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Reimagining TESOL Professionalism: The Graduate Student Perspective

Prospective teachers pursue a graduate degree in TESOL with the expectation that they will become more qualified, on paper and in practice, and more recognized as professionals in the field. In this article, the authors interrogate that assumption by exploring what it means to be a TESOL professional and how graduate students begin to shape this identity. Using their own professional-development paths and input from other graduate students to guide their investigation, the authors make the claim that when graduate students take advantage of professional-development opportunities in a structured and reflective way, they professionalize themselves and the TESOL field at large.

Note: Throughout the article the authors use "TESOL Inc." to refer to the international education association and "TESOL" to refer to the field.

Introduction

In his two-part president's message, past TESOL Inc. President David Nunan (1999ab) presented four criteria to determine whether or not TESOL is a legitimate profession: advanced education and training, an agreed theoretical and empirical base, standards of practice and certification, and advocacy through professional bodies. After weighing TESOL against these criteria he argued that even with a number of committed and active institutions and associations, TESOL still had a weak disciplinary basis and low standards of practice and certification. He concluded, "It is up to us who are committed to the notion of TESOL as a profession to identify and promote those practices around the world that are consistent with this goal" (Nunan, 1999b, para. final).

Nunan's statement suggests that TESOL has struggled to construct a professional identity. English teaching has historically been seen as "a natural gift or a talent" (Nunan, 1999b, para. 4) rather than a discipline or acknowledged profession. To address and mitigate these concerns, professional organizations such as TESOL Inc. strongly advocate for high standards of practice and certification. In 2003, the Board of Directors of TESOL Inc. approved a position statement on the professional equity of the field. The organization recognized TESOL as both a profession and an academic discipline and argued for the right of its educated and rigorously trained practitioners to receive fair com-

pensation and treatment (TESOL Inc., 2003). Increased membership in professional organizations, the growing availability of TESOL-related journals, and well-established and accredited graduate programs have all contributed to the growing professionalization of TESOL.

Yet despite marked progress toward professional recognition, TESOL is still strongly associated with a public perception of language teaching as a "nonprofession." Untrained teachers who move abroad to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often reinforce the idea of teaching English as a means to an end: to finance travel adventures, practice a foreign language, or put off finding a "real job." Issues such as these have led TESOL Inc. to publicly speak out against English-teaching tourism. In 2003, the organization stated, "Native speaker proficiency in the target language alone is not a sufficient qualification for such teaching positions; TESOL is a professional discipline that requires specialized training" (TESOL Inc., 2003).

These mixed messages about TESOL professionalism may discourage TESOL graduate students. Graduate students may think they are working to become part of a profession that isn't deemed "professional." Research shows that both native and nonnative English-speaking TESOL graduate students find it difficult to reconcile graduate student and professional identities (Johnson, 2001; Merseth, Sommer, & Dickstein, 2008). Students wonder how or why to engage in professional practices while completing a degree and question at what point in their training they become "full professionals" (Marrs, 2008). This transition may not take place even after they get a job; many TESOL graduates find themselves working in institutions where their theoretical and pedagogical training is not valued or understood. Criticisms of training and certification in TESOL are well documented (Crookes, 2009; Thomson, 2004), but the effect these criticisms have on TESOL graduate students has not fully been explored.

In our capacity as student representatives on the CATESOL Board of Directors it has been our job to promote student participation and professionalism in the TESOL field. In this article we critically examine TESOL professionalism from a graduate student perspective by exploring the following questions:

1. What is a "TESOL professional"?
2. What action steps can graduate students take to shape this identity?
3. How do these actions contribute to the professionalization of the field?

In addressing these questions we have attempted to give voice to both graduate students and faculty. Through an informal small-scale survey we elicited input from peers and colleagues studying and working in TESOL programs in California and Nevada. Input from this survey and our own professional-development experiences inform the following discussion.[1]

A TESOL Professional

TESOL Inc. defines a TESOL professional as one who enhances his or her career through activities such as materials development, program administration, and active membership in a professional organization. Additionally, "TE-

SOL professionals conduct language research, present papers at conferences and seminars, write for professional publications, and advance academically by pursuing postgraduate degrees and becoming lifelong learners" (TESOL Inc., n.d. a, para. 3). Tesol Inc. sees academic preparation as essential but dependent "upon the nature of one's employment." For example, "whether it is research-oriented or practice-oriented" will affect the type of training needed. The organization states, "A Master's degree in TESOL (or related area) can be considered the terminal degree for teaching positions" but "identifying a single, specific academic credential as the terminal degree for the entire field is not possible" (TESOL Inc., 2007).

