



Preparing All Teachers to Educate Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

Educator Competence in the Application of Second Language Acquisition Principles



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About the Series: This is a three-part series written by the Latino Policy Forum (see Appendix for the preparation of the brief series). The purpose of the series is to promote the importance of linguistic and cultural responsiveness in both pre-and in-service teacher preparation. The initial policy brief provides demographic data and research to illustrate the rise of diversity within the Illinois student population and how it differs with the largely white, female, and monolingual workforce. The second summarizes growing scholarly consensus on the specified knowledge and skills all teachers need to be linguistically responsive. The final brief summarizes current education policies and implications for linguistically and culturally diverse students followed by a call to action with a specific policy framework for change.

Changing education systems—like raising a child—takes the efforts of the entire community: educators, parents, policy-makers, elected and appointed officials, nonprofit leaders, community representatives, students themselves, and many others. It is the Forum's expectation that this series will have a positive impact on all those who are directly or indirectly concerned about teacher preparedness for today's classroom.

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago-area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum strives to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community. It does this by conducting analysis to inform, influence, and lead, all with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future.

Our mission: To build the power, influence, and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform public policies that ensure the well-being of our community and society as a whole. The Latino Policy Forum works to ensure that all Latino children have access to high-quality education services that are linguistically and culturally responsive.

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Educator Competence in the Application of Second Language Acquisition Principles

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What is the difference between social and academic language and what is their impact on students whose home language is not English?
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Why is it important to encourage the development of students' home language, in both oral and written form, even if they are in a primarily English-oriented classroom?
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Why is it essential within second language development to intentionally support student academic language through all four language domains—reading, writing, speaking and listening?

These questions will be addressed throughout the brief in addition to summarizing growing scholarly consensus on the specified knowledge and skills all teachers need to be linguistically responsive. The brief will also review the initial knowledge base that should be expected of all teachers. The central focus is on key elements of educator competence in the application of second language acquisition principles. Such principles are what all teachers need to effectively support linguistically and culturally diverse students in accessing the curriculum.

English language learners (ELLs) are a subset of linguistically and culturally diverse students.¹ To achieve on par with their English-proficient peers, they need specific language supports.² Substantial numbers of ELLs are in all-English general education instruction for at least part, if not all, of the day.³ Many general education teachers, however, have



received little, if any, preparation on ELLs. Illinois institutions of higher education are not systemically required to provide training on the complexity of second language development, bilingualism, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

With mounting concerns about ELL achievement, intensified accountability measures, and continued demographic growth statewide, the Forum believes that *all* teachers need preparation on the dual challenge of cultivating English language development while also making subject matter accessible.

With the heightened language and literacy demands across all subject areas stipulated by the Common Core State Standards, educator competency in second language acquisition principles—understanding the difference between social versus academic language, language transfer, and development across the four language domains—is an imperative.

Understanding the Difference between Social versus Academic Language.

1 Academic language includes the specific vocabulary and rhetorical styles of the classroom that all students must master to effectively read, write, and participate in various school subjects. For example, textbooks and tests are written in academic language. Low levels of academic English are associated with low scholastic performance.⁴ Social language, in contrast, is less cognitively demanding, used in everyday conversation, and a critical step towards initiating second language acquisition.

It can take ELLs around three years to achieve social language in English and anywhere from five to seven years to master academic-level English language proficiency.⁵ It is problematic when an ELLs' language skills are informally assessed based on their ability to communicate in social language. Educators need to understand when students are fluent in everyday conversations, they may still struggle with the academic demands of the classroom:

“...placement in mainstream classrooms without appropriate preparation of teachers and instructional accommodations can lead to the social isolation of ELLs, as well as to a lack of class participation, meaningful peer interactions, and teacher feedback, and opportunities for language development and academic achievement” (Harper and de Jong 2009).

Transitioning ELLs into general education classrooms too early can be detrimental for achieving academic gains. An educator's lack of information about social versus academic language development may even cause students to be inappropriately assessed as having a learning disability.

