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## Book Reviews

### ***The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners: Grades K-12***

Deborah J. Short, Helen Becker, Nancy Cloud, Andrea B. Hellman, & Linda New Levine. TESOL Press. (2018) (132 pp.) ISBN: 978-1-945351-30-3 Price \$30.95 (3,644 yen)

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The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented disruptive force that negatively affected the education of over 1.5 billion students (UNESCO, 2023) and the traditional teaching practices of numerous English as an international language (EIL) educators. The transition to the “new normal” style of learning was initially quite bumpy for many EIL teachers, as they had to overcome digital divide issues (Isha & Wibawarta, 2023) as well as students who were frustrated and dissatisfied studying in a virtual classroom (Hagedorn et al., 2022). After critically reflecting on the last three years, I believe that the turmoil generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) and ongoing teacher-directed professional development (TDPD). These days, the numerous affordances of digital devices (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018) coupled with the continuous development of Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., Zoom) have generated an exciting new array of TDPD opportunities (e.g., massive open online courses, virtual communities of practice) for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

While reading a book is often an overlooked TDPD tool, especially in our

technologically saturated world, it is still one of the most effective ways that EIL educators can expand their pedagogical horizons. Bakkegard (2023) argued that examining and discussing an educational book with colleagues is a “powerful” professional development vehicle which can “drive change and improve teaching and learning” (para. 14). Keeping this idea in mind, I decided to review *The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners: Grades K-12* (henceforth referred to as *The 6 Principles*), published by TESOL Press. This book, which is the first in the teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) series, aims to help English language learners (ELLs) in kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms acquire effective social and academic language proficiency. The other books in the series examine the following topics: a) adult education and workforce development, b) English for academic and specific purposes, and c) young learners in a multilingual world. The five-member writing team of *The 6 Principles* make use of a plethora of evidence-based research as well as their own experiences teaching ELLs in the American elementary and high school systems. While certain parts of *The 6 Principles* are specific to the United States (e.g., immigration policies – undocumented students), international EIL educators, including those who teach in a higher education setting, will nevertheless find this book to be an immensely valuable resource.

Over the years, the disconnect that often exists between front-line teachers and researchers has been well documented in the academic literature (Kempe, 2019). Anecdotally speaking, there is a tendency by EIL educators to perceive many scholarly studies to be too theoretical and not applicable to their own teaching contexts. The writers of *The 6 Principles* were cognizant of the long-standing gap between research and practice in the EIL field. Their detailed examination of the six core tenets of exemplary teaching, which are grounded in teacher-practitioner research and written in an accessible style, can be applied to a myriad of instructional environments. *The 6 Principles* is organized into five chapters which take up only 103 pages. The remaining 29 pages comprise three appendices, a detailed glossary, references and a further reading section which contains 218 citations. Chapter one, “A vision for exemplary English language teaching,” opens with a vignette of an ideal middle school collaborative learning

project that values students' first language (L1) skills and involves several teachers from different subject areas. This vignette encapsulates the TESOL International Association's vision of an effective education, namely one that honors ELLs' L1 abilities and cultures and provides them with access to a rigorous curriculum that is supported by the entire school community (p. 8). These notions, which are particularly important for anyone who works in a Japanese higher education context, embrace cultural diversity and the value of collaborative synergy in developing ELLs' twenty-first century skills. On a similar note, Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) argued that EIL educators need to be interculturally sensitive and competent themselves in order to foster their students' intercultural communicative competence. The first chapter concludes with an introduction of the six principles of exemplary teaching and an explanation of why they are essential in the American elementary and secondary school systems.

Chapter two, "What teachers should know about English language development to plan instruction," will resonate with international EIL educators and materials developers, as it is jam-packed with essential information about second language (L2) learning. There are several figures, tables, and vignettes liberally sprinkled throughout this chapter which enable readers to take in a tremendous amount of detail without becoming overwhelmed. For instance, Table 2.1 – *Characteristics of proficient academic English* is divided into four levels (i.e., conceptual, discourse, sentence, word) and includes 18 characteristics, an explanation of each one, and practical examples. Students can incorporate the notion of detachment (characteristic four), which suggests objectivity and logical reasoning at the conceptual level, into discussion activities and writing assignments by using phrases such as "research shows that ..." and "the evidence points to ..." to support their opinions.