While exploring this topic, we also asked TESOL faculty what qualities they possess as TESOL professionals, and their answers echoed the ideas above. All cited efforts to "keep up with the field" by going to conferences and reading journals and commented that touching base frequently with colleagues and networking were other important components of their professionalism.

Graduate students and alumni who provided input defined "TESOL professional" quite differently from TESOL Inc. and TESOL faculty. Survey respondents identified "a degree" and "a paying job" as the basic requirements for being considered a professional and believed personality traits such as patience, integrity, curiosity, and compassion were also important. Their answers reflected direct concern with the scarcity of employment and finances, a result that sheds light on what graduate students think a TESOL professional's priorities should be.

Graduate Students as Professionals

Most TESOL graduate students who responded to our survey focused on the teaching aspects of professionalism, identifying a TESOL degree, a paying full-time teaching job, and teacherly personality traits as crucial. By contrast, both TESOL Inc. and the faculty with whom we spoke do not emphasize specific personality traits, one specific degree, or employment in their definitions of a TESOL professional. TESOL Inc. regards employment as only the starting point to professionalism. It views professional development as "a continuum with 'just a job' at one end and 'professionalism' at the other" and emphasizes that the "goal is to continually move toward the professionalism side of the spectrum" (TESOL Inc., n.d. a, para. 4).

In fact, the *Guide to Professional Development in TESOL* begins with a headline that asks, "Are you a TESOL professional or do you just have a job?" (TESOL Inc., n.d. a). We presume that to "just have a job" means teaching. While we agree that this TESOL statement is well intentioned, we question its impact on new teachers because it sets up a hierarchy in the field with "teacher" and "professional" occupying unequal positions of prestige. Many of our peers feel unqualified to seek employment and perceive that without a job they can not even begin to be a professional. This understanding sets up a number of binary systems—either a graduate student or a teacher, either a teacher or professional—which move "the graduate student" further and further away from "the professional."

Graduate students balance multiple identities and struggle to reconcile their student identities with their identities as professionals. TESOL graduate students easily assume the "graduate student" and "apprentice" identities, but they have difficulties seeing themselves as members of the larger field and autonomous professionals. They see themselves as members of a TESOL graduate program but not as members of the TESOL field. Graduate students may not know exactly what it means to be a "TESOL professional" and therefore often postpone constructing that identity. Our peers often tell us they are not ready to even consider submitting proposals to present or publish their work because they are "only graduate students."

Studies focused on building professional identities have used the social identity theory of Hogg and Abrams (1998) and Terry and Hogg (2000) to better understand this construct (Hansen & Liu, 1997; Johnson, 2001). "People derive their identity (their sense of self, their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong" (Hogg & Abrams as cited in Johnson, 2001, p. 8). Social identity theory understands identity as "relational in power and status" (Johnson, 2001, p. 8), and it is "about how people see themselves in representation, and about how they construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others" (Hetherington, as cited in Johnson, 2001, p. 7). An analysis of graduate student professionalism using the theory of social identity proves helpful in understanding how "identity is articulated through the relationship between belonging, recognition or identification and difference" (Johnson, 2001, p. 7). Individuals do not replace one identity with another; rather, different identities become more "salient and significant" (Johnson, 2001, p. 11) at different times.

We therefore argue that "professional" is not a fixed category, attained only after an unspecified period of apprenticeship and accomplishments, but rather a shifting construct that becomes more salient and significant through time as it is continually defined and redefined by all members of the field. We view professionalism as a practice rather than an end goal and think of graduate student, teacher, and professional as different identities that overlap and coexist, rather than different positions on a linear development path to success. Having a job in the field should not be the beginning nor the end of this journey, but rather one of many avenues through which individuals might develop their expertise and further their professionalism. If the TESOL field in general and graduate programs in particular begin to talk about professionalism differently, they can create a space in which students feel more capable of engaging in professional practices. TESOL graduate students do not *become* professionals, they *are* professionals. They shape what being a TESOL professional means as they, like other members of the field, participate in and contribute to the field.

Building a Professional Identity

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. (Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*)

In our roles as graduate students and student representatives on the CATE-SOL Board of Directors we have worked to both shape our own professional identities and to support the professional development of the TESOL graduate student community. In the past few years, graduate students have asked us how we came to hold these positions in the field. To even begin to answer that question, we had to engage in critical reflection about our own professional-development paths. We have written the following professional-development narratives in order to better identify and reflect on the patterns in them. These narratives illustrate ways in which we actively constructed our professional identities by pursuing various professional-development opportunities. These retrospective accounts present a coherent and comprehensive picture of professional development, but we do not wish to give the impression that our processes were always smooth, linear, or ever complete.

