers are both compassionate and skilled, multilingual learners are better positioned to achieve their potential and thrive in school and beyond.

SCAFFOLDING FOR LANGUAGE AND CONTENT INTEGRATION

Integrating content and language learning is a cornerstone for instruction in inclusive classrooms for multilingual learners, and scaffolding offers the support they need to engage with grade-level material while simultaneously developing their language skills. Without scaffolding, the complexity of academic content and the demands of learning a new language can create significant barriers, leaving many students overwhelmed and unable to fully participate in their education.

By breaking tasks into manageable steps and providing a range of targeted supports, scaffolding offers multifaceted guidance for students to connect what they already know with what they are expected to learn. These strategies help students access challenging content while building the language skills necessary to express their understanding. Scaffolding enables multilingual learners to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information and ensures that they can actively engage in classroom activities.

Moreover, scaffolding promotes equity by enabling multilingual learners to participate alongside their peers in meaningful, grade-level learning experiences. It shifts the focus from remediation to empowerment, from struggling to striving, from deficits to assets, emphasizing that students can achieve high standards with appropriate support.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY WITH SCAFFOLDING APPROACHES

Fundamental to the effective use of scaffolding for instruction are flexibility and adaptability. Scaffolds should not be static, predetermined instruments for learning; rather, they must respond to the individual and changing needs of students. These dynamic approaches allow teachers to provide the right level of support at the right time, ensuring that scaffolds remain effective, practical, and relevant. For example, multilingual learners may initially need sentence frames or starters to complete writing tasks, but as their confidence and skills grow, the scaffold can shift to open-ended prompts and word banks that encourage independent selection of the shape and structure of a piece of writing as well as the words and phrases used. Similarly, scaffolds in math might begin with students using visual aids or manipulatives to problem solve and later evolve into their consideration of a series of strategic questions to support their completion of a task.

Flexibility also means being attuned to students' emotional and social needs, which can impact their readiness to engage with learning. By observing, assessing, and responding in real time, teachers can maintain the delicate balance of challenge and support that scaffolding requires. This responsiveness ensures that scaffolding not only helps students overcome immediate challenges but also builds their long-term endurance to take risks and capacity to tackle complex tasks independently.

ONGOING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Two critical components of effective scaffolding are ongoing assessment and feedback to ensure that support strategies remain responsive to students' needs. Scaffolding requires continuous monitoring to understand where students excel and where they may need additional assistance. Teachers can use formative assessments, such as observations, student reflections, class discussions, anecdotal notes, or nonverbal techniques, e.g., thumb up/down,

to gauge student understanding and gather real time feedback. This data helps identify when to adjust supports by adding or reducing assistance.

Constructive feedback plays a vital role in this process, as it not only highlights areas for improvement but also reinforces what students are doing well. Effective feedback is:

- **Specific** – it focuses on a particular skill, concept, or part of the task instead of being vague or general. For example:
 - General: “Good job!”
 - Specific: “You used strong evidence from the text to support your argument in the second paragraph.”
- **Actionable** – it provides students with clear, specific steps they can take to improve their performance. For example:
 - Not Actionable: “Your essay needs more detail.”
 - Actionable: “Add a specific example from the text to support your main argument in paragraph three.”
- **Aligned with the learning objectives and success criteria** – it directly addresses the specific skills, knowledge, or behaviors that students are expected to demonstrate. For example:
 - Success Criterion: “Use at least two pieces of textual evidence to support your argument.”
 - Feedback: “You used one piece of textual evidence effectively in paragraph four. To meet the criteria, add another quote or paraphrase from the text to strengthen your argument.”

For multilingual learners, feedback might include tailored guidance on language usage, content understanding, and strategies for applying learning across contexts. Teachers should also reflect on their own practices, analyzing whether their scaffolding approaches meet students’ needs and make adjustments accordingly.



WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT SCAFFOLDING

Kelly Cray, secondary cultural and language support educator has the following take on “removing” scaffolds:

As a student, it feels like you are running behind the pack in a race and then you get a boost so you can finally just keep up, and it is ripped away. Instead of removing

scaffolds, I teach my students how to replicate them independently. For example, how to build their own word banks. Since this is an extra step, it is more work. This means when they don't need them anymore, they stop using them. However, they have built the skill so when a challenging assignment comes along, they can build their own scaffolds to help themselves be successful.

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE AND STUDENT AGENCY THROUGH SCAFFOLDED INSTRUCTION

A commitment to fostering independence is central to effective scaffolding. The main goal of scaffolding is to empower students to take ownership of their learning by gradually transferring responsibility from the teacher to the student. This process requires intentional planning and thoughtful instructional delivery to ensure students build the skills and confidence needed.

The gradual release of responsibility framework (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983, Fisher & Frey, 2021) “suggests that the cognitive load should shift purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice, and application by the learner” (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 12). It involves setting clear goals, providing appropriate levels of support, and gradually removing those supports as students gain confidence and competence. Through this intentionality, scaffolding addresses immediate learning needs and equips students with the skills and strategies to succeed independently. Ultimately, fostering independence through scaffolding equips students with the tools and mindset to face challenges, adapt to new learning contexts, and thrive beyond the classroom.

Students can independently leverage scaffolding strategies to deepen their understanding and effectively apply concepts, enabling them to break down complex topics into manageable parts. Through scaffolding approaches, multilingual learners can gradually develop the skills needed to become self-directed learners and act with agency. See how independence evolves using scaffolding, viewed through our CARES lens (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 • The CARES Lens

ELEMENTS OF THE CARES LENS	WHAT STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO DO
Choice	Students identify and choose tools that best represent their preferences and goals, understanding their scope and purpose as well as how to use them effectively for specific activities.
Autonomy	Scaffolds help teachers gradually transfer responsibility for knowledge and language

	development to students. Students learn to use tools, practice collaboratively, and eventually apply them independently, with opportunities for teacher support, and guidance as needed.
Routines	Multilingual learners develop routines with clear roles and responsibilities, helping them understand expectations and achieve success. Over time, they internalize these routines and navigate the classroom with confidence.
Engagement	Students view scaffolds as engaging tools that amplify their voice, foster agency, and help them connect to learning in manageable steps.
Self-Regulation	Scaffolds empower students to take control of their learning, setting achievable but ambitious goals and monitoring their progress while building tolerance for ambiguity and adaptability to new situations.



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WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE GOALS OF THIS BOOK?

In this text, we offer practical ideas based on research-informed instructional practices to scaffold the learning of content, language, and literacy for multilingual learners. Our intention with this work is to support teachers to offer multilingual learners greater and consistent access to grade-level content as they build mastery in English. We want to dispel the belief that multilingual learners, particularly those students who are at an entering or emerging level of English proficiency, need to place their academic schooling on hold and master a certain level of English before they can engage with grade-appropriate subject matter. In our view, this type of thinking fails to recognize the immense abilities, strengths, talents, and potential that multilingual learners bring to school.

