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### Author
Cadiero-Kaplan, Karen


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**KAREN CADIERO-KAPLAN**
*San Diego State University*

# Introduction to the Theme Section: The Status of ESL Professionals in K-12 Education: Theory, Practice, and Politics

## Background

Most educators who prepare teachers or other professionals in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) would agree that the teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is a uniquely distinct academic and professional discipline. Specific linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and abilities need to be acquired and developed to successfully meet the needs of the more than 5 million preschool to grade 12 English learners (ELs or English language learners/ELLs) across the US, representing more than 400 different language backgrounds (Goldberg, 2008), and the approximately 1.5 million in California, where more than 80% of ELs are Spanish speakers (California Department of Education, 2010).

TESOL, not unlike other disciplines found in education (e.g., English literature, foreign languages), requires specialized and rigorous education and training. Most often, professionals planning to teach in specific disciplines, such as TESOL, are required to obtain, in addition to a college degree, a specific licensure or certification. According to TESOL's *Position Statement on the Status of, and Professional Equity for, the Field of TESOL,*

> "in many academic settings and institutions, instructors and faculty of English for speakers of other languages in both English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) programs are not respected as being part of a unique discipline, and often do not receive the same professional treatment or benefits as their peers in other academic areas" (TESOL, 2008, p. 1).

This last statement is the focus of the articles that make up the theme section of this issue of *The CATESOL Journal,* most specifically in the areas of policy and pedagogy in teacher preparation/certification and teaching practices necessary for ELs in K-12 settings. The authors who contributed to this special themed section of *The CATESOL Journal* are specifically concerned that within the public education system both practically and politically, teachers of ESL, EFL, and English Language Development (ELD) are not always viewed as teachers enter-

ing schools with a specific discipline, a discipline that stands apart from English language arts, English literature, or foreign languages.[1] For example, in California "teachers who teach ELs in English-only classrooms, where the majority of ELs are currently taught, [receive] as little as 45 hours of instruction in theory and methods for teaching students, and non-supervised practice" (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009, p. 771). Further, in 2003 the average teacher received little more than 2 hours per year of in-service training dedicated to the teaching of ELs (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003).

In previous research conducted in a large Southern California high school district (Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004), it was found that ESL programs had no specific department or home within the individual high schools studied. More often, ELD teachers were housed as part of the English Department. While the district had an office for English Language Learner Services, the role of this office was to ensure that all teachers throughout the district had professional development targeted specifically to meet the needs of English learners in ELD, Structured English Immersion (SEI), and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) classrooms.[2] [3] While the office would bring together ELD and SEI teachers from throughout the district for training and support, there was no specific department for ELD at school sites. This same concern has also been raised by other scholars, including Patricia Gándara and Russell Rumberger (2009) in their article, *Immigration, Language, and Education: How Does Language Policy Structure Opportunity?* and by Laurie Olsen in her 2010 report, *Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners*. In both research documents the authors noted the lack of clear professional certifications or degrees specific to the field of linguistics as part of English language acquisition.

In most K-12 settings in California, ESL/ELD classes are focused specifically on English language acquisition or development. However, the teachers who are responsible for this instruction in the state, while prepared to address EL literacy for academic purposes, are not specifically prepared to teach ESL as a subject-specific course as exists at the adult education or community college level, for example. As part of K-12 initial teacher certification most teachers in California receive one and sometimes two courses specific to theories and teaching strategies for ELs. Thus K-12 teachers do not receive in-depth preparation that focuses specifically on process, theories, and pedagogies for teaching English as a language *to* the growing English learner population.

## Overview

The first article in this themed section is by Eduardo Diniz de Figueiredo, Matthew Hammill, and Daisy Fredricks and titled Marginalizing TESOL: Preservice Teacher Training in Arizona. The article examines the attitudes of preservice teachers in Arizona concerning the Structured English Immersion program implemented with English learners in K-12 settings. The authors report on several perceptions and beliefs that these preservice teachers hold, including their perceived level of preparation to work with ELs, their attitudes toward them, and the difficulties they anticipate in teaching ELs in the future. Diniz

de Figueiredo and his colleagues highlight the importance of incorporating the insights of the larger TESOL field into K-12 teacher-training programs.

To begin to address the specifics of theory and pedagogy necessary for preservice and in-service teachers, in From Theory to Practice for Teachers of English Learners, Magaly Lavadenz synthesizes the literature on language-teaching methods, along with the learning theories that guide those methods. Her purpose is to highlight the requisite teacher expertise for the appropriate instruction of K-12 ELs. Further, Lavadenz provides perspectives on how curriculum reforms in standards and technology have affected the teaching of English learners.

The third article, by Connie H. Thibeault, Natalie Kuhlman, and Cathy Day, begins to address the concerns raised by Diniz de Figueiredo, Hammill, and Fredricks and the recommendations of Lavadenz by providing clear actions that are being taken by two national organizations concerned with both the ESL and teacher-education professions. In their article ESL Teacher Education Programs: Measuring Up to the TESOL/NCATE Yardstick, the authors 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. The authors address both policy and pedagogical issues related to program standards, pedagogy, and assessment, asserting that candidates who graduate from programs that follow these standards "are ready to begin meeting the challenges of educating the next generation of ELLs in American classrooms."

The theme section concludes with an article that appeared in a recent issue of the *CATESOL News* highlighting the move toward the creation of an English as a World Language Credential in California. This article highlights the journey that began more than 15 years ago to obtain support to create this professional certification to meet the growing need of California's long-term English learners in middle and high school grades. This article by Jeff Frost, Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, and Natalie Kuhlman provides a historical perspective and a path toward the future, with the hope that those leading the way to create this authorization will consider the call from TESOL to "recognize the field of TESOL as a unique academic and professional discipline that is distinct from, but on par with, other academic subjects" and in so doing will "foster academic and intellectual equity and integrity in academic institutions and in society at large" (TESOL, 2008, p. 1).

The articles in this section represent a synthesis of research in the area of professionalization, theory, pedagogy, and policy that can serve educators, advocates, and future teachers in articulating the profession of ESL, and as it now will be on the horizon in California, EWL—English as a World Language. This need is not only essential in higher education as an area of study, but in the K-12 educational setting. If we are to be successful in meeting the needs of our growing English learner populations it is imperative that pedagogy trump politics in defining and supporting, as these authors have done here so well, the appropriate standards, pedagogy, policy, and curriculum for the profession.

## Author

*Dr. Karen Cadiero-Kaplan is a professor at San Diego State University and department chair of Policy Studies in Language and Cross Cultural Education. Her publications focus on the role of education and language policies in curriculum development and teachers' professional development for meeting the needs of English learners. She is past president (2006-2007) for the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL), past vice president (2007-2009) of the CATESOL Education Foundation, president of Californians Together, and 2011 Affiliate Leadership Council chair-elect for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).*

## Notes

[1]In California all teachers receiving a teaching credential are authorized to teach ELD. ELD is structured according to five proficiency levels: the beginning proficiency (Level 1), the early intermediate proficiency (Level 2), the intermediate proficiency (Level 3), the early advanced proficiency (Level 4), and the advanced proficiency (Level 5).

[2]Structured English Immersion is the program mandated in California to teach ELs academic content in English with specific strategies and scaffolds.

[3]Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English programs are designed to meet the needs of intermediate and higher levels of ELs in content-area instruction.

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