Scaffolding Writing With the "Teaching and Learning Cycle" for Students in Grades 6–12

PAMELA SPYCHER

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"[T]he best way to learn to write is by reading. Reading critically, noticing paragraphs that get the job done, how your favorite writers use verbs, all the useful techniques. A scene catches you? Go back and study it. Find out how it works."

— TONY HILLERMAN[1]

As celebrated author Tony Hillerman emphasizes, to become a good writer, one must read abundantly and critically. Reading critically, from this standpoint, involves examining the language choices authors make to "get the job done" — in other words, to communicate effectively in specific ways with particular audiences. Not all students in middle and high school intuit this type of reading and may experience challenges when they go to write for academic purposes. Their teachers are in a unique position to demystify how language works in written texts in their content areas, but they may not know of specific methods for doing so.

This article addresses these challenges by offering concrete ideas so teachers across the disciplines can add to their existing repertoires and support their students to be better writers. Teachers will find that the ideas offered are especially useful for their students who are learning English as an additional language (herein referred to as multilingual learners); however, they may decide that particular methods are also beneficial for their English-proficient students. The article begins with a scenario with which teachers may be familiar: students turning in papers with writing that is disorganized and unclear, making the task of determining students' content

[1] Best-selling American author Tony Hillerman (1925–2008) wrote detective novels and nonfiction works and is best known for his Navajo Tribal Police mystery novels that illustrate his avowed purpose: to instill in his readers a respect for Native American culture.

knowledge difficult. The rest of the article explains a process through which teachers can scaffold students' successful writing. This process is called, simply, the "Teaching and Learning Cycle."

Meet Ms. García

Ms. García is a 9th grade English language arts (ELA) teacher in a school serving a large number of multilingual learners, most of whom have been in U.S. schools for at least four years.[2] Not long ago, she planned a unit based on a topic of interest to many of her students: immigration experiences and their effects on individuals and families before, during, and after the actual immigration has taken place. The culminating task for the unit was a written argument about the topic.

She selected a book that she thought her students would enjoy reading and that many of her students would be able to relate to: *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* by Reyna Grande (2016). Grande's book, a memoir, is about her experiences living in Mexico — in poverty and without her parents for much of the time — traveling across the border, and starting a new life in the United States. Ms. García also provided the Spanish language version of the book (Grande, 2017) to her student who had been in the United States for only about a year, whose English language proficiency was emerging, and whose home language was Spanish.

Ms. García wanted to help her students become critical thinkers and readers and effective communicators, and she planned lessons that would help her students better understand the world around them and the important and powerful roles they can take to improve it. As is the case with all teachers, she wanted her students to be able to express thoughtful, evidence-based, and coherent ideas in writing. Throughout the unit, she taught a variety of interactive lessons in which students discussed Grande's story and the themes it addresses. She observed that her students were engaged, excited, and eager to share their ideas.

Despite these positive signs of engagement and learning, when Ms. García sat down to read and evaluate her students' final arguments at the end of the unit, she found that, by and large, their writing fell flat. Most of the students' reports were disorganized and did not reflect all of the rich content learning and discussions

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[2] Ms. García is fictional, but she and the scenario described in this article are based on real teachers and schools.

that had taken place over the previous few weeks. Although a handful of students were able to write clearly and coherently, most of the arguments were choppy and fragmented, and some were merely lists of information. Ms. García was frustrated as she had set high expectations for her students, expectations that she believed they were capable of achieving. She knew they had a lot to share about the topic, as evidenced by their rich discussions during the unit. Upon reflection, she realized that she may have made incorrect assumptions about what her students already understood about argumentative writing, and she realized that her students may have benefited from more intentional and explicit instruction in how to write in this particular genre.

The Power of Educator Reflection and Collaboration

Like most teachers, Ms. García has a vision for her students to be critical thinkers and powerful communicators on issues they care about and able to meet the increasingly rigorous demands of high school. She is a reflective teacher, always eager to improve her practice. In the next ELA departmental team meeting, which included the school's English language development (ELD) specialist, the team discussed Ms. García's problem of practice and commiserated with her. They, too, were challenged to support all students to become proficient writers. After much discussion, the team determined that the next step would be to deepen their pedagogical knowledge in the area of argument writing. They were confident that intentional scaffolding — specialized and temporary support tailored to students' learning needs and designed to support their future independence — would support their students to thrive. However, they were unsure about where to start in their professional learning on the topic.

> What aspects of Ms. García's story have you experienced? In what ways has collaboration with your colleagues helped you to address challenges in your practice?

One teacher proposed that the team explore a process for scaffolding she recently learned about in a summer institute: the Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC). She shared that the TLC may give them ideas for supporting their students more intentionally to focus on how the language in argument texts works. The team decided to begin learning together about the TLC approach by reading and discussing some of the articles from the summer institute during their team meetings. They agreed

to identify some of the recommended practices in the article that they would like to try out in their classrooms the following semester. The next section of this article explains what the team learned as they collaborated on this project and some of the new practices they chose to try out in their classrooms.

The Teaching and Learning Cycle
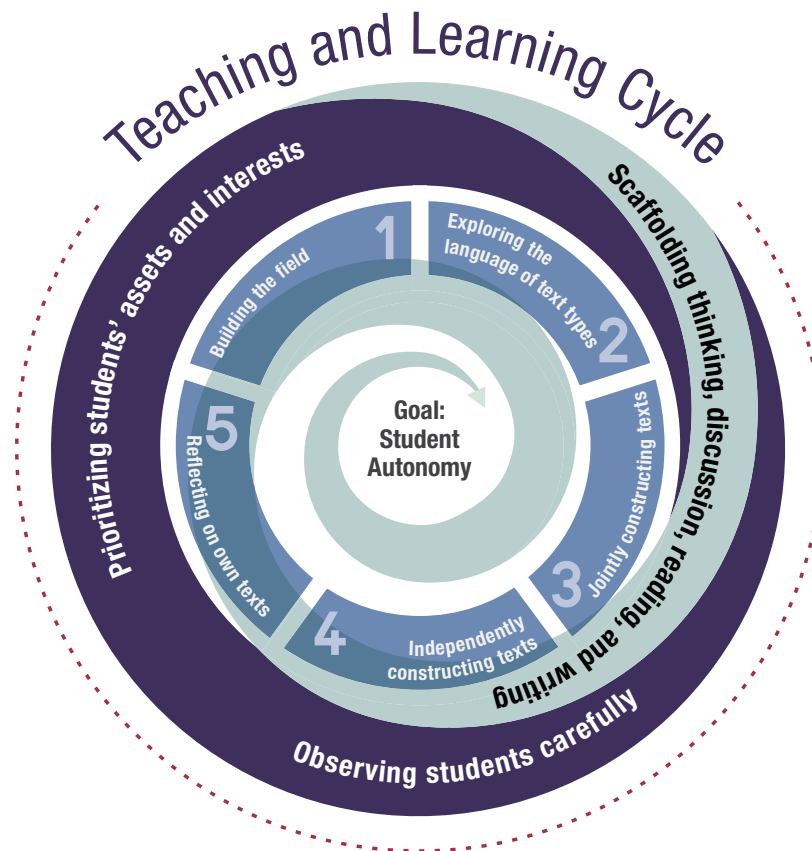
The TLC is a pedagogical process for systematically scaffolding students' thinking, reading, discussions, and writing. Using the TLC, teachers support students as they progress through five stages in the cycle:

