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Feb. 22, 2013

TLC document: Addressing English Language Learners in the Five High-Leverage Instructional Principles

I find the document to be a major step forward in formulating priorities for teachers to attend to in every way. I have included a few supplementary considerations below on parts of the document, but at this point my main concern lies in areas not yet addressed: 1) How are teachers going to engage in an educational process in such a way that allows them to become competent in the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic knowledge and experience that will enable them to be held responsible for the components in the document? 2) How are teachers going to be assessed for practicing the High-Leverage Instructional Principles? I submit that how both these components are enacted is critical to the success of the proposal.

Supplementary considerations: Literature Review

#### Cultural Background

Learners' prior knowledge, if it is to be engaged in the classroom needs to come from learners being allowed to include their cultural/personal identity, which means they need time in activities to be able to relay their personal histories. This should also become a resource for teacher and students alike to recognize and address ELLs as who they are in addition to their designations of student and language learner.

#### Diverse Learners

Different neighborhoods cater to different student populations, something that needs to be taken into account - one size does not fit all, contexts matters at this level too.

#### Language

Unfortunately, most teachers (and professors for that matter) understand little about language in use. Ideally, there should be an undergraduate course on the topic of Educational Linguistics that focuses on language schema as embedded in classroom contexts, covering dialectical, social, critical and other approaches as well as ELL concerns.

#### ELLs

In addition to moving away from the IRF framework of communication in classrooms, it is crucial that ELLs have a chance to interact in group classroom activities effectively if they are to become proficient in English.

This necessarily entails instruction for native-speaking students, to help them learn how to scaffold language learning when working with ELLs.

### Problems with SIOP

Most of the grounding of SIOP was done in the 1980s, and the following view adheres more to references cited in the TLC literature: Learning leads development: Better to aim at the “ripening than the ripe fruit,” that is, to work within the Zone of Proximal Development, which can be defined as what a student can do with assistance beyond his or her independent level of knowledge. This may be hard to determine with ELLs, who often have conceptual knowledge in the first language that is not yet available for articulation in the second language. Another consideration is “comprehensible input,” which suggests that through listening alone, brain based processes lead to acquisition. In contrast, interaction in the second language is widely accepted as necessary for acquisition at this point. Finally, many scholars now believe that in classrooms it is better to move from the abstract to the concrete and not the other way around because this course of action facilitates the understanding of which concrete entities belong to a conceptual category. Both inductive and deductive approaches are necessary, however.

### Key Principles for ELL Instruction

**4. Instruction moves ELLs forward by talking into account their English proficiency level(s) and prior schooling experiences.** ELLs have cross-linguistic differences in addition to cross-cultural (schooling) differences that affect language acquisition, and in a number of complex ways. Moreover, the contexts of the school – how many other students and teachers are available who speak the same first language, a teacher’s emphasis on student participation, and so on, also makes a difference. Additionally, asking teachers to pay attention to these factors is asking a lot in classrooms of 20 or more students. So, individual differences are key to acquisition, but difficult to track, especially without formal or informal use of forms of assessment for learning.

**5. Instruction fosters ELL’s autonomy by equipping them with the strategies necessary to comprehend and use language in a variety of academic settings.** There are many, many “strategies” advocated in the literature, but only those that actually lead to development are of importance, and to secure this relationship, “strategies” must be employed consciously by teachers and students alike over time and consistently just to find out if eventually students will actually utilize (internalize) them. In contrast, to this “blank slate” perspective, it is important to remember that students are naturally looking to “self-regulate” and are able to draw on prior



ways of knowing to help them become proficient in the L2. An emphasis on strategies may not be the best way to help ELLs.