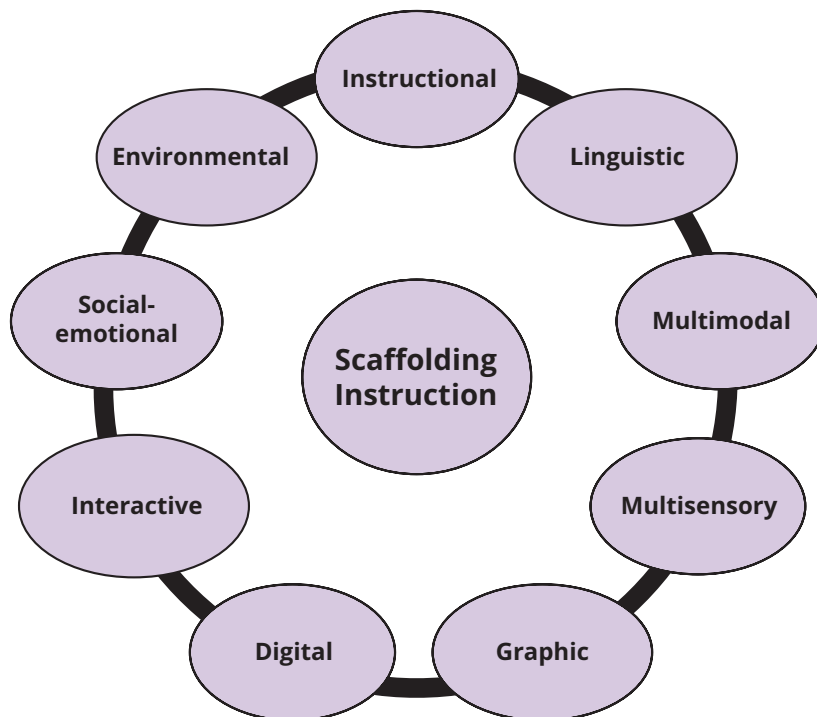
First and foremost, we believe multilingual learners deserve rigorous, age-appropriate curricula that challenge their intellect, stimulate critical thinking, deepen their understanding of the subject matter, and support the application or transfer of their learning to new contexts. They need to study relevant topics in which they can see their own lives reflected as well as deepen their awareness of the greater world. To this end, our goal with this book is to support teachers to use research-informed and evidence-based teaching practices that provide multilingual learners with the help they need to overcome their unique challenges. In addition, we further advocate for a focus on building relationships between multilingual learners, their teachers,

and their peers to foster acceptance and belonging. Curricula design, relevancy of subject matter, targeted instructional practices, and social and emotional stability are critical to not only the academic success of these students but also serve to dispel the misconceptions about the ability of multilingual learners to learn.

BOOK OVERVIEW

In this volume, we offer a nine-point framework for scaffolding instruction that supports the linguistic and academic development of multilingual learners in grades K-12. This book focuses on nine approaches to scaffolding—instructional, linguistic, multimodal, multisensory, graphic, digital, interactive, social-emotional, and environmental—that were introduced in our Corwin book, *Co-Planning: Five Essential Practices to Integrate Curriculum and Instruction for English Learners* (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2022) (see Figure 1.6). We expound on each of the nine approaches, detailing instructional and assessment strategies and techniques based on research-informed and evidence-based best practices.

FIGURE 1.6 • The Nine Dimensions of Scaffolding



The inspiration for this book arose from conversations with teachers and school leaders about planning instruction for multilingual learners and addressing the challenge of supporting all students in meeting grade-level standards. This book is designed to help educators understand scaffolded instruction for multilingual learners and guide them in developing and adapting strategies to meet their students' needs within their unique

contexts. Our goal was to create a practical, user-friendly, and richly illustrated resource featuring authentic examples from numerous educators in the field to demonstrate the effective application of scaffolding strategies as well as to celebrate successful practices.

As we visit classrooms and observe teachers in the field, we notice there are some who—at times with the best of intentions—persistently maintain low expectations for multilingual learners, failing to engage these students in grade-level work. Even more disturbing are situations when English language development curricula or online learning apps are used that promote skill-and-drill frameworks devoid of opportunities for students to think critically, engage in genuine inquiry, or incorporate their personal frames of knowledge. Generally speaking, some teachers might feel underprepared to support multilingual learners, particularly those at the earlier stages of English language proficiency. This book aims to address the use of effective approaches, techniques, and strategies for these students so that they are better able to participate in grade-appropriate learning alongside their English-proficient peers with carefully planned scaffolds and supports.

Our main purpose is to guide teachers in supporting multilingual learners so that they can participate in standards-based general education curricula. We invite our readers to consider each type of scaffolded support, how particular strategies provide targeted assistance for various purposes, and how to make instructional decisions and develop strategies to support all learners. We foster the practice of collaboration among teachers so that together, they may determine what types of scaffolds will afford students equitable access to the core curriculum, the development of English language and literacy, and the appropriate assessments that accurately measure their knowledge, skills, and abilities. To illustrate these points, we share authentic stories and examples from successful teachers whom we met in schools and districts across the United States.