There is a need for caution, however, against interpretations of social and academic language as dichotomous. Rather, they are related and educators will want to be prepared to generate rich continuums of both social and academic language across the disciplines.⁶

Understanding Language Transfer.

2 Oral and literary proficiencies in a student's home language serve as assets to foster English language development. While exposure to English is essential, optimal achievement requires continued development in the home language. When both languages are supported in the classroom they serve to reinforce each other.⁷

A critical example is the use of cognates—words that have related meaning and spelling in two languages, like *program* in English and *programa* in Spanish. Pre-service preparation can provide candidates with the skills to build bridges between what students speak in their homes and their growing understanding of the language of the classroom.⁸

ELLs who are more advanced in their home language are likely to have oral and literary skills along with conceptual knowledge that transfers into developing English proficiency. By cultivating the home language, students continue to build skills in the language they know and nurture future linguistic, conceptual, and academic development (e.g. the concept of telling time in one language transfers to another). Extended home language instruction develops a sound foundation to later exhibit more advanced academic English and conceptual skills.⁹

For example, good practice incorporates home language development in the classroom—songs and videos can be highly effective for teachers who do not speak a student's home language. Teachers can also reinforce parent-child language and literacy development by encouraging parents to teach rhymes, songs, word games, and use storybooks in the home language. English language acquisition will be enhanced—not stalled—by trained educators adept at connecting what students understand in their home language with what they need to know in English.¹⁰

Intentional language development across the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

3 Techniques that make academic content accessible to ELLs involve developing a student's *receptive* and *expressive* language.¹¹ It is not enough for a student to understand the text he is reading or the academic language used by the teacher. Students must also be able to communicate, both orally and in writing, using academic language.¹²

Providing comprehensible input (reading and listening) just beyond a student’s current language level is critical: “Classroom language should not be so challenging that ELLs cannot access it at all, but, at the same time, it should stretch them beyond their current proficiency.” Lucas and Villegas (2011) point to the critical need to be able to identify the language demands of texts and tasks and provide techniques to modify language and make content accessible.

Cultivating comprehensible output (speaking and writing) by providing opportunities for social interactions is vital. Particular attention to speaking—rich discourse and contextualized vocabulary along with phonology, morphology, and grammar—is a critical component of English language development practice. Teachers who do not have the appropriate training might neglect to foster meaningful dialogue, with particular emphasis on academic language. A laudable example (practiced in many classrooms) might be to structure cooperative learning environments, especially small groups, where ELLs are placed with English proficient peers working together around shared goals. This allows students to negotiate meaning along with refining, persuading and evaluating ideas. Educators can serve as facilitators affording

opportunities for learners to develop academic language within the context of genuine interactions.¹³

Particularly in the early years, explicit, systematic, and contextualized vocabulary development can foster the necessary basis for language and literacy development. Classroom strategies like read-alouds, having students retell a story, or dramatic play centered on specific themes are some of the many practices used to help children learn new words in ways that deepens understanding of their meaning.¹⁴

While grammar and vocabulary development are important, the Common Core State Standards have focused even more attention on the need to read, comprehend, and interact with complex texts. Critical to this is oral language development for ELLs as a foundation to literacy. As teachers and schools are pressured to boost test scores, students on their way to learning academic English too often are placed in remedial reading classes together with native English speakers who struggle with reading. These approaches tend to emphasize decoding and basic skills over vocabulary development and reading comprehension. The activities tend to be individualized, focused on solitary performance, and



downplay the critical role of social interaction to stimulate language learning.¹⁵

ELLs often reach proficiency and are on par with native English speakers when it comes to decoding, word recognition, and spelling. They tend to rarely catch up in what are referred to as text level skills: reading, comprehension, and writing. A fundamental problem is insufficiently developed oral language proficiency in both English and native languages. Creating learning environments that lower apprehension for ELLs and inspire their active participation are ideal ways to help them.¹⁶

Ultimately, teachers want to guide students to practice all four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This includes opportunities for students to apply both subject matter knowledge and growing academic language.

Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Practices

Below is a sampling of linguistically and culturally responsive practices.

Identify the complex array of factors that influence students' first and second language development.