1. building the field (building content knowledge about the topic),

2. exploring the language of text types,

3. jointly constructing texts,

4. independently constructing texts, and

5. reflecting on own texts.

The immediate goal of the process is students' successful writing (or written-like oral presentations) of a specific genre in a particular discipline (e.g., a science explanation, a literary analysis). The ultimate goal is student autonomy in successfully writing in a variety of genres across the disciplines.

The TLC was first developed in Australia in the 1980s by teachers working with educational linguists drawing on the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics.[3] It has since spread globally as educators see how the quality of their students' writing improves through the framework's intentional and language-focused support. Through the TLC, students not only have the opportunity to engage meaningfully in deep content learning, they also develop metalinguistic awareness (awareness of how language works) as their teachers support them to notice, explore, analyze, and rehearse discipline-specific writing.

The TLC helps students to understand how different genres within the disciplines work. Here, genre refers to different types of writing (text types), which differ because they are written in different content areas, communicate to different audiences, and have different purposes, such as to persuade, to entertain, or to explain. Genres that secondary students typically write in school include narratives (such as fictional stories or biographies), descriptions of scientific phenomena, explanations of historical events or how math problems were solved, and arguments for interpretations of literature. The genre-based pedagogy that is central to the TLC demystifies the language used in academic texts, which supports students' abilities to navigate such texts and make informed choices in their own writing.

The TLC is especially powerful for extended units of study, but it can also be adapted for use with a sequence of lessons that span only a week or two. The TLC should not be thought of as prescriptive; the pedagogical practices employed in each of its stages can be used flexibly. The next section explains the framing of the TLC and the five stages of teaching and learning.

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[3] To read more about the TLC and genre-based pedagogy, see Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Gebhard, 2019; Gibbons, 2015; Rose & Martin, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2017; and Spycher & Spycher, 2016.

Prioritizing Students' Assets and Interests

As shown in the TLC graphic, the instructional stages of the TLC are framed, first and foremost, by a commitment to prioritizing students' cultural, linguistic, experiential, and other assets, as well as what students are interested in learning about. Asset-based pedagogy begins with positive beliefs about and dispositions toward students who are Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) — as well as other marginalized students,[4] their families, and communities — and continues with actions that express these beliefs. Most multilingual students are also BIPOC, and therefore asset-based pedagogy is necessary for their success in school.

Critical consciousness is an essential component of asset-based pedagogy. Teachers who are critically conscious routinely reflect on their beliefs about and dispositions toward their students, feel empathy and compassion for their students and their communities, vocally reject deficit-oriented views, and position students' culture and language as central to their academic success and to classroom learning activities. Asset-based pedagogy, which includes culturally and linguistically relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies,[5] calls on teachers to

> What aspects of asset-based pedagogy are already part of your practice? Which aspects of asset-based pedagogy would you like to explore further?

- recognize, value, and cultivate students' cultural and linguistic assets;

- prioritize content, topics, and texts that accurately portray the historical and current experiences, contributions, and struggles of individuals and communities;

- address the school system's racial, linguistic, and other inequities and injustices that harm students;

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[4] Other marginalized students who have been historically underserved and treated from a deficit orientation in schools include those who are LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual), students living in economically under-resourced communities, students with immigrant or migrant status, students struggling with mental health, and students with disabilities.

[5] To learn more about asset-based pedagogy, see Aronson & Laughter, 2016; López et al., 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017; and visit the California Department of Education web page on the topic: https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/assetbasedpedagogies.asp.

- support students to develop positive identities, racial and ethnic pride, and a sense of belonging and efficacy in school;

- integrate into the curriculum students' frames of reference, worldviews, and learning styles;

- raise all students' awareness of issues of social justice for all oppressed people and how they can contribute to justice and unity; and

- incorporate into the curriculum individual students' varied interests.

Strong examples of asset-based pedagogy in secondary schools include Ethnic Studies courses and the curriculum and activities that are commonly part of those courses. For example, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is a project approach based in social justice principles whereby students conduct research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions that serve them. In YPAR projects, students (1) identify a problem facing their community, (2) analyze the problem to identify possible underlying causes, (3) create a research plan to investigate the causes, (4) implement their research and gather data as it progresses, (5) reflect on the data, and (6) communicate what was learned about the problem and possible solutions. There are different variations of YPAR, but one key aspect is that it is youth-led. Sample YPAR project topics include environmental health issues facing the local community, discrimination and gender bias in the school dress code, integrating transformative justice into school policy, access to mental health services, and college access.[6]

For multilingual learners, asset-based pedagogy includes practices that promote opportunities for students to sustain their multilingualism, cultivate pride in being multilingual, and develop agency over their language use. One example of such practices is translanguaging pedagogy. Translanguaging consists of multilingual students combining and integrating their languages in learning activities. Translanguaging pedagogy involves teachers believing that their multilingual students' language practices are central to learning and a right, and it includes teachers designing instruction to promote students' use of their full linguistic repertoire. Examples include providing students access to texts and other instructional materials in their home languages and encouraging students to use all of their languages in academic discussions and formal assignments.[7]

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[6] For more information on YPAR, visit http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/.