We are confident that the contents of this book will help our readers better understand how to scaffold instruction for multilingual learners so that they may have greater access to and engagement with grade-level, standards-based general education curricula. By applying the approaches outlined in this book, readers can expect to see increased student participation and improved comprehension among multilingual learners, enabling them to successfully complete tasks and experience a stronger sense of inclusion and belonging in the classroom. Interactive features, such as periodic stop-and-process probes connected to research-informed and evidence-based recommendations, are designed to keep readers actively engaged. Additionally, end-of-chapter reflection questions provide valuable opportunities for both individual reflection and collaborative discussions within professional learning communities.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

The following provides a summary of the key insights and focus areas each chapter will explore. Each chapter targets one of the nine dimensions of scaffolding instruction for multilingual learners, creating a comprehensive journey through each scaffolding approach. Here is what each chapter will uncover following this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER 2: INSTRUCTIONAL SCAFFOLDING

In this chapter, we carefully outline the practice of instructional scaffolding, structuring lessons in ways that are accessible for learners at all levels of academic and language readiness. We highlight how instructional scaffolding helps multilingual learners engage in learning by breaking complex tasks into manageable steps and providing tailored support, such as questioning, modeling, and guided practice.

CHAPTER 3: LINGUISTIC SCAFFOLDING

This chapter focuses on linguistic scaffolds that support the use of language that is necessary to communicate and attain academic growth, work with complex concepts, and develop new academic skills across content areas. Through linguistic scaffolding, the full range of multilingual repertoires students and teachers possess are leveraged, and multiple techniques are used to offer language-specific support.

CHAPTER 4: MULTIMODAL SCAFFOLDING

In this chapter, multimodal scaffolding is featured. We describe how multimodalities are critical to students having access to the same information. Multimodal scaffolding is also inherent to and essential for how students retrieve, make meaning from and respond to new information, and engage in disciplinary practices.

CHAPTER 5: MULTISENSORY SCAFFOLDING

This chapter focuses on approaches to multisensory scaffolding—visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. Readers will develop an understanding of how learners can use multiple senses to process and retain information and engage in academic, language learning, and literacy practices.

CHAPTER 6: GRAPHIC SCAFFOLDING

This chapter addresses graphic scaffolding, a commonly used technique that provides easier access to new learning for multilingual learners. Graphic representations generally offer quick and organized visual access to complex concepts while also helping to synthesize key information.

CHAPTER 7: DIGITAL SCAFFOLDING

This chapter explores using digital tools for learning, such as watching and listening to videos, simulations, or animations; taking virtual tours of national parks, monuments, and museums; using educational applications, and so on, to develop targeted content and language skills. Additionally, it highlights how students can take a more active role and create digital content.

CHAPTER 8: SCAFFOLDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

In this chapter, we explore scaffolding social-emotional learning—the purposeful, pedagogical use of linguistic and nonlinguistic communication tools that help students build relationships. It supports the social development as well as emotional response to learning for multilingual learners.

CHAPTER 9: INTERACTIVE SCAFFOLDING

In this chapter, we focus on interactive scaffolding as a process where meaning-making, language and literacy development, and engagement happen in the company of others. When students interact with their peers, time is allotted for them to formulate their own ideas about the content and practice using academic language both in authentic and structured ways.

CHAPTER 10: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAFFOLDING

In this final chapter, we discuss environmental scaffolding and how its practices can provide a safe and secure physical or virtual setting for learning to take place. It focuses on how to best provide a supportive environment for multilingual learners to enhance their academic, linguistic, and social-emotional growth and development.

FROM INSTRUCTIONAL TO ENVIRONMENTAL SCAFFOLDING: HOW SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES INTERSECT

Different types of scaffolding strategies often overlap, as they share the common goal of providing students with the support needed to access learning. While each type of scaffolding addresses a specific area, their interconnectedness enhances their overall effectiveness in fostering student engagement and understanding.