EIL educators, especially those with an applied linguistics orientation, will undoubtedly gravitate towards the section of the chapter that focuses on L2 acquisition. According to Short et al. (2018), successful L2 hinges on these five conditions: a) neurophysiological capacity (normal first language development), b) motivation, c) facilitative emotional conditions, d) usable input and feedback, and e) deliberate practice (p. 21). I believe that the third condition, which falls

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under the SEL umbrella, is particularly important for educators and students in the post-COVID-19 era. There is a common misconception in many educational circles that students in a typical Japanese university EIL classroom are a culturally homogenized group who are cut from the same proverbial cloth. In actuality, the ELLs in Japan, like students everywhere, are diverse in terms of their gender identity, regionality, dialect, and socioeconomic status. There are also a growing number of students in Japanese university classrooms who are neurodivergent (e.g., autistic and dyslexic) thinkers as well as others who struggle with mental health issues such as social anxiety disorder and depression (Burke, 2020; Watanabe et al., 2021). Thus, I concur with the authors of *The 6 Principles* that teachers have a responsibility to create a “welcoming, safe, and relaxed environment” so that ELLs can better manage their emotions and anxiety levels (p. 21). Encouraging students to read for pleasure in both their L1 and English is another theme that is emphasized in the second chapter and one that will undoubtedly reverberate with TESOL extensive reading aficionados.

The heart and theoretical foundation of *The 6 Principles* book can be found in the third chapter. Chapter three, “The 6 principles for exemplary teaching of English learners,” is chock-full of pedagogical pointers and realistic classroom scenarios which provide teachers with a tremendous amount of food for thought. Short et al. (2018) argued that the following teaching tenets and classroom practices are essential elements in the cultivation of students’ L2 abilities:

1. Know your learners;
2. Create conditions for language learning;
3. Design high-quality lessons for language development;
4. Adapt lesson delivery as needed;
5. Monitor and assess student language development;
6. Engage and collaborate within a community of practice. (p. 36)

The authors explain each of these guiding principles in detail and highlight a wide range of instructional practices that will help teachers establish a more supportive and active learning environment for ELLs. For example, when designing high-quality lessons (principle three), educators should integrate different types of explanatory devices (e.g., graphic organizers, video clips) and

scaffolding techniques (e.g., gestures, varied repetition) to foster students' L2 comprehensibility. International EIL teachers and materials developers will find this this chapter to be especially useful as the concepts and practical pointers are highly transferable.

Chapter four, "Additional roles for teachers of English learners," describes the different hats that educators wear outside of the classroom. Short et al. (2018) claimed that EIL teachers can be agents of change who have a positive impact on students' education if they engage in the following activities: a) advocate for ELLs, b) liaison with families, communities, and administrators, and c) support content teachers by becoming an L2 resource person. In the Japanese higher education context, EIL educators can don the advocacy cape by calling on cost-conscious administrators to stop increasing class sizes, especially in communicative English courses, and working with them to establish effective self-access language learning centers. The final chapter, "Establishing a culture of shared responsibility," deals with the ways that other members of the school community (e.g., district curriculum directors, principals, librarians) can incorporate the six principles into their professional practice. While many of the resources highlighted in this chapter are specific to the political and educational realities in the United States, international EIL educators will still find it to be a worthwhile read. For example, the authors astutely note that curricular developers and test writers can "either support or frustrate the success of English learners" depending on the way in which their materials are designed and implemented (p. 103). Undoubtedly, this notion will resonate with many EIL teachers who question the wisdom of preparing Japanese high school students for high-stakes tests (e.g., university entrance examinations) instead of focusing on their English language communicative competencies.

The main strength of *The 6 Principles* book is that it helps reduce the gap between theory and practice in the TESOL educational realm. The writers have a talent for presenting theoretical concepts in an easy-to-understand manner and for illustrating them with practical teaching practices. Busy EIL teachers will also appreciate the book's brevity, organization, and companion website (see: <https://www.the6principles.org/the-6-principles-grades-k-12-online-resource->

page/). The subheadings, spacing, and color schemes allow readers to locate and process information quite quickly. Likewise, the double-sided A3 laminated color supplement, which contains a synopsis of the key points in *The 6 Principles*, is an added bonus that does not usually come with other academic books on the market. The companion website provides additional web-links to other helpful resources, embedded videos, and discussion questions for each chapter. The discussion questions are an excellent launching pad for both education students and in-service teachers to critically reflect on their own classroom practices.

While the book has a tremendous amount of practical value, it is not without its limitations. First, including a list of the six principles in five separate locations is a tad repetitive, especially when one considers that the book is only 132 pages long. The book's brevity meant that certain important issues were omitted (e.g., teacher burnout) and not explored in sufficient depth (e.g., SEL).

Despite these noteworthy drawbacks, *The 6 Principles* would be a worthwhile addition to any pre-service teacher education program. In fact, I consider chapters two and three to be a must-read for any Japanese university student who aspires to be an English teacher even though the book is rooted in the United States school system. International in-service EIL educators will also find *The 6 Principles* to be an excellent TDPD tool, especially if they discuss it in a book studies club, critical friends group or professional learning network.

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**Received:** April 8, 2023

**Accepted:** May 8, 2023