[7] To learn more about translanguaging pedagogy, see Ascenzi-Moreno & Espinosa, 2018; Canagarajah, 2011; and García et al., 2017.

Observing Students Carefully

As innovative and efficient professionals, teachers are always looking for ways to maximize instructional time and avoid wasting it. Investing in deep understanding of scaffolding — and its complementary practice, formative assessment — can help teachers achieve these dual goals. Scaffolding refers to a process in which teachers or peers offer support that assists learners to move from what they already know or can do independently to new understandings or skills (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983). This specialized support happens through meaningful interaction between a "more knowledgeable other" and the learner and is tailored to the learner's "sweet spot," or their zone of proximal (next) development (ZPD). Importantly, scaffolding gradually tapers off as the learner develops autonomy and no longer needs such specific support. When students have appropriate and adequate scaffolding (high support), they are engaged in a comfortable learning zone, able to achieve high expectations (high challenge).

> In what ways does this explanation of scaffolding connect with what you understand it to be? What new understandings are occurring for you?

High Challenge, High Support
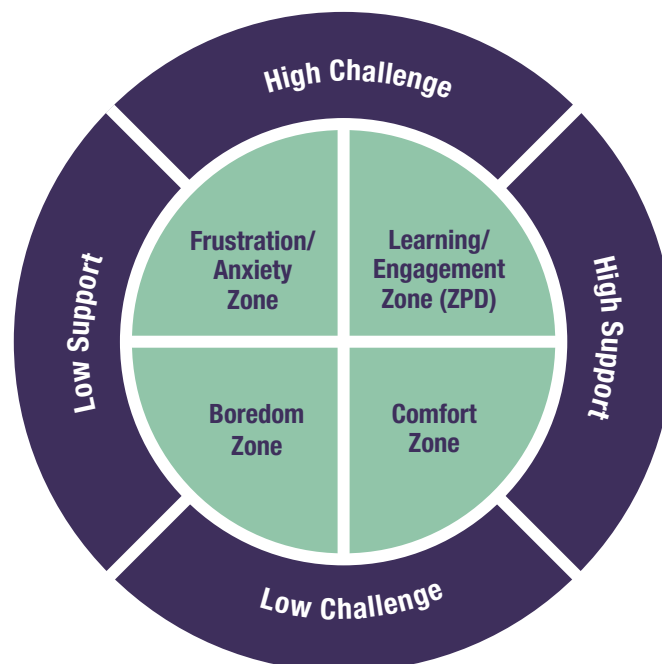
Sources: Adapted from Gibbons (2009) and Mariani (1997)

Planned scaffolding — what teachers prepare for in the planning phase before teaching — is essential to ensure that all students are able meet high expectations and learning goals. Planned scaffolding is complemented by in-the-moment scaffolding, which is provided while learning is happening so that students can make timely shifts as they progress toward goals. Since it requires intentional and constant observation of student progress, this in-the-moment scaffolding also allows teachers to make timely *pedagogical* shifts so that valuable instructional time is not squandered. Careful observation of students while instruction is happening allows teachers to provide useable feedback and in-the-moment scaffolding.

Scaffolding Thinking, Discussion, Reading, and Writing

This section zooms in on each of the five stages of the TLC, which are framed by prioritizing students' assets and interests and by careful, ongoing observation of student learning, as noted in the previous sections. Emphasized in the five stages is the simultaneous development of content knowledge, disciplinary practices, and language. Naturally, specific pedagogical practices are selected intentionally based on the content-area learning goals and culminating tasks for a unit of study. In other words, a strategy[8] is not necessarily "high-impact" if it doesn't serve to deepen students' knowledge and critical thinking about a topic or help them build the specific language and literacy competencies so they can express such knowledge effectively and be successful with end-of-unit expectations (e.g., a written argument, a speech, a multimedia presentation).

The TLC does not replace the effective instructional practices teachers already have in place, it enhances them.[9] Teachers are encouraged to consider incorporating some of the strategies described in this article into their existing units of study in order to become comfortable with these strategies. Often, the first time a new strategy is implemented, it feels awkward and clunky for both teachers and students. Taking the time to reflect after a new strategy has been tried is essential. Before long, it will be possible to connect many of the strategies using the TLC's sequenced process in order to provide high challenge and high support for all students.

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[8] In this article, the term "strategy" means a purposeful, intentional, and structured instructional approach that has a predetermined objective and that employs various teaching methods or techniques. Effective instructional strategies are grounded in sound theories of teaching and learning.

[9] For a broader set of research-based instructional practices that are particularly effective for multilingual and English learner students in grades 6-12, see Spycher et al., 2020.

Stage 1: Building the Field

The first stage of the TLC focuses on building students' "field" of deep content knowledge about a topic through language-rich experiences that involve a lot of discussion, inquiry, and exploration ("building the field" for short). Pedagogical practices in this stage engage students meaningfully in discipline-specific practices to build their content knowledge, anchor their learning in real-world experiences and phenomena that are relevant and meaningful to them, and cultivate collaboration between students through regular team-based learning and extended discussions focused on collective sense-making. Because the activities in this stage prioritize peer-to-peer interaction, the use of protocols, norms, and success criteria is critical.

In reality, building the field occurs throughout all stages of the TLC because, obviously, students continue to deepen their content knowledge and sharpen their disciplinary practices throughout a unit of study. Building the field is placed as the first stage to emphasize the critical importance of knowledge and language development through meaningful interaction. Beginning with this stage, while keeping in mind that it continues through the end of the last stage, also provides a content context within which students explicitly learn how to use new discipline-specific language and expand their disciplinary literacy skills. The following lists provide a sampling of tasks that teachers may want to include in their units of study for this stage.

Inquiry Activators

- **K–C–L chart:** At the beginning of the unit, students chart what they already know (K) about the topic in order to activate their existing knowledge. Next, they chart questions they have about the topic or what they are curious about (C). These questions help teachers be responsive to what students are interested in learning about. Over the course of the unit, students add to the chart the important things they are learning (L) as well new things they are curious about.

- **Gallery walk:** Students roam the room in triads and stop at various places where photographs that are related to the topic have been posted on the walls. There, they discuss the images and may take notes in a note catcher or leave "I notice…" and "I wonder…" sticky notes next to each image, which other triads can read when they rotate and discuss the image.