For instance, linguistic scaffolding, such as providing sentence frames or word banks, often overlaps with multisensory scaffolding—using visuals such as charts, diagrams, or images. Both strategies aim to make abstract concepts concrete and accessible by reducing cognitive load and clarifying meaning. Similarly, tactile scaffolding, which involves hands-on learning

tools like manipulatives, can complement linguistic scaffolding by providing a physical connection to abstract ideas. For example, students learning geometry might use manipulatives alongside labeled diagrams and descriptive language.

Multimodal strategies—using multiple formats such as text, audio, video, and interactive elements—align closely with multisensory strategies, which engage sight, hearing, touch, and sometimes smell or taste. Both approaches address diverse learning needs and ensure students have multiple pathways to grasp concepts.

Environmental scaffolding, such as creating print-rich classrooms or strategically designed seating arrangements, often supports social-emotional learning scaffolding by creating spaces where students feel safe and valued. A welcoming classroom environment with accessible resources fosters collaboration, confidence, and a sense of belonging, which are critical for learning, especially for multilingual learners.

These overlaps are intentional, as they create layers of support that reinforce one another. A teacher might combine multiple types of scaffolding in a single lesson—for example, using a word wall (environmental and linguistic scaffolding) alongside group discussions (social-emotional scaffolding) and hands-on experiments (multisensory scaffolding). This integration ensures that all students, regardless of their strengths or challenges, have equitable opportunities to engage with and master the content. The interconnected nature of scaffolding strategies enhances learning by addressing the whole student cognitively, emotionally, and socially. See Figure 1.7 for what may be a powerful example of multiple-dimensional scaffolding. Sarah Elia, a secondary ENL teacher at Saugerties High School, New York, and her students were practicing key vocabulary related to enduring issues for global history class (such as scarcity, conflict, population growth, etc.). She would show a word, and the ball would be passed around for students to say something about it—it could be a simple definition, a word in their home language (use a translator if needed), a description of the term, and example of the term, and so on. Through this game-like activity, Sarah utilized multiple scaffolding approaches as she invited her students to co-construct meaning about key concepts, review key vocabulary in an engaging way that lowers their affective filter (Krashen, 1982), interact with each other and use tactile and kinesthetic approaches to learning.

PROGRAM MODELS: WHERE SCAFFOLDING IS IMPLEMENTED

Within each chapter, we emphasize how scaffolded instruction can be applied across various program models, including general education classes, integrated co-taught classes for multilingual learners, standalone or pullout English language development classes, and special education classes. Additional settings where these strategies are highly relevant include bilingual classes and dual-language programs.

FIGURE 1.7 ● Incorporating Multiple Scaffolding Strategies



Source: Adile Jones. Used with permission.

In *general education classrooms* with diverse student populations, scaffolded instruction ensures multilingual learners can access grade-level content.

In *integrated co-taught settings*, scaffolding involves collaboration between the content teacher and the language learning specialist. Together, they design supports that balance language acquisition with literacy learning and academic content.

In *standalone or pullout English language development (ELD) classes*, targeted language development support is offered. Scaffolding is tailored to build foundational language skills through varied instructional approaches.

In *special education classes* with multilingual learners, scaffolding is essential to instruction and accommodate individual learning profiles in order to break tasks into smaller steps and provide consistent routines to support both language and content learning.

In *bilingual settings*, scaffolding supports language development in both the students' home language and English. Teachers strategically use trans-linguaging techniques to build a strong foundation for learning.

In *dual-language programs*, scaffolding involves balancing the use of two languages while ensuring comprehension and participation in academic tasks.

While not every chapter explicitly addresses all program models, the scaffolding techniques described are universally applicable across these settings. The strategies outlined in this book are designed to be adaptable, ensuring that educators in any instructional context can implement them effectively to meet the diverse needs of their students.

