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ESL Teacher-Education Programs: Measuring Up to the TESOL/NCATE Yardstick

English language learners (ELLs) in K-12 schools continue to increase in number across the country. In California alone, about 1.5 million students are not sufficiently proficient in English to perform optimally in mainstream classrooms. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 emphasizes the need for highly qualified teachers, but just who is qualified to apply best educational practices to help ELLs reach their potential in an academic environment? This article will discuss how the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)/National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) P-12 ESL teacher-preparation standards provide a nationally recognized framework for teacher preparation and evaluation, while at the same time providing for flexibility in the way in which certified ESOL teachers are prepared. Graduates of programs that follow these standards are ready to begin meeting the challenges of educating the next generation of ELLs in American classrooms.

English language learners (ELLs) in K-12 schools continue to increase in number across the country. In California alone, about 1.5 million students are not sufficiently proficient in English to perform optimally in mainstream classrooms. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 emphasizes the need for highly qualified teachers, but just who is qualified to apply best educational practices to help ELLs reach their potential in an academic environment? Is there a license, certificate, or other credential that identifies a given teacher as a qualified English Language Development (ELD) specialist?

This article will discuss how the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)/National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) P-12 ESL teacher-preparation standards provide a nationally recognized framework for teacher preparation and evaluation, while at the same time providing for flexibility in the way in which certified ESOL teachers are prepared.¹ Graduates of programs that follow these standards are ready to begin meeting the challenges of educating the next generation of ELLs in American classrooms.

One such challenge was examined in a recent study by Laurie Olsen, which found that in California

59% of secondary school English Learners are “Long Term English Learners” (in United States schools for more than six years without reaching sufficient English proficiency to be reclassified). In one out of three districts, more than 75% of their English Learners are Long Term. (2010, p. 1)

Olsen cites many reasons for this, including weak, inconsistent, and poorly implemented programs and that these students have been taught by “largely unprepared teachers.” Among her recommendations, she calls for improving the capacity of teachers so that they are more prepared and skilled to work with English learners and long-term English learners. Programs adhering to the TESOL/NCATE P-12 standards are designed to address the systemic shortcomings identified by Olsen and to prepare ESOL specialists in California and elsewhere to reduce the percentage of ELLs who are long-term English learners.

Credentialing ESOL Professionals in California

Since 1985, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) has authorized a variety of certifications for teachers who teach English learners. These have varied from the Language Development Specialist (LDS), with 24 units of in-service preparation and examination in 1985, to the Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) credential in 1992. Most recently, Senate Bill (SB) 2042 was enacted by the state legislature but has only one standard specific to teaching ELLs. Consequently, the CLAD has been replaced (Cadiero-Kaplan, Berta-Avila, & Flores, 2007), although an examination route and a 12-unit certificate still exists for in-service teachers. The way in which SB 2042, still in use in 2010, has been implemented varies by institution. In the end, however, there is still no specialization for teaching ESOL in California, even though such authorizations to meet requirements for NCLB’s “highly qualified teachers” have been advocated for by various researchers (Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodriguez, 2008).²

A Model for Consistency and Accountability

Many colleges and universities throughout the US grant professional credentials to aspiring P-12 ESOL teachers to teach this growing ELL population. However, the requirements to work as an ESOL instructor vary from state to state, just as ESOL teacher-education curricula vary from institution to institution. Given this proliferation of ESOL programs in California, and across the country, how is an aspiring ESOL teacher or a prospective employer to judge if a given teacher licensure program has adequately prepared a candidate to help ELLs reach their potential in the classroom? Since 2001 there has been a national model that can be used to assess the quality of ESOL teacher-education programs: the TESOL/NCATE P-12 ESL Teacher Education Program Standards. This form of accountability provides for a systematic data-collection system (Ingersoll & Scannell, 2002; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008) aligned to standards and categories of assessments.

The TESOL/NCATE P-12 ESL Teacher Standards

In 1999 the international Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization became a member of the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and began a 2-year process of establishing P-12 national standards for teacher-education programs. TESOL programs that are recognized grant initial ESOL certification, credentialing, and/or endorsement to their graduates. Thirteen original standards were approved by both TESOL and NCATE in 2002. In 2009 a revised set of TESOL standards were approved after having undergone a rigorous revision and approval process (TESOL, 2010). The revised 2009 standards are based on updated supporting research.