- **Think-write-share:** A quick way to activate students' knowledge and spark curiosity about a new topic is to provide them with a bit of tantalizing information about the topic, such as a brief explanation, an image, or a short video clip. Then, students can have several minutes for writing down any connections they are making with what they saw or heard, followed by sharing their connections with a peer or table team.

I highlighted that ambition is socially useful.
It sustains economic vitality. It prods people

Students engaging in a small-group discussion. Source: California Department of Education (2021)

Student-Led Discussions

- **Paired and small-group discussions:** Students routinely discuss topics or reading selections in pairs or small groups using protocols and discussion norms to ensure equity in participation. They discuss open-ended questions that promote critical thinking and extended discourse. They may have specific roles, such as facilitator, timekeeper, notetaker, and norms monitor.

- **Expert group jigsaw:** Students form three to four "expert groups." Each group reads and discusses a different text, thereby becoming "experts" on the information in the texts. They use a structured notetaking tool to capture points from the discussion. Students then convene in "jigsaw groups" with one person from each expert group and share the information they have in their notes. They use the same notetaking tool to capture notes from the other experts as they fill in their "information gaps." They then reconvene in their expert groups to compare what they learned.

- **Socratic seminar:** Students lead a whole-class, extended discussion about a novel or several informational texts they've read to deepen their understanding of and synthesize critical concepts in response to guiding questions. They meet in small groups before the seminar to discuss the guiding questions and generate notes they want to use during the seminar, such as claims, evidence, and reasoning. "Discussants" are seated in an inner circle and actively discuss the questions. "Coaches" sit in the outer circle, take notes, and coach the discussants at breaks. Students switch roles halfway through the seminar.

- **Structured academic controversy:** Students work in small groups to explore different perspectives on a controversial topic by reading one or more texts on it. The different groups then convene to share the various perspectives. They use success criteria to adhere to norms for civil discourse and, rather than arguing for a particular perspective, they focus their discussion on reasons why people might have a particular perspective.

Language frames such as the ones in the following table support discussions because they are not "cloze" sentence frames looking for a "right" answer. Instead, they are open-ended and encourage students to express their content knowledge and elaborate on their perspectives by giving them a boost to participate in the conversation. They also provide students with formulaic expressions that the students can use often to help them communicate their ideas clearly in a range of contexts. Importantly, students who use these language frames in oral discussions may later feel comfortable using them in writing, thereby bridging from oral to written language.

> In what ways do you currently encourage and support student-led discussions in your classroom? What new ideas are emerging for you?

Language Frames to Support Discussions	
To share your information: One thing I noticed was _____. Something you may find interesting/ upsetting/unbelievable is that _____. In my section ___, I learned that ____, which suggests that ___.	**To build on someone's ideas:** I'd like to add something to what ___ said: ___. Something related to what you said that I learned was that ___. What you said about ____ made me think about ___.
To ask for clarification: Can you say more about _____? What do you mean by _____? So, what you're saying is ___. Do I have that right?	**To disagree respectfully:** I can see your point; however, _____. Have you considered this idea: _____? I understand what you said about _____, and I'd like to offer another perspective: ____.

Promoting Abundant Reading

- **Independent reading:** Students choose a full-length book they are interested in, ideally related to the topic they are learning about, or read a book that is the focus of the unit of study. They use a reading journal to note important events, new words or phrasing, or personal reflections. Class time is allotted for students to read independently, such as the first 10 minutes of class. Students are also expected to read outside of class. Students convene periodically in pairs or small groups to share about their books, using the notes they have taken in their journals.

- **Modeled reading:** Teachers model an enthusiasm for reading and metacognitive reading behaviors by reading aloud a high-interest literary or informational text to students. They stop at strategic points to make comments, point out beautiful or striking language, summarize, make predictions, and pose themselves reflection questions that are then discussed as a whole class, in table teams, or in pairs. Students may participate in the reading in different ways, such as fade-in/fade-out reading (in which the teacher occasionally allows their voice to fade out and the students pick up the reading and continue until the teacher's voice

fades back in) or relay reading (in which the teacher occasionally asks students to read a few sentences and then "pass the baton" to another student before resuming the modeling).

Multimedia and Experiential Integration

- **Videos, music, and podcasts:** Students view engaging videos, such as TED Talks, and listen to music and podcasts related to the topic they are learning about. They use structured notetaking tools with guiding questions that draw their attention to particular aspects of what they are viewing or listening to. After, they use protocols and their notes to discuss their ideas.

- **Invite an expert:** Teachers invite local experts, such as artists or activists, to present to or be interviewed by the class. Before the visit, students work in small groups to prepare interview questions in advance and nominate those questions to be asked first. The notes from the interview are then used as evidence for culminating tasks.

- **Field research:** Students have opportunities to conduct "field research" by, for example, visiting museums, historical landmarks, nature reserves, or other places that provide them with firsthand experience on a topic.

Stage 2: Exploring the Language of Text Types

By this stage, students have been reading and talking about a topic quite a bit and have built up some content knowledge about it. They've also been using new language related to the topic and learning it incidentally through exposure. They are now ready to explore more explicitly the language in the texts they've been reading. The second stage of the TLC is an opportunity for teachers to highlight and amplify the purpose, overall structure, and particular language features of the texts, which will help students with comprehending the texts and also provide them with rich models of writing to help shape their own independent writing.

In this stage, using well-crafted texts that students have already read (mentor texts[10]), teachers help students to understand how the author's purpose (such as arguing for a position or explaining a scientific concept) and their intended audience (such as an elected official or their peers) shape how the genre is organized and what kind of language is used. The students' language exploration should be directly connected to the type of text they will be writing. For example, if they are going to write an argument in the style of an op-ed article, they would examine similar op-ed articles on the same topic. If they are going to write a scientific explanation, they would examine such explanations. Through this exploration, students begin to see how, for example, an argument written as an op-ed is structured and what kinds of language are used. They also begin to see that an argument is structured differently and draws on different kinds of language than, say, a piece of creative writing. In stage two of the TLC, students explore and analyze genres to determine the details of these differences.

> In what ways are the ideas in this section similar to or different from your current instructional practice?
> Is there anything you are curious to learn more about?