INFLUENTIAL VOICES ON SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION

We would like to acknowledge the foundational work of scholars and educators who have shaped our understanding of scaffolding instruction. Their research and writings have provided valuable insights into how scaffolding supports student learning and continue to influence classroom practices.

Aída Walqui and Leo van Lier (2010) named scaffolding the *pedagogy of success* and noted that scaffolds “should be constantly changed, dismantled, extended, and adapted in accordance with the needs” of the students (p. 24).

Pauline Gibbons (2015) highlights the three major characteristics of scaffolding as follows:

- It is *temporary* help that assists a learner to move toward new concepts, levels of understanding, and new language.
- It enables learners to know *how to do something* (not just what to do) so that they will be better able to complete similar tasks alone.
- It is *future oriented*: in Vygotsky's words, what a learner can do with support today, he or she will be able to do alone tomorrow. (p. 15)

Gibbons (2015) calls for high-challenge, high support instruction that is integrated and carefully planned. She challenges the notion that multilingual learners “need to first ‘learn English’ before they can learn subject content. As we have seen, in a well-planned integrated curriculum where there is a dual focus on both content and language, students have many opportunities to develop subject knowledge and relevant academic language simultaneously.” (p. 93)

There is a newly rekindled interest in scaffolding in the professional literature and in classrooms across the United States alike. Nancy Frey and colleagues (2023) identify three key characteristics of scaffolding such as being (a) only needed when the task is too difficult to complete; otherwise, (b) responsive to individual needs and adjustable; and (c) temporary.

Similarly, in the introductory chapter to their edited volume, Luciana C. de Oliveira and Ruslana Westerlund (2023) name some consistent features of scaffolding with multilingual learners in mind, including it being (a) dynamic and contingent upon student needs, (b) customized and adaptive, rather than routine and generic, (c) connected to student learning and growing autonomy; and (d) either planned or spontaneous. All the chapters are aligned to these basic premises whether the participating author or author team offers a theoretical framework, a case study, or a teacher education perspective. In the introductory chapter, de Oliveira and Westerlund suggest that “considering scaffolding as help or routine support does not see scaffolding as adaptive and tailored as students gain responsibility and gain autonomy over their thinking” (p. 2). Later in the same volume, Aída Walqui and Mary Schmida (2023) offer a three-level approach to conceptualizing scaffolding—micro, meso, and macro, indicating scaffolding may occur within the context of a task, a lesson, and/or a unit.

Barbara Blackburn (2025) also cautions that scaffolding is connected to rigorous instruction for any student, and it should never be considered discriminatory or punitive. She believes rigor involves more than assigning difficult tasks to students; it requires thoughtfully supporting and scaffolding their learning to help them achieve high levels of challenge successfully (Blackburn, 2008).

By building on these contributions, we further explore and expand the conversation around scaffolding in this book. We provide practical insights and strategies that teachers can implement to meet the needs of multilingual learners. Through this work, we hope to inspire a deeper understanding of how scaffolding can foster equity, engagement, and academic success for all students.

BEYOND TEMPORARY SUPPORT: SCAFFOLDS THAT EMPOWER

There tends to be much agreement among educators that scaffolding is a process of contingent support. In this book, we will challenge the notion that scaffolds go up, and scaffolds always come down because they cannot always come down! They might move sideways or further up to elevate learning to the next level and maintain rigor. For multilingual learners, scaffolds may not come down because:

- They may become the learners’ permanent tool kit.
- They may help maximize student independence and self-reliance.
- They may travel across content areas and contexts, also referred to as recurrence, and are applied to new contexts.
- They may respond to students’ multiple complex learning needs.
- They may be necessary to sustain learning.

