

# Teaching on Principle

*An introduction to the six principles for exemplary teaching of English learners*



In a bold move that could influence English teaching worldwide, TESOL International Association has released a “set of universal guidelines drawn from decades of research in language pedagogy and language acquisition theory.” The six principles for exemplary teaching of English learners are “targets for teaching excellence” designed to support any English language instruction program. “TESOL embarked on this project because we recognized the need for a practical guiding set of principles that would reinforce exemplary ESL instruction, regardless of the content being taught and the context in which it’s delivered,” said Christopher Pow-

ers, TESOL’s executive director.

*The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners: Grades K–12*, the first book in a suite of 6 Principles products from TESOL Press, is now available. This first book provides an evidence-based foundation for schools to examine their own instructional practices and to work collaboratively with colleagues, parents, and policy makers to enable English learners to acquire strong social and academic language proficiency.

Myrna Jacobs, TESOL’s director of publishing and product development, provided some background to the initiative: “The main goal of the six principles is to define what’s

required to develop truly excellent English language teaching around the world. With quite a bit of care and effort, TESOL has undertaken this major strategic initiative to define and describe the conditions, structures, and assessments required for high-quality English language teaching.

“The six principles give TESOL professionals meaningful, research-based guidance in creating a global learning environment in which all English learners thrive, regardless of the content that’s being taught. With all that they represent and offer to teachers, I think the six principles really bring to life and highlight the links between TESOL’s core values,

# THE 6 PRINCIPLES FOR EXEMPLARY TEACHING OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Exemplary teaching of English learners rests on the following 6 Principles:

- 1. Know your learners.** Teachers learn basic information about their students' families, languages, cultures, and educational backgrounds to engage them in the classrooms and prepare and deliver lessons more effectively.
- 2. Create conditions for language learning.** Teachers create a classroom culture that will ensure that students feel comfortable in the class. They make decisions regarding the physical environment, the materials, and the social integration of students to promote language learning.
- 3. Design high-quality language lessons.** Teachers plan meaningful lessons that promote language learning and help students develop learning strategies and critical thinking skills. These lessons evolve from the learning objectives.
- 4. Adapt lesson delivery as needed.** Teachers continually assess as they teach—observing and reflecting on learners' responses to determine whether the students are reaching the learning objectives. If students struggle or are not challenged enough, teachers consider the possible reasons and adjust their lessons.
- 5. Monitor and assess student language development.** Language learners learn at different rates, so teachers regularly monitor and assess their language development in order to advance their learning efficiently. Teachers also gather data to measure student language growth.
- 6. Engage and collaborate within a community of practice.** Teachers collaborate with others in the profession to provide the best support for their learners with respect to programming, instruction, and advocacy. They also continue their own professional learning.



standards, position statements, and wealth of expert content.”

She continued, “One of the major

strengths of the book is that it involves the entire school community—administrators, ‘mainstream’ content teachers, librarians, guidance counselors, and other educational personnel—in its discussion of exemplary teaching of English learners.

“With all that they represent and offer to teachers, the six principles really bring to life and highlight the links among TESOL’s core values, standards, and expertise,” added Powers.

*The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners*

Deborah J. Short, lead writer of *The 6 Principles*, offers her insight on the initiative

**1. Why do you think it is necessary to establish these principles?**

There are several reasons. For one, TESOL is dedicated to improving the quality of English language teaching around the world. The six principles serve as a foundation for TESOL’s efforts, explicating a core set of guidelines for the exemplary teaching and learning of English as a new language. It is important for TESOL to affirm and promote students’ home languages, celebrate their multilingualism, and show how to use their diversity as an asset in class.

For another, the number of English learners continues to grow globally, and it is important for their teachers to understand second-language development and use that knowledge to inform their instructional decision making. As they plan lessons or develop curricula, we want them to consider their learners first, so lessons have clear objectives and engaging tasks that help students use the new language in authentic ways.

For a third reason, many teachers—here is the U.S., for instance—will benefit from a better understanding of how students can learn a new language at the same time they are learning math or science or history. This first book in the series focuses on K–12 settings and is applicable to the multiple classrooms and courses that English learners

are enrolled in. The examples of classroom practices can be implemented whether students are learning Spanish or Mandarin language arts in a dual-language classroom or English in an algebra class or in a content-based ESL course.

**2. How can educators be encouraged to adopt them?**

These six principles are not earth-shattering, new concepts about how to learn a language. What they are instead are simple but powerful, research-based statements about effective language teaching. The key is implementing the six principles as a whole, not just one or two. The advantage is that teachers are not apt to become overwhelmed by addressing the principles. They can start implementing them little by little, adding to their repertoire of classroom practices over time.

We hope that the six principles become a staple in teacher education and professional development. All teachers need to know how to provide high-quality instruction to English learners, a group that in the U.S. has grown much faster in K–12 schools than any other subpopulation of students. Colorado just recently proposed that all new teacher candidates receive 90 hours of instruction for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and practicing teachers receive 45 hours as part of their recertification process.

This book, *The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners*, would be a valuable tool to help with this endeavor, and with similar efforts in other states or countries.

Apart from teacher preparation programs, we encourage teachers and administrators in schools and districts to examine their current programs and determine if they follow best practices for instruction and assessment of second-language learners.

One of the book’s chapters is dedicated to helping schools establish a culture of shared responsibility for the learners. The book also offers a self-assessment for teachers, and discussion questions for PLCs (professional learning communities) will be posted on the website ([www.the6principles.org](http://www.the6principles.org)) in the coming months.

**3. Can they be implemented by the growing numbers of online EFL/ESL teachers worldwide?**

Absolutely; the six principles are universal. Their implementation may not be

identical to the traditional picture of how a teacher plans and delivers lessons in a physical classroom or how he or she interacts with colleagues, but that is the very nature of online instruction.

To address Principle 1, Know Your Learners, for example, when students are not sitting in front of the teacher and he or she does not have opportunities to chitchat, it may take some additional preparation, but surveys of student interests, strengths, preferred learning styles, language and cultural backgrounds, and the like can provide teachers with the data that will help them craft lessons of interest and accessibility.

To address Principle 6, Engage and Collaborate within a Community of Practice, teachers of online courses do not have a teacher lunchroom or faculty meetings in which to discuss teaching and learning, but most do participate in virtual groups such as the myTESOL communities and regularly share ideas, review one another’s lesson plans, gather information about new assessments, upload and discuss videos, and more.

This first book, as I mentioned, is situated in K–12 settings, so some of the classroom practices and sample techniques may need adjustments for EFL contexts and curricula, but EFL teachers who read the ideas will be able to adapt the suggestions creatively to their own classrooms and students. Further, TESOL is planning more books for additional settings, such as EFL and adult education.

**Deborah J. Short** is Deborah J. Short, Ph.D., directs Academic Language Research & Training, a consulting company, and provides professional development on sheltered instruction and academic literacy worldwide. Formerly she was a division director at the Center for Applied Linguistics where she co-developed the research-validated SIOP Model for sheltered instruction. She has directed numerous research studies on English language learners funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education, among others. Her publications include journal articles, SIOP Model books, and several ESL textbooks for National Geographic Learning. She taught English as a second/foreign language in New York, California, Virginia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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