During this stage, students are learning about and talking about language itself and are therefore developing metalinguistic awareness (awareness about how language works) and metalanguage (language for talking about language). Metalanguage includes terms that are already familiar to many students, such as "verbs" and "nouns." Students may also learn new terms such as "text connectives," which refers to words such as "additionally" and "therefore" that connect chunks of text. Different types of texts will have particular language in it. For example, when discussing argument texts, students might discuss language that authors use to increase or decrease the intensity of their claims, such as "extremely unlikely," "somewhat likely," or "unlikely."

Teachers may want to plan instruction that focuses on different "levels" of language, such as the whole-text level, section level, paragraph level, sentence level, clause level, phrase level, and word level. The levels in focus will depend on what

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[10] Analyzing mentor texts helps students identify how particular aspects of language contribute to the texts' efficacy. Mentor texts also serve as models that students can refer to when crafting their own texts.

the text affords, the learning goals for the unit, and where students are in their development. The following lists provide sample activities for some of these levels that teachers might focus on.

Whole Text–Level Analysis

- **Identifying the author's purpose:** Students work in pairs to examine a whole text and discuss what the author was trying to do in each section of the text, which has typically been predetermined by the teacher. Students might discover that some sections of a text describe or explain something, whereas other sections try to persuade readers of a position. After exploring the author's intent for each section, students discuss why the sections are sequenced as they are.

- **Whole-text jumble:** Students work in pairs or triads to reconstruct the "chunks" of text that have been cut apart and "jumbled" ahead of time by the teacher. Their task is to put the text back together in a way that makes sense and to explain their rationale. For example, they may identify clues, such as text connectives or words that refer to another chunk, that led them to place the sections where they did. Then, they explain what they learned.

- **Analyzing cohesion:** Students explore how whole texts "hang together" through specific cohesive language, such as openers (i.e., how an author begins a text or a paragraph), text connectives (e.g., "however," "consequently"), and/or referencing (e.g., using terms such as "that" or "this problem" to refer to something that came earlier in the text).

Paragraph-Level Analysis

- **Collaborative text reconstruction:** Students listen to the teacher read aloud a short "mentor text" (no more than one to two paragraphs long). The teacher reads it several times without the students being able to see the text. As they listen, they take notes to capture key words or phrases. Then they work with a partner to reconstruct the text as closely as they can to the original one they heard. The pairs might compare what they generated against what another pair generated. The teacher then reveals the original text, and the students compare it to theirs, focusing on specific

language that was used to convey the content. The teacher then points out some key language features that they want to make sure students notice, such as text connectives or discipline-specific terms.

- **Paragraph jumble:** This activity is similar to a whole-text jumble, but instead of reconstructing the major sections of a whole text, students work in pairs or triads to reconstruct the jumbled sentences of a paragraph. Then they explain their rationale, noting language clues they used to place sentences in the order they did and what they learned from doing so.

Paragraph Jumble Protocol

Purpose: To help you understand how to write a strong paragraph by focusing on how it's structured and the language used to make it cohesive ("hang together well")

Instructions:

1. **Prepare:** Find your triad. Identify a timekeeper. Someone volunteer to get the materials.

2. **Read the Sentences:** Take turns reading each sentence in the envelope.

3. **Get the Gist:** Discuss what you think the paragraph is mostly about, just by reading the jumbled sentences.

4. **Order the Sentences:** Work together to place the jumbled sentences in the correct order (according to you).

5. **Find the Language Clues:** Identify the language clues you used to reassemble the text in order. What made you think this was the correct order? Circle or underline these language clues.

6. **Make Meaning:** Explore the meanings in the text.

7. **Summarize:** Come to a consensus on one or two big ideas that this paragraph is communicating (what this paragraph is mostly about).

8. **Share:** When you hear the signal, find another triad and share your analyses and summaries.

Sentence-, Clause-, and Phrase-Level Analysis

- **Sentence unpacking:** Students "unpack" the meaning of grammatically dense sentences that are important to understanding the meaning of the text and overall learning goals. This is done by breaking up the different "chunks" of the sentence (e.g., dissecting a particularly long noun phrase into smaller parts), translating the meanings into more familiar language, and discussing the meanings. These steps are what proficient readers do when they come to particularly challenging sentences.

- **Sentence expanding:** Students start with a basic sentence and build onto the sentence by adding academic vocabulary or phrases, which expands the sentence's meaning and adds precision. Teachers might display a photo for students to use to spark ideas.

- **Sentence jumble:** This activity is similar to a whole-text jumble and a paragraph jumble, but this time, students work in pairs or triads to reconstruct the jumbled clauses or phrases of different sentences. Then they explain their rationale, noting language clues that they used to put together their sentences the way they did and what they learned from doing so.

Sentence Unpacking Protocol

Instructions: We will unpack one or two sentences together as a class first. Then, work with a partner and use the "Sentence Unpacking Protocol" to unpack the other sentences provided.
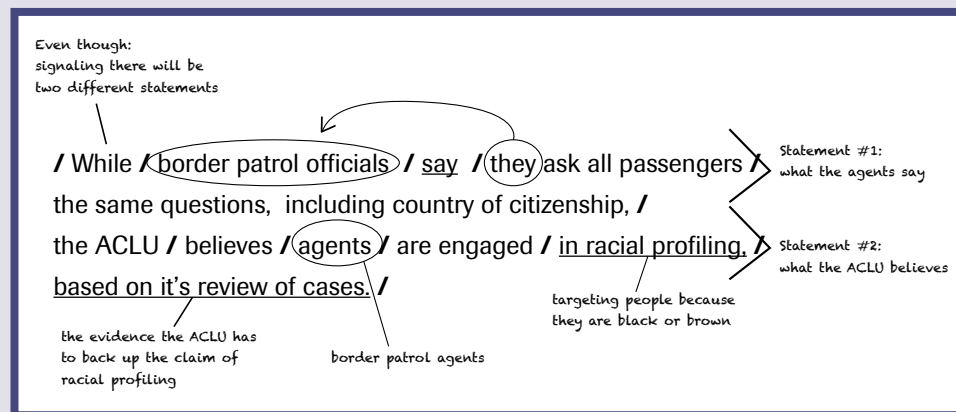
Purposes:

- To slow down when you get to a grammatically complex sentence and "unpack" it to understand it better
- To get ideas about how to write your own sentences in academic texts

Sentence Unpacking Protocol

1. **Get the Gist:** Discuss with your partner what the sentence is mostly about.