For linguistically responsive instruction, teachers will want to understand how individual, family, community, and sociopolitical dynamics can influence student first and second language development along with subject matter learning.

This involves the paramount task of actively learning and assessing ELLs' prior knowledge, sociocultural values, and experiences and seeing these as resources for continued learning. These include:

- ▶ oral and literary proficiencies in the home language and English
- ▶ familiarity with formal schooling experience (including Students with Interrupted Formal Schooling or SIFEs)
- ▶ ethnic and cultural background
- ▶ subject matter knowledge corresponding with grade-level expectations
- ▶ developmental characteristics
- ▶ duration in the U.S.
- ▶ immigration status and reason for immigration
- ▶ parental education levels
- ▶ socioeconomic status.¹⁷

Define and integrate content and academic language objectives.

Educators, especially when working collaboratively between language and content area teachers, will want to consider both English language development and academic content standards within instructional planning. This entails developing measurable objectives aligned to their respective standards and integrating them in to assessment, curriculum, and instruction. Multiple considerations comprise such a task: determining objectives for both language and content within a lesson; choosing appropriate supports for language and content development; determining how to differentiate instructional strategies for both language and subject matter; and conducting ongoing assessments that includes reactions to student performance.¹⁸ Below are a sampling of techniques to consider within curricular and instructional implementation.

Language progressions: defined as student language development over time, with equal focus on general language acquisition and content-specific academic language. Learning progressions are key to the Common Core and entail what students are to learn from grade to grade. The progressions represent the order in which most students are likely to gain specific types of skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.¹⁹ Teachers will want to be cognizant of how they will teach within these learning progressions content-specific language—this entails understanding how academic language is used within varying subject areas—so that students not only understand the concepts, but can communicate effectively about them.

Language demands: defined as linguistic abilities commanded by certain texts and tasks. To be sure students can access academic content while developing their language, teachers will want to bring careful awareness to the language demands involved in various classroom learning situations: note-taking from an oral presentation, reading aloud and discussing a story to class members, or writing a report based on informational text. Teachers will want to gauge both the content and language expectations to complete the assignment and address if there are additional tools students will need to understand the content while building domain-specific vocabulary.²⁰

Language scaffolds: defined as modified language and differentiated instruction by teachers to match the language level of students and to also teach grade-level content. Scaffolding needs to be intentional in supporting both comprehension of content and nurturing language development. To illustrate, when scaffolding a reading assignment, a teacher might preview the text and highlight

important vocabulary for students to understand.

Other examples include extra-linguistic supports: visual cues, graphic organizers, hands-on activities—that can facilitate ELLs to understand the subject matter at hand without being completely dependent on language. By modifying texts, like preparing study guides with discipline-specific vocabulary and central concepts, students can grasp the gist of more complicated texts.²¹

Build an inviting school environment for ELLs, parents and families.

Promoting home language development nurtures the vital linguistic and cultural contributions of parents and families in supporting student academic success: cultivating early literacy through reading and storytelling, assisting in homework assignments, and asking children to discuss and share what they are learning at school. A child's loss of the home language can ultimately undermine parent-child communication. Instead, the home language is a resource to be incorporated and developed in the classroom as a part of general language and literacy development. The validation and promotion of student home culture, language, and identity is critical for students to take ownership in their learning process.²²

Teachers are critical agents on the frontlines shaping how language education plays out in the classroom. Perspectives that linguistically diverse students enter the classroom at a disadvantage can have profound effects. Common misunderstandings that the home language will confuse or delay English language acquisition or the proverbial myth that immigrants and their children do not want to learn English are just some of the misconceptions that might cause a teacher to neglect fostering the first language. Disregarding the benefits of—or lack of knowledge on how to support—home language and culture can also lead to lower expectations for ELLs and failure to challenge and advocate for them.²³

In reality, linguistically and culturally diverse students view basic communication in English as a social and educational

necessity. Some even forgo their home language fearing it impedes their English language development. Unfortunately, the home language is seen, in effect, as inferior causing some students to dissociate themselves from cultural, familial, and community ties.