The TESOL standards are grouped within the framework of five conceptual domains: *Language*, *Culture*, *Instruction*, *Assessment*, and *Professionalism*, depicted in Figure 1. The five domains and standards are all interrelated. Language and culture (content knowledge) form the foundation, and instruction and assessment are the applications (pedagogical knowledge), while professionalism is at the core. This conceptual framework does not imply that the domains and accompanying standards can be arbitrarily separated in practice. Instruction of ELLs, for example, cannot be separated from any discussion of language, culture, assessment, and professionalism.

Figure 1
The TESOL Domains and Standards (TESOL, 2010)

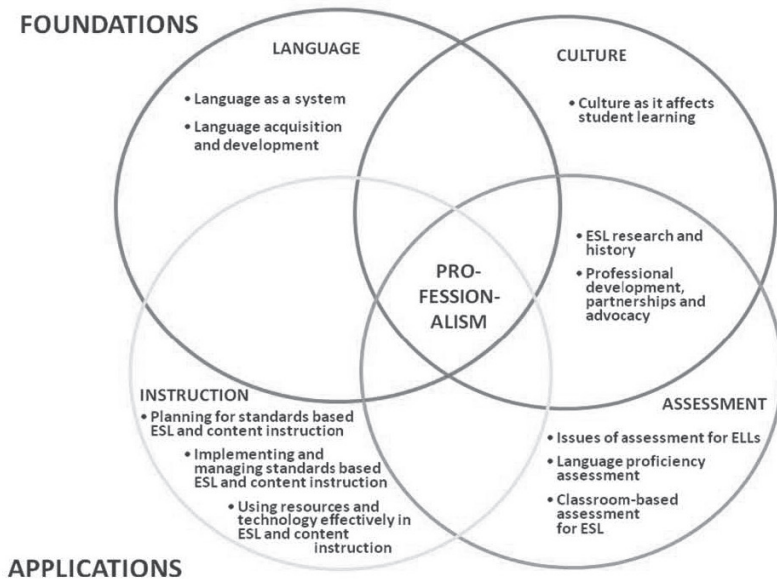


Figure 1 shows the interrelationship of the domains and the standards themselves. The full set of standards, along with their supporting explanations,

can be found in the Appendix. To see the performance indicators that further delineate the standards, go to www.tesol.org and look under “Issues” and then “Standards.”

So, what is the benefit of this model? The model serves as a visual of the interrelatedness of the domains, illustrating that each is a part of the others.

How Institutions Apply for TESOL/NCATE Recognition

The TESOL/NCATE recognition process provides assurance that a given teacher-education program implements current research, theory, and best educational practices and has a systematic way in which to provide evidence that those certified to teach through the program meet the TESOL standards. The applicant institution submits a self-study report specifying how its teacher-education program addresses the 11 TESOL standards and provides evidence that the standards are met by its ESOL teacher candidates.

Six Assessments of Teacher Candidates

The TESOL/NCATE recognition process requires applicant institutions to track teacher-candidate progress through a minimum of six assessments with accompanying rubrics or scoring guides. The rubrics or scoring guides must specify how candidates are rated in terms of meeting each standard, and they usually use a 3-point scale: *Approaches standard*, *Meets standard*, and *Exceeds standard*. The required assessments include:

- Content knowledge (Assessments 1 and 2);
- Planning classroom-based instruction (3);
- Applying knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the classroom (4);
- Effects on student learning (5); and
- Professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions (6).

These assessments provide ways to measure whether a teacher candidate has the theoretical and practical grasp of particular standards and can apply them to instruction where applicable. Assessments designed to gauge a candidate’s understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support the P-12 standards take many forms. Commonly used assessments include candidate portfolios, unit lesson plans, personal educational philosophies, teaching practica, and one-to-one collaboration between the candidate and an ELL.

In the following paragraphs, each of the six required assessments will be discussed and illustrated by thumbnail descriptions of assessments submitted with program applications for TESOL/NCATE recognition.

Assessments: Content Knowledge

Overview

Assessments 1 and 2 focus on content knowledge (primarily the language and culture domains). They provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate that they “know, understand, and use the major theories and research

related to the structure and acquisition of language to help ELLs develop language and literacy and achieve in the content areas.” (TESOL, 2010, p. 27). Two of the P-12 standards (Standards 1a and b) focus on “language as a system” and “language acquisition and development.” These two standards are interrelated. Current research indicates that candidates “must understand language as a system of communication” (Genesee & Harper, 2009, p. 13) before they can teach it (Ellis, 1997).