2. **Focus on Meaning:** Identify the meaningful chunks in the sentence by putting a slash mark (/) in between each chunk. Write notes about what each chunk means in your own words.

3. **Focus on Language:** Discuss what you notice about the language in each chunk. How did the author pack a lot of information into the chunk?

4. **Translate:** Translate the sentence into everyday language, as though you were talking to a friend or a younger sibling. Write it down below the original sentence.

5. **Reflect:** Discuss what you now understand about the sentence's meaning. Has anything changed since step 1?

Example to get you started:

Even though: signaling there will be two different statements

/ While / border patrol officials / say / (they) ask all passengers / the same questions, including country of citizenship, / the ACLU / believes / agents / are engaged / in racial profiling, / based on it's review of cases. /

Statement #1: what the agents say

Statement #2: what the ACLU believes

targeting people because they are black or brown

border patrol agents

the evidence the ACLU has to back up the claim of racial profiling

Source: Turnbull (2018) "Two-Thirds of Americans Live in the 'Constitution-Free Zone'"

Word-Level Analysis

Attention to vocabulary learning can also be part of whole text–level, paragraph-level, sentence-level, clause-level, and phrase-level analyses. In whole text–level analyses, students may be noticing and discussing how text connectives — such as "however," "as a result," or "in addition" — create cohesion and help readers navigate smoothly through the text. As they discuss texts and topics, teachers may explain in context the meaning of general academic words (such as "accumulate" or "expectation") or discipline-specific words (such as "circumference" or "legislative"). They also may have students keep track of these words in vocabulary notebooks or post the words, along with short definitions and sample (mentor) sentences, to encourage and support students to use these words frequently.

Teachers can also explicitly address certain types of words that are particularly prevalent in writing for academic purposes, such as nominalizations. Nominalizations are terms that are usually expressed in everyday communication using verbs (such as "destroy") or adjectives (such as "strong"), but in academic texts are often expressed as nouns and noun phrases (such as "destruction" or "strength"). Nominalization helps authors to express abstract concepts precisely, as the following example illustrates (the nominalizations are underlined and bolded).

*An **understanding** of the **influence** of **transnational immigration** on **identity** is critical in today's world of **migration**, **diaspora**, and **displacement**.*

At all levels of analysis, students are engaged in conversations about both the language and the content of the texts that they are analyzing. They are not doing "language work" in isolation; in other words, content learning does not drop off in stage two in order to have an isolated focus on language. Language exploration is always in service of content knowledge development.

Stage 3: Jointly Constructing Texts

In stage three of the TLC, teachers guide students to collectively write part of a text (a paragraph or two) that is in the same genre as one that they will later write independently. This stage can be thought of as writing "rehearsal" that is carried out through dialogue. The talking part of this joint construction should feel like a comfortable and informal conversation even though what the class is writing is more academic in nature. In this stage, the teacher does the writing and prompts the students to express both their content understandings and language skills. As the students craft the text through dialogue, they negotiate what language to include.

This stage of the TLC provides many opportunities for in-the-moment scaffolding. Teachers prompt students strategically, ask follow-up questions, help them to rephrase statements, and judiciously offer suggestions when needed. This scaffolding requires teachers to know where students are in their learning, have an idea of what the final text might look like, be ready with techniques for navigating the class toward the expected outcome, and all the while be open to new and unexpected ideas that students may have. The lists on "Preparing Students for the Activity," "Writing on the Chart," "Drawing Out and Being Open to Students' Ideas," and "Possible Questions to Ask" provide some tips for carrying out this stage and jointly constructing texts with students.

> How might you try out jointly constructing texts with your students? What would be your first steps?

Preparing Students for the Activity

- Set the purpose of the activity by telling students what type of text they will be co-constructing and the social purpose of the text (e.g., to persuade, inform, explain, entertain, recount an experience).

- Briefly review the information on charts and word walls generated in stages one and two of the TLC so that students can refer to them if they need ideas.

- Consider asking the students to discuss with a partner their ideas about the topic before coming together as a whole class to discuss and co-construct the text.

Writing on the Chart

- Act as a scribe, draw attention to relevant language features (e.g., vocabulary, phrasing, organization), and provide sentence starters as needed. You are modeling and they are rehearsing the writing process that they will soon do on their own.

- Cross out, add, and/or rearrange words and phrases, and generally model that writing is an iterative process that involves multiple drafts — writing is messy.

- Don't put a period at the end of each sentence right away in order to encourage students to expand and enrich the ideas that you are writing.

- Leave spaces between each row of sentences so that more information can be added, if needed.

Drawing Out and Being Open to Students' Ideas

- Coach the students by modeling how to think aloud before settling on what to write, such as how to start the text, expand and enrich sentences, edit sentences, and include precise vocabulary.

- Be open to students' ideas even if their ideas are different from your own and not what you were expecting.

- Rephrase ideas that students offer to model how to use language in particular ways, such as including discipline-specific terms.

- Use metalanguage, such as "Who can think of a good text connective to connect these sentences?" "What's a more vivid action verb to describe the character's behavior?" "How could we expand this noun phrase to describe the setting more precisely?"

Possible Questions to Ask

- How should we start our text?

- What word could we use here?

- Is there another way to say that?

- Could you say more? Could you explain your idea a bit more?

- How could we expand that idea?

- How could we condense that idea?

- How could we connect those ideas?

- Why is that information important for this text?

- What other information should we include? What other terms are important?

- Is this the order we want, or should we move things around?

Once the text has been jointly constructed, if it is too messy, it can be recopied onto another chart and annotated with the stages of the genre and any significant language features. The final text can serve as a mentor text to which the students can refer as they craft their own texts.

Jointly constructing texts with students provides teachers with opportunities to observe how students are "taking up" the content ideas and language that they've been learning. These observations allow teachers to specifically target where they need to clarify content misunderstandings or do more language work. Jointly constructing texts is also a way for teachers to model how real writers write and that writing is a process and that the process is messy. There is a lot of thinking and talking and editing happening while writing. When students go to write their first drafts, their process should also be messy, and students should be encouraged to seek guidance from their peers as they are trying on new writing skills and working through their ideas.