Rethinking the traditional metaphor of scaffolding is essential, particularly when considering the needs of multilingual learners. Rather than viewing scaffolds as temporary structures that must be removed, we should recognize their potential to evolve into enduring tools that empower students. By responding to the diverse needs of students, scaffolds not only sustain learning but also elevate it to higher levels of rigor. Embracing this broader perspective ensures that all students, especially multilingual learners, are equipped to succeed and thrive. Further, we acknowledge that students must be given the opportunity to ask questions about their own learning and make decisions about what works best for them. The questions in Table 1.2 help educators reflect on their decision-making process and invite students to think critically about their own learning and decide which tools make the most sense for them. To further strengthen autonomy, encourage students to ask themselves: *What am I learning? What is this scaffolding approach or tool typically used for? When do I use this approach or tool? Is it a good fit for the assignment? What am I ultimately responsible for?*

TABLE 1.2 • Aligning Teacher's and Student's Reflection Questions for Scaffolding

TEACHER	STUDENTS
<i>What do my students need to know? How will they evidence this?</i>	<i>What do I need to know? How do I show it?</i>
<i>How do students know the critical parts? What do they need to know about them?</i>	<i>How do I know the important parts and what I need to know about them? What scaffold would work best?</i>
<i>What is not essential?</i>	<i>What can I skim through?</i>
<i>How do ideas connect to what students already know? How do they show this?</i>	<i>What connections can I make? How do I show that I can make connections?</i>
<i>What new ideas have students learned?</i>	<i>What new ideas did I learn?</i>
<i>What are students confused about? Where are they stuck? What resources can I provide to make the information more clear?</i>	<i>What confuses me? What am I unsure of? How do I get more information to learn more?</i>



WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding is not just an important teaching tool, but it is also a form of self-advocacy. As students are able to interact with the content on their level, they are able to participate more in group discussions. Receptive comes before productive language, therefore it is important for students to hear and see content in meaningful

ways, such as through images, body movements, realia, or videos. I often use leveled or thematic texts for students. For productive language, sentence frames and stems can be essential to lessening the cognitive load so we can better assess their understanding of content. Consistent graphic organizers are key to scaffolding because the information they need is presented in a way that is easily accessible. The most important aspect of scaffolding is that students should never feel like they're out of their zone of proximal development. It is up to us to ensure that they feel positive about their school work; self-efficacy is essential to promoting intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and a love of learning!

—Amy Eckelmann, EdD, ENL teacher, Rockville Centre, New York, adjunct teacher education professor, Molloy University



KEEP THIS IN MIND

When implementing scaffolding approaches, teachers should focus on understanding their multilingual learners' language proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge to tailor supports effectively. Scaffolds should align with clear learning objectives and success criteria, gradually building independence by starting with maximum support and progressively reducing intensity as students gain more skills. Students should be guided in making decisions about when and whether to reduce scaffolding approaches.

Scaffolding instruction can be challenging and demanding, especially when addressing students' varied proficiency levels and grade-level readiness. Remember to carefully manage time constraints that may limit opportunities for individualized support and avoid over-scaffolding, which can discourage students from taking risks or developing independence.

By maintaining a learner-centered approach, scaffolding can better promote both academic and language learning with multilingual learners.

SUMMARY

Scaffolding is essential for multilingual learners, supporting language mastery, academic success, and a sense of belonging. Without it, these students may not be able to engage fully in learning or access grade-level content. Scaffolding provides targeted approaches that help students to make gains given their current language skills and the proficiency needed to understand grade-level material. Providing focused support, scaffolding helps students build essential skills, actively participate in learning, and gain independence. It enables multilingual learners to engage in general education curricula, showcase their abilities, and collaborate meaningfully with peers. More than a strategy, scaffolding is a mindset. By centering planning instruction for multilingual learners with these approaches, teachers can create inclusive, equitable classrooms where multilingual learners can grow, succeed, and meaningfully contribute to their own learning.

Questions

1. How can scaffolding instruction help multilingual learners overcome barriers to accessing grade-level content and fully engaging in classroom activities?
2. What strategies would you use to balance providing support with fostering independence in multilingual learners?
3. In what ways does adopting a “scaffolding mindset” change how teachers approach lesson planning and instruction?
4. How can scaffolding techniques be tailored to address multilingual learners’ diverse needs and language proficiency levels in inclusive classrooms?