An educator's in-depth understanding of how language, culture, and student identity are inextricably linked is critical. Teacher-student differences in culture and communication can have significant influence on their interactions, classroom participation, and approaches to literacy. Teachers also need competence in conducting conferences with parents and families who may not speak English. This can include working with an interpreter and understanding cultural differences in expectations around the roles of teachers and families within educational settings, cultural styles of communication (i.e. directness versus indirectness), etc.²⁴

For the growing body of diverse learners, teachers need the tools to build on student cultural and linguistic backgrounds—viewing their experiences and values as tools to nurture their learning process—and acute awareness of varying language development stages as students develop academic English proficiency.

Conclusion

The foundation for teacher effectiveness is how well they are prepared to teach the children who are in front of them. As the student demographic continues to change, teachers—along with principals and all other educators—must be prepared with the knowledge and skills to build on the rich language and cultural assets in today's classrooms. The future of Illinois is tied to the educational success of this vibrant and growing student population.

Appendix: Preparation of the Brief Series

Through a six-month process, the Latino Policy Forum sought to take a wider look at how Illinois might ensure that all students have access to culturally and linguistically relevant education. The process entailed the following:

- ▶ Conducting a review of research regarding language, literacy and teacher preparation and the demographics of the Illinois ELL population.
- ▶ Convening a pre- and in-service teacher preparation work group to review, reflect on, and make suggestions to developing a statewide approach to fortify teacher preparation for linguistically and culturally diverse students. Their comments provided insight in the development of this policy brief series.
- ▶ Developing this brief series to include recommendations to provide linguistically and culturally responsive teacher preparation.

The work group represented educators and philanthropic leaders with extensive experience in language education and pre-service

and/or in-service preparation. Through smaller breakout sessions, members discussed the various impediments and potential solutions to strengthen linguistically and culturally diverse student achievement. Widely respected education research and data analyses support the themes and feedback generated by the work group: amplified coursework and content on linguistic and cultural competencies, strengthening higher education capacity to prepare linguistically and culturally responsive candidates, priority for diverse fieldwork experiences, heightened professional knowledge on the complexity of linguistically and culturally diverse students with special needs. These will be discussed in briefs two and three.

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Appendix 2: Illinois Examples of Linguistically Responsive Pre-Service Preparation

This policy brief synthesized the research indicating what all teachers should know to effectively teach ELLs. Questions remain, however, about how teacher preparation might implement such curriculum content: adding a course or seminars focused on ELLs, infusing ELL concerns throughout the curriculum, providing ongoing professional development opportunities for teacher faculty on ELL issues, prioritizing field apprenticeships with ELLs, and developing programmatic structures for field mentors with expertise in the education of ELLs are some of the ways this might be addressed.

Provided are two examples of how Illinois-based institutions of higher education are addressing the preparation of all teachers in ways that are linguistically responsive.

University of Illinois at Chicago School of Education

For nearly two decades, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Education has taken deliberate steps to educate all teacher candidates about the needs of ELLs and the processes of second language acquisition. Critical to this task is structuring an environment of collaboration between their bilingual and mainstream teacher candidates, providing general education candidates with training opportunities with bilingual/ESL specialists, and offering practical opportunities to teach ELLs. The outcome: empirical evidence that their mainstream candidates have a more positive view of ELLs before they transitioned into the general education classroom along with aligned language learning goals with bilingual/ESL teacher specialists.²⁵

The program is a long-standing trailblazer in promoting shifting roles and expectations for both bilingual/ESL specialists and mainstream teacher candidates: First, the program is structured to facilitate bilingual/ESL teacher collaboration and support mainstream teachers so that all have an enhanced understanding of language and culture. Second, general education teacher candidates are prepared for the increased demands of integrating subject matter and language instruction.²⁶

Placing both bilingual and monolingual candidates together within clinical field experiences with ELLs. This entails general education candidates spending a portion of their practicums within a bilingual/ESL classroom fostering hands on experiences with lesson planning, assessments, instruction, along with learning from a bilingual/ESL mentor.