The second aspect of content knowledge focuses on the domain of culture. Candidates are expected to demonstrate that they “know, understand, and use major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct supportive learning environments for ELLs” (TESOL, 2010, p. 39). ELLs do not come to school as blank slates. Research indicates that taking advantage of the linguistic and cultural experiences of the ELL will result in better learning of the core curriculum as well as English (Banks & Banks, 2007; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Candidates must be aware of the importance of learning about the individual ELL’s background to plan instruction that will be effective.

The third aspect of content knowledge are issues in ELL assessment. Candidates must understand issues of validity, reliability, practicality, and impact of high-stakes testing on ELL students. They must be able to interpret standardized tests to content teachers and administrators. Candidates also need to demonstrate understanding of cultural and linguistic bias that may produce test results that do not accurately reflect an ELL’s knowledge (Gottlieb, 2006; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Assessment 1: Content Knowledge

Given the broad requirements described above regarding the content knowledge needed by ESOL teacher candidates, the first content knowledge assessment, Assessment 1, is a state or national licensure test, if such a test is required by the state for certification. Such tests sample a wide range of content knowledge, although usually not in depth. An institution’s teacher candidates must have an 80% passing rate to meet this first assessment. Such an exam aligned with TESOL/NCATE standards can provide evidence of how well a teacher-education program is conveying content knowledge associated with the standards. ETS’s Praxis II exam in ESL (ETS, 2009), probably the most commonly used by institutions nationwide, is closely aligned with the TESOL P-12 ESL teacher standards.

Some states, notably California, do not require a statewide professional examination for all certified teachers of English learners, since those requirements can also be met through course work. However, the California Teachers of English Learners (CTEL) exam is used to certify in-service teachers in CLAD competencies and could meet this requirement. In any case, one examination can cover only a small part of the content knowledge in a domain needed by an ESOL teacher and so by itself should not be considered sufficient evidence to meet a standard.

Assessment 2: Content Knowledge

Assessment 2 also focuses on content knowledge and can be demonstrated in a variety of ways: for example, an additional, perhaps multipart, test, a portfolio, and grades. For example, one public Midwestern university administers separate exam-style measures of P-12 ESL standards in the final weeks of three key courses: Pedagogical Grammar and Phonology of ESL, Second Language Acquisition for Classroom Teachers, and Foreign Language Testing and Evaluation.

Another content knowledge assessment used by a private Mid-Atlantic university illustrates that assessments need not be a series of exams. One element in its Culture and Language Acquisition Project is an interview with the parents of an ELL that establishes in-depth information about the ELL's linguistic and cultural backgrounds and characteristics (Standard 2). The teacher candidate uses recorded speech samples and writing samples to analyze the ELL's phonological, lexical, and syntactic grasp of English (Standard 1a). The project requires candidates to discuss ELL English proficiency in the context of learning style, personality, first language characteristics (L1), and sociocultural factors that may influence second language (L2) acquisition (Standard 1b). They are also required to relate their findings to second language acquisition theories, research, and practice (Standard 5a). Finally, the teacher candidate prepares a brief summary of the results for communication to ESL students and their parents.

Assessments: Planning and Implementing Instruction

Overview

The next two assessments relate to the application of the content knowledge from the first assessments to the classroom. Candidates must demonstrate that they can put the knowledge demonstrated above into use in both planning and implementation in the classroom. Wise (2010) argues the importance of how one teaches, not just what one teaches. Assessment 3 details some of the techniques used for assessment of candidates' ability to plan for English language learners in classes. Assessment 4 has to do with the actual implementation of the lessons in the classroom. Planning is not enough; it is a necessary but not sufficient indicator of a candidate's ability to work with diverse learners.

Assessment 3: Planning Classroom-Based Instruction

The third required assessment focuses on planning instruction. It is important to assess candidates' ability to plan for supportive classrooms for learners from diverse backgrounds and levels of English proficiency, using multiple ways of presenting material (Levine & McCloskey, 2009; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). While this assessment primarily focuses on TESOL Standard 3a (Planning instruction), the lesson plans developed to meet this requirement usually address other P-12 ESL standards as well: for example, language as a system, language acquisition and development, culture, and classroom-based assessment (TESOL Standards 1a, 1b, 2 and 4c). For Assessment 3, a public Mid-Atlantic college calls on teacher candidates to develop a study unit with a

particular group of ELLs in mind, including information on the ELLs' educational background, first language, ethnicity, age, English language proficiency, and length of time in an English-language academic environment.