Stage 4: Independently Constructing Texts

By this stage, the students are well prepared to draft their own texts, but they still benefit from strategic support. As students are writing independently, teachers can provide in-the-moment scaffolding or more extensive assistance to individuals or small groups. In addition, writing "independently" may mean that students are writing by themselves as individuals, but it can also mean that they are writing in pairs or small groups, depending on the writing project. For example, students may have researched something in groups and would therefore support one another on their writing assignments together as well. The goal of this stage is not to formally assess students but to continue to support them in becoming autonomous writers.

An important part of this stage is to help students be very intentional and deliberate about the content of their writing and the language they will use in it. Success criteria provide an anchor for students as they are writing. These criteria can be posted on a chart or provided to individual students so that the teacher's expectations for the students' writing are transparent. Students should be involved in creating and/or refining success criteria. This way, they build ownership with the criteria and also begin to recognize layers or nuances of writing that they might want to address. In addition, while first using success criteria, students can focus on just a few indicators, and the criteria for success can be general. Soon, though, success criteria for writing should match genre expectations because different types of texts (e.g., argument, story, science explanation) are structured differently and draw on different language resources, something that students need to be made aware of.

In what ways do success criteria differ from rubrics or other traditional methods for supporting students' independent writing? How might you use (or enhance how you use) success criteria to support your students' writing development?

Success Criteria for a Policy Position (Argument)

Content and Sequence:

- My introduction clearly states my policy position.

- I explain the significance of the position.

- I elaborate on each piece of evidence.

- I acknowledge alternative perspectives on the policy.

- I respectfully say why alternative perspectives are not as good as mine.

Cohesion:

- My ideas flow smoothly and are clearly connected across the sections of the argument.

- My ideas are connected within paragraphs and are clearly related.

Language Choices:

- I use a formal tone to match my audience.

- I use precise terms, both specific to the topic and more generally academic.

- I use persuasive language, such as "should" or "ought to."

- I use text connectives to connect ideas in sentences and paragraphs and across sections.

The Basics:

- I carefully check spelling and punctuation to ensure accuracy.

- I refer to a dictionary when I am unsure of a word's spelling or meaning.

Stage 5: Reflecting on Own Texts

Self-reflection is an important part of the writing process, particularly because formal writing is an iterative process that involves multiple rounds of review, reflection, and revision. Once students have written a solid draft of their texts, they are ready to self-reflect, and they are in a good position to provide and receive feedback. Teachers can conference with individual students, and peers can conference with one another, using the same success criteria that were used for writing first drafts as a guide to focus feedback and suggestions for revisions.

How might your students benefit from reflecting on their own writing and giving writing feedback to their peers?

Peer Feedback Conversations

Students can convene in pairs or small groups to critique one another's writing using norms and agreed-upon processes, such as designated roles and the use of structured feedback protocols. Students are grouped strategically for specific reasons. For example, at times, it may benefit students to be grouped with peers who have similar strengths and areas for growth. However, students should also have the opportunity to read and provide feedback to peers who are stronger writers or who are still emerging in their skills. It's important for students to be exposed to a variety of different peer writers and to recognize that all students have strengths and areas for growth. Regardless of the format of the feedback process, students should have frequent opportunities to reflect on their own writing and to offer and receive feedback from others. Such give and take is a part of how all writers grow.

Peer Feedback Conversation Preparation Notes

Instructions: Read through the whole paper first. Then go back and identify strengths and areas for improvement. Write your notes below. You will use them in your peer feedback conversation.	
A few areas I think are working for this writer and that make this paper effective:	
A few areas I suggest this writer revisits in the revision process and why:	
Questions I have for the writer:	

Evaluating Writing and "Bumping It Up"

One way to provide students an opportunity to evaluate writing — either their own or others' — and improve their own writing is through "bump it up" tasks. One example of doing "bump it up" in secondary classrooms is to provide students with four different short texts, each just a paragraph or two. These short texts could be samples from previous years' students or teacher-created texts and should be aligned with the type of writing students are doing (the same genre and, ideally, same topic). The students work together in pairs or small groups to rank the samples in order from strongest to most in need of improvement, then they explain their rationale for the ranking. They might focus on the accuracy of the content, the efficacy of the rhetorical devices used, how cohesive the text is, discipline-specific terms used for precision, how well-crafted the sentences are, and/or other aspects of writing. The small groups then share their rankings and rationales with the whole group and discuss similarities and differences.

The whole class then comes to a consensus about how the samples should be ranked and the evidence for why, and the writing samples and evidence are posted on the wall (such as in the photo) or in an online format. After, the students consider where they think their current writing skills fall along the continuum of most in need of improvement to most proficient. They also identify specific ways that they could "bump up" their own writing to the next level, using the evidence that the class generated for increasingly stronger writing. At the end of the unit of study, after completing their formal writing assignments, the students return to the "bump it up" wall and reflect on the extent to which they have improved and in which specific areas. Finally, the students reflect on the whole process by discussing what they have learned through it and how it has helped them.

This type of activity, teachers find, can help students with both their metacognitive awareness (being aware of how they think) and metalinguistic awareness (being aware of how they use language).

Source: Trent University School of Education[11]

Making Writing Public

Making writing public is an important part of the writing process. It not only heightens students' awareness about how to communicate effectively with different types of audiences (because they know someone other than their teacher will be reading what they wrote), it also validates all of the hard work they put into creating their piece of writing. Publishing student writing projects on a website, in newsletters (online or in print, for the class or the whole school), or simply posting their writing in the classroom acknowledges students as writers and gives them a voice that others can acknowledge and interact with.

At the end of a unit of study, students from other classes or students' families might be invited to read and hear about students' writing, or teachers might simply post student writing on the walls or place their writing on desks so that students in the class can read a few of their peers' final writing products and, perhaps, leave positive messages about them on sticky notes or slips of paper. Students might perform to a small or large audience their "written-like" oral presentations, such as poems, spoken word, speeches, or multimedia presentations done in the style of TED Talks. Or, small groups of students may record a podcast they prepared and listen to those of their peers. All aspiring writers appreciate having their hard work acknowledged and appreciated, and when they have the opportunity to witness their peers' writing, they may feel encouraged, uplifted, or even inspired.