The approach trains candidates on how to create a seamless language learning environment for ELLs between bilingual/ESL and mainstream classrooms, as specialists and general education teachers together develop shared goals on how to best serve these students. All candidates develop common understandings of the diverse array of knowledge, cultural values, and experiences ELLs bring to the classroom. Above all, general education candidates—through the partnership—are able to realize their responsibility in teaching ELLs.

Purposefully placing bilingual faculty in leadership positions.

For example, having a bilingual professor coordinate the regular graduate elementary program can inform other faculty of ELL concerns and elevate that such issues are better infused across the curriculum. Such leadership encourages bilingual/ESL faculty to teach general education courses in reading methods, math methods, and social studies methods. The result is dual-pronged: general education candidates gain exposure to faculty with expertise on ELLs and ELL concerns are made germane across the curriculum.

Intentionally hiring monolingual graduate assistants for research projects based on ELLs.

The university is privileged to have a number of full-time bilingual education faculty with research endeavors focused on the education of ELLs. Rather than keep these projects limited to bilingual teacher candidates, monolingual students are intentionally hired as research assistants boosting their attentiveness to and understanding of ELL concerns.

Cultivating awareness among teacher candidates of the high likelihood of having an ELL in their classroom and the need to attain a ESL/bilingual endorsement.

UIC has been ahead of the curve in proactively informing candidates for how school districts with linguistically and culturally diverse students often post vacant positions with preference given to candidates who hold an ESL or bilingual credential and many actively seek those candidates upon completion of their teacher preparation program. UIC is deliberate in advising candidates about taking courses required for licensure that can also apply to the endorsement along with informing them they do not need to speak another language to acquire the ESL endorsement. On average, an impressive one-third of candidates in both the undergraduate and graduate programs at UIC graduate with bilingual or ESL endorsements.

Appendix 2: *continued*

Illinois Examples of Linguistically Responsive Pre-Service Preparation

Expanding pre-service initiatives into in-service by encouraging collaboration between general education and bilingual/ESL teachers to serve ELLs within Chicago Public Schools.

Between 1994 and 2008 their Project 29 enrolled 203 provisionally certified bilingual teachers as part of their elementary Master's program.²⁷ Rather than isolate the project, UIC intentionally integrated it within the mainstream graduate elementary program:

“Project 29 ‘Scholars’ were practicing teachers who not only knew more about k-8 teaching and learning than their non-teaching peers, but also knew much more about serving ELLs. Other students and our own faculty embraced the Scholars’ participation, seeing them as a powerful resource to enhance teacher preparation” (Sakash and Rodriguez-Brown 2011: 150).

The scholars were viewed as agents spreading ELL concerns program-wide, particularly to other candidates who had not yet entered the classroom.²⁸

In the same spirit of collaboration between mainstream and bilingual/ESL teachers, over the past decade UIC conducted additional projects aimed at supporting ELLs as they move from bilingual to all-English classrooms. Participants were given tuition to subsidize two requisite courses applicable to a degree, endorsement, or professional development. The courses overviewed state transition and exit policies, analyzed case studies of successful transition programs, studied ELL work and shared effective practices, taught instructional techniques of language transfer, and developed strategies on how to cultivate parent and community engagement. Projects also included school-based meetings to discuss ELL concerns and teaching strategies with educators outside the program.²⁹

UIC's preparation counters a long-standing artificial dichotomy: second language acquisition as the sole responsibility of the bilingual/ESL teacher, while general education teachers primarily focus on subject matter instruction. The underlying and antiquated belief is that language proficiency comes before academic content learning. Rather, UIC embraces the idea that all educators are responsible for the dual challenge of making subject matter accessible to ELLs while also cultivating English language development.³⁰

Loyola's Teaching, Learning, and Leading with Schools and Communities

Loyola's Teaching, Learning, and Leading with Schools and Communities teacher preparation program has recently revamped to better prepare its candidates to educate diverse learners in a wide array of settings. Across the birth-12th grade continuum, candidates are prepared for linguistically and culturally diverse learners to the extent that all will graduate with the Illinois English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement—a first in the state. Even more, for those who specialize in early childhood education, they will graduate with an additional endorsement in special education.