Assessment 4: Applying Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions in the Classroom

The fourth required assessment calls on candidates to implement their lesson plans in the ESOL classroom. This includes taking into account the special cultural and linguistic factors associated with ELLs. ESOL teacher candidates undertake a variety of activities based on student interests and levels of proficiency in English in order to provide ELLs access to the core curriculum and to English. Candidates must also use resources effectively, selecting, adapting, and using appropriate materials that are culturally and linguistically accessible to their ELL students (Levine & McCloskey, 2009; Perego & Boyle, 2008).

Most commonly this assessment is a component of the program's field or practicum experiences. While rubrics for the assessment are often the evaluation form used by university supervisors and cooperating teachers, they are specifically aligned to the P-12 standards and designed to document the candidate's ability to teach ELLs.

Assessments: Effects on Student Learning and Professional Knowledge

Overview

Through the first four assessments, candidates have demonstrated their knowledge, ability to plan, and ability to implement plans in actual classrooms. The next two assessments look at the effect of candidate performance on student learning. If a candidate can analyze the effects of his or her teaching on student learning, reflect on strengths and areas for improvement, and use introspection for further development, the candidate is on the road to true professionalism. Such a candidate demonstrates a philosophy of teaching that reflects an understanding of and commitment to the critical issues related to culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Assessment 5: Candidate Effects on Student Learning

The fifth required assessment gauges candidates' understanding and application of tests and other assessment tools to measure student learning in English language development. Candidates must "demonstrate understanding of issues and concepts of assessment and use standards-based procedures with ELLs" (Standard 4, TESOL, 2010, p. 57). One of the important roles that candidates must play is establishing what ELLs can do with the English they have. This may be accomplished through language-proficiency assessments (Standard 4b) and through classroom-based assessments (Standard 4c). While assessment of ELLs follows many of the characteristics of effective and appropriate assessment of all students (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000), ESOL teacher candidates must be able to differentiate between language proficiency and competence in the content area for ELLs. Candidates also demonstrate their ability to select or devise assessment tools that will measure students' comprehension of course content, rather than just their English language proficiency, although language proficiency must also be assessed.

Assessment 6: Professional Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Professionalism lies at the heart of the TESOL/NCATE P-12 ESL standards. For this sixth TESOL/NCATE assessment, institutions often ask candidates to write a personal statement of philosophy to demonstrate their grounding in the historical and theoretical foundations of English language teaching (Standard 5a) and their dispositions toward their ELL students. The philosophy ideally demonstrates a willingness to learn through reflective practice and classroom inquiry and a readiness to contribute to the professional development of their colleagues while actively serving as advocates for their ESOL students.

Another of the attributes of the TESOL professional is the commitment to providing equal access for all students, a commitment that requires collaboration with colleagues and the community. According to Genesee and Harper (2010), the emphasis on high expectations for all students is vital. These authors say, however, that outcomes cannot be measured only by standardized tests as they may not take into consideration the cultural and linguistic diversity and levels of proficiency of the ELL. A TESOL professional is an educator who understands these issues and can better help in the implementation of policy decisions regarding ELLs.

Another important aspect of continual professional growth and advocacy (Standard 5b) is the requirement to collaborate with colleagues to ensure the application of best practices in educating ELLs. Candidates may demonstrate their professionalism by assisting their colleagues with adapting tests to accommodate the ELL, or by helping the general-education or content-area teacher assess and adapt content in ways that are appropriate to the learners' language proficiency (Gottlieb, 2006; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

The Evaluation Process

Once the self-study document has been submitted to NCATE, it is reviewed by two to three TESOL reviewers to determine if there is sufficient evidence that the TESOL/NCATE standards have been met. A recommendation of *Recognition*, *Recognition with conditions*, or *Not recognized* is then made to NCATE, which makes the final decision. For more specific requirements, go to either the TESOL website (www.tesol.org) and look under "Issues" and then "Standards," or go to the NCATE website (www.ncate.org).

Teacher Candidates to Language Development Specialists

TESOL/NCATE national recognition represents a common ground amid a plethora of state-by-state licenses, certificates, and endorsements. Teacher candidates who have successfully completed a TESOL/NCATE-recognized program are more likely to be prepared to embark on a career as a professional educator of ELLs specific to K-12 settings than those who have not. Many general-education teachers have received little, if any, postsecondary education addressing the specific needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse student. Candidates coming from a TESOL/NCATE-recognized program are ready to draw on a rich body of theory and research to inform their practice and meet their students' distinct learning needs. They are able to assume the

role of an English-language development specialist, including collaborating or team teaching with peers. They are ready to become part of professional learning communities where their expertise plays a prominent, not a peripheral, role (Breen, 2007; Lacina, Levine, & Sowa, 2008).