Revisiting Ms. García and Her Colleagues

Naturally, Ms. García and her departmental team did not attempt to tackle all of the strategies presented in this article. After reading about the TLC and identifying some of the strategies they would like to try out, they decided that the most reasonable approach was to give themselves a month or two for each of them to try out one new strategy. They focused on strategies that they could weave into their existing curriculum without too much disruption. They agreed to gather evidence of impact on student learning — such as their observation notes, student writing samples, or feedback from students on the strategies — and to dedicate time at each departmental meeting to examine the evidence, reflect on their implementation of the new strategies (successes and challenges), and work together to refine their approaches in order to better support students.

The following year, now more confident in the TLC process and familiar with several of the strategies that are useful in each of the five stages, Ms. García and her departmental team collaboratively revised the immigration experiences unit that Ms. García had taught the previous year. They retained many of the original lessons that had been so engaging for students and gave them space to discuss their diverse perspectives and their own experiences. They also kept Grande's memoir and decided to do a combination of teachers reading aloud certain chapters to students — to model proficient reading and guide student thinking and discussion — and student-led literature circles with structured protocols and journals to capture notes from the discussions.

Because they wanted to support their students' argumentative writing, the teachers kept the culminating assignment for the unit: a written argument, in the style of an op-ed in the New York Times and other major publications with broad audiences, about immigration experiences and their effects on individuals and families before, during, and after immigration has taken place. With the final writing assignment in mind, they framed their lessons to scaffold students' success using the TLC. Students read and discussed multiple articles containing important content ideas on the topic in expert group jigsaws, Socratic seminars, and other student-led discussions.

Students also read and discussed the content ideas in a related op-ed article. The first time they read the article, the purpose was to understand the content ideas and perspectives. The second time, the purpose was to identify what the author's purpose was in each section or the author's intended effect on readers. The third time, the purpose was to analyze how the text was structured and identify specific language that the author used to persuade readers to adopt their perspective. Key takeaways of this "language work" were captured on anchor charts during lessons and then posted in the room for students to refer to.

The teachers and students jointly constructed the first paragraph of an argument on the topic. Then, teachers guided students to co-create success criteria that students would use for the culminating writing assignment. The jointly constructed paragraph and the success criteria were also posted. After students wrote their first drafts, they met with peers to give and get feedback for improving their drafts. When students completed their writing assignments, they asked if they could send them to the local newspaper, which ultimately published a few online.

At the end of the unit, students reflected on their growth as critical thinkers and readers, engaged conversationalists, and effective writers. The teachers also reflected on their professional growth, using student writing samples as evidence. Though the writing of some of her students was still not where Ms. García had hoped it would be, compared to the previous year, the quality of most students' writing had improved significantly. The teachers discussed specific places in the unit where they could make improvements, and they used this information as they planned the next one.

Parting Thoughts

The TLC is a powerful approach for helping students become critical readers and effective writers. These dual skill sets can empower students to communicate their perspectives and experiences to a variety of audiences on a range of topics. In the short term, the TLC can help students be able to engage in more meaningful ways with the texts they are reading and be more successful in their writing assignments. In the medium term, students can gain greater access to postsecondary education. In the long term, they can be better prepared to be able to fully participate in broader discussions about issues they care about and that affect their communities.

Not all students will choose to become professional writers or work in professions in which writing is central. But they should have the opportunity to envision themselves in these writing roles and to choose whether or not to pursue them. With the kinds of responsive and sustained support of the TLC as described in this article, their writing abilities may be able to take them as far and wide as they desire.
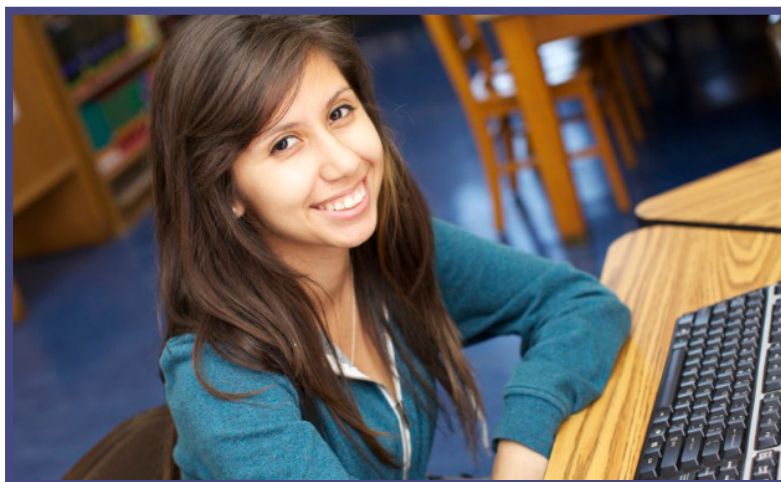
Ready to Explore More?

The following resources offer additional information and insights related to the content of this article.

The chapter "Content and Language Instruction in Middle and High School: Promoting Educational Equity and Achievement Through Access and Meaningful Engagement" in the free online book *Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice* (2020) may expand readers' understanding of topics presented in this article. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/mleleducationch6.pdf

The vignettes in the California ELA-ELD Framework (California Department of Education, 2015), available free online, provide examples of the TLC in action and offer additional instructional strategies that teachers may find helpful. http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/documents/elaeldvignettescollection.pdf

Teaching Language in Context (2016) by Beverly Derewianka and Pauline Jones is a master class in the TLC and how to support students in writing a variety of genres. This book is widely available.

To see some concrete examples of teachers using the TLC and genre-based pedagogy, see Meg Gebhard's book, *Teaching and Researching ELLs' Disciplinary Literacies: Systemic Functional Linguistics in Action in the Context of U.S. School Reform* (2019). This book is widely available.

For a deeper dive into how language works, see Mary Schleppegrell's seminal book *The Language of Schooling: A Functional Linguistics Perspective (2004),* and see Beverly Derewianka's *A New Grammar Companion for Teachers* (2011). These books are widely available.

Caroline Coffin's *Language Support in EAL Contexts: Why Systemic Functional Linguistics?* (2010), which is available free online, provides a deep dive into pedagogical approaches, including the TLC, derived from systemic functional linguistics. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18758.pdf

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