In response to the growing diversity in today's classrooms, many Illinois-based universities encourage candidates to seek specialties in ESL or bilingual instruction. None, up until now, have required this for every candidate. Loyola's programmatic revamp explicitly attempts to break the mold of traditional teacher preparation with two key changes: (1) emphasis on developing the specific skills and knowledge of all candidates to teach linguistic and culturally diverse students; and (2) the implementation of an entirely field-based apprenticeship model within a myriad of settings that spans the four years.

Loyola is driven by a simple, yet profound philosophy: preparing all teachers to teach all students. The university views preparing educators for linguistic, cultural, and ability diverse students on par with training for literacy in an era of Common Core and International Baccalaureate policy.

Specific programmatic attention to teaching linguistic and culturally diverse students. Instead of an optional avenue of study, the knowledge and skills that comprise the ESL endorsement for Illinois are seen as part and parcel to preparation: foundational linguistic principles, first and second language development, foundational theories in practice, sociopolitical dimensions of language education policy, cross-cultural methods, and assessment.

For candidates who elect the early childhood major, they begin to apply the linguistic and culturally responsive theory and practice with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. This includes an amplification of their knowledge and skills to include understanding the complexity of language development of young learners with special needs. Recognizing the confluence of factors that influence the

Appendix 2: *continued*

Illinois Examples of Linguistically Responsive Pre-Service Preparation

identification or misidentification of ELLs with special needs, all early childhood education candidates will earn the special education endorsement.

For all other candidates outside early childhood, they have the option of taking two additional modules to receive the special education endorsement, as the other state requirements are integrated into the program. In the same vein, while all candidates receive the ESL endorsement, those who seek the bilingual endorsement can add on two additional modules offered in the summer for the bilingual endorsement along with the language test. In addition, Loyola offers an optional School-based Language, Culture, and Pedagogy Immersion program in Mexico City where candidates live with host families and work with local elementary teachers.

Schools and communities are the epicenter for Loyola's teacher preparation. A novel site-based program has been instituted where both faculty and candidates can consider the real life involvedness of teaching in a host of school- and community-based environments. Instead of faculty delivering instruction on a university campus, they are on-site facilitators and mentors to candidates. Through eight clinically-based sequences, candidates experience wide-ranging opportunities to learn in varied locales across the birth-to-grade 12 range: high-need urban classrooms, high-performing schools, and community-based organizations. The student teaching increases during the four years, referred to as a growth-based apprenticeship model embedded in schools and communities.

Candidates also participate in Professional Learning Communities led by university faculty with intensive collaboration with school- or community-site professionals. Teacher professionals are regarded as local experts, referred to as “co-teacher-educators.”³¹ They play a critical role advancing rich local understandings of history, culture, socioeconomic diversity and concerns with equity, community and family values. Teacher professionals are vital in educating candidates on the various contextual factors that influence student learning. These on-the-ground lessons complemented by deep pedagogy facilitate candidates to work with both teachers and faculty in the development of culturally relevant teaching techniques.

Conclusion

These programmatic advances are at the forefront of preparing candidates for 21st Century linguistic and culturally rich classrooms. Diverse students are an obvious and essential component of candidate training. As Illinois strives to meet the necessary challenge of quality learning for its growing population of linguistic and culturally diverse students, the reviewed pre-service changes serve as examples for how institutions of higher education can transform to meet the needs of classrooms today.

Endnotes

- ¹ The acronyms English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Dual Language Learner (DLL) have historic roots among educators of children whose native language is not English. In Illinois the use of English Learners (EL) has also begun to be used. Among academics none is considered incorrect, and although they are often used interchangeably, some individuals or groups may have strong preferences for one or another. For the sake of consistency with references, citations, quotes, etc. the acronym ELL will be used throughout this report.
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- ¹¹ Coleman, Rhoda and Claude Goldenberg (2010). "What Does Research Say about Effective Practices for English Learners?" Part II: Academic Language Proficiency. Accessed on October 10, 2013: <http://maldenells.wikispaces.com/file/view/Coleman+R+and+Goldenberg+what+does+research+say+about+effective+practices+for+ELLs.pdf>
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