The TESOL/NCATE recognition process represents a milestone in the establishment of national standards for ESOL teacher education and is fundamental to the professionalization of English language teaching. It provides a ready framework that can be used to prepare the highly qualified teachers now being called for in the US. In California, it can be used as the starting point to prepare English language specialists so that our ELLs have those highly qualified teachers whom students have for math, science, English, and social studies.

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Notes

¹The P-12 ESL teacher-preparation standards that we discuss here are TESOL standards used by NCATE for program recognition decisions; they are commonly called TESOL/NCATE standards, and we follow that practice in this article.

²See the following article in this journal, Commission on Teacher Credentialing Approves 8 ELL-Related Credential Options by Jeff Frost, Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, and Natalie Kuhlman, for an update on a new authorization in California.

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Appendix

Revised TESOL-NCATE Standards for P-12 ESL Teacher Education Programs

Domain 1: Language

Candidates know, understand, and use the major theories and research related to the structure and acquisition of language to help English language learners (ELLs) develop language and literacy and achieve in the content areas.

Issues of language structure and language acquisition development are interrelated. The divisions of the standards into 1.a. language as a system, and 1.b. language acquisition and development do not prescribe an order.

Standard 1.a. Language as a System. Candidates demonstrate understanding of language as a system, including phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics, and support ELLs as they acquire English language and literacy in order to achieve in the content areas.

Standard 1.b. Language Acquisition and Development. Candidates understand and apply theories and research in language acquisition and development to support their ELLs' English language and literacy learning and content-area achievement.

Domain 2: Culture

Candidates know, understand, and use major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct supportive learning environments for ELLs.

Standard 2. Culture as It Affects Student Learning. Candidates know, understand, and use major theories and research related to the nature and role of culture in their instruction. They demonstrate understanding of how cultural groups and individual cultural identities affect language learning and school achievement.

Domain 3: Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction

Candidates know, understand, and use evidence-based practices and strategies related to planning, implementing, and managing standards-based ESL and content instruction. Candidates are knowledgeable about program models and skilled in teaching strategies for developing and integrating language skills. They integrate technology as well as choose and adapt classroom resources appropriate for their ELLs.

Standard 3.a. Planning for Standards-Based ESL and Content Instruction. Candidates know, understand, and apply concepts, research, and best practices to plan classroom instruction in a supportive learning environment for ELLs. They plan for multilevel classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds using standards-based ESL and content curriculum.

Standard 3.b. Managing and Implementing Standards-Based ESL and Content Instruction. Candidates know, manage, and implement a variety of standards-based teaching strategies and techniques for developing and integrating English listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Candidates support ELLs' access to the core curriculum by teaching language through academic content.

Standard 3.c. Using Resources and Technology Effectively in ESL and Content Instruction. Candidates are familiar with a wide range of standards-based materials, resources, and technologies, and choose, adapt, and use them in effective ESL and content teaching.

Domain 4: Assessment

Candidates understand issues and concepts of assessment and use standards-based procedures with ELLs.

Standard 4.a. Issues of Assessment for English Language Learners. Candidates demonstrate understanding of various assessment issues as they affect ELLs, such as accountability, bias, special education testing, language proficiency, and accommodations in formal testing situations. ...

Candidates also demonstrate understanding of issues around accountability such as implications of norm-referenced standardized assessment and other high-stakes testing. They understand the differences between these kinds of assessment and alternative assessments and also understand issues of accommodation for ELLs in formal testing situations.

Standard 4.b. Language Proficiency Assessment. Candidates know and can use a variety of standards-based language proficiency instruments to show language growth and to inform their instruction. They demonstrate understanding of their uses for identification, placement, and reclassification of ELLs.

Standard 4.c. Classroom-Based Assessment for ESL. Candidates know and can use a variety of performance-based assessment tools and techniques to inform instruction in the classroom.

Domain 5: Professionalism

Candidates keep current with new instructional techniques, research results, advances in the ESL field, and education policy issues and demonstrate knowledge of the history of ESL teaching. They use such information to reflect on and improve their instruction and assessment practices. Candidates work collaboratively with school staff and the community to improve the learning environment, provide support, and advocate for ELLs and their families.

Standard 5.a. ESL Research and History. Candidates demonstrate knowledge of history, research, educational public policy, and current practice in the field of ESL teaching and apply this knowledge to inform teaching and learning.

Standard 5.b. Professional Development, Partnerships, and Advocacy. Candidates take advantage of professional growth opportunities and demonstrate the ability to build partnerships with colleagues and students' families, serve as community resources, and advocate for ELLs.

(from TESOL, 2010)