Christina's Story

Like many in this field, I decided to apply to a TESOL graduate program fueled by a desire to understand what I had been doing just before. The year before I applied, I spent a year abroad as a volunteer English teacher. With experience under my belt, I was surprised to feel less professional than when I began—with more questions than answers about teaching English and a realization that I was not nearly as well trained as I should have been. These understandings became my motivation for enrolling in a MA TESOL program with an aim to explore if there were a place for my passion in the vast field of TESOL.

My experience began with the struggle to reprogram my body and mind to the rigors of student life, but the 2nd semester brought about positive change. In class we read *The ESL Classroom* by Brian Morgan, a book that affirmed teaching ESL as important principled work in a way I connected with. I took advantage of office hours to visit with a professor whose work inspired me and applied for a research fellowship to help her explore that work. For 2 years I apprenticed with her and other TESOL practitioners, collecting, transcribing, and translating data, developing materials, copresenting and, most important, forming relationships with ESL teachers and learners in the Bay Area.

It was also my 2nd semester when I was advised to add a professional membership section to my résumé. I remember a professor saying, "Your résumé starts now or even before; it doesn't start when you graduate." I took action as best I knew how by Googling "TESOL professional membership" and paying membership dues for TESOL and CATESOL. I was officially part of two professional organizations and immediately felt more professional. Later in the semester I was searching for funding online and found an open position for a student representative on the CATESOL Board of Directors. Two weeks after I applied, I found myself sitting in a conference ballroom, in what I hoped was professional attire, learning about legislation and budgets at my first-ever board meeting. I served on the board as student representative for 2 years, organizing activities, reading proposals, and trying my best to publicize student opportunities at chapter and regional conferences. I felt energized when I spoke up at

CATESOL events and watched the ripple effect of my individual actions travel across different communities of teachers and learners.

My role as CATESOL student representative gave me an optimistic and idealized view of the field, but this optimism was somewhat tempered by a challenging ESL classroom observation soon after. This class was a whirlwind of confusion for me, for the students, and, as I came to find out, for the teacher herself. Teaching principles I had so confidently adopted were in direct conflict with what I saw, and the "best practices" we learned in class were not at all what was happening. After the observation, the teacher followed me out to express extreme discontent with her career and to caution me against joining the field. I left the experience with a mind full of questions, just as unsure about TESOL as I had been when I began the program. It took a supportive group of peers, faculty, and family to remind me that difficulties are inherent in any profession and it is up to me how I choose to manage them.

Finally, the experience that had the most impact on my professional development was the 44th Annual TESOL Convention and Exhibit in Boston. I initially felt lost among TESOL professionals from all over the world but quickly settled comfortably into the anonymity. I spent the lunch hour watching people and guessing what their jobs might be. I took my time in the exhibition hall talking to publishers and watching product demonstrations. I walked down the conference hall as if it were the bulk candy aisle, opening doors to sample different sessions. I sat in on an informational session for the English Language Fellows Program, a discussion about administration versus teaching, a short corpus linguistics demo, and a presentation on teaching EFL for peace talks. There would be a time for appreciating a full hour-long session, but as a graduate student at my first TESOL conference, seeing the broad scope of the field allowed me to consider how far the branches of TESOL reached and understand I was part of something bigger than my program.

Julia's Story

I decided to enroll in a MA TESOL program because, even after completing a TESOL Certificate course, I felt unprepared to face an entire classroom of language students. In fact, the certificate course raised more questions for me than it answered, but at the time I had no idea what other options existed for professional preparation in this field. I was surprised to learn that people got master's degrees in something as specific as TESOL! Before I applied to a program, I arranged to observe an ESL teacher at a local community college to gain some clarity about whether I actually wanted to enter this field. This teacher became my first mentor in the field; we met often to discuss lesson plans and curriculum, and she encouraged me to design materials and teach lessons. Her openness and generosity made me feel, despite my inexperience, that I already had valuable ideas to contribute.

My MA TESOL program experience began with my feeling somewhat apprehensive. Besides the difficulties of navigating a new school with new resources, I also felt overwhelmed by the TESOL-specific jargon I encountered in my classes. Slowly though, I became more familiar with the layout of both

my program and the field as a whole, and I began to pay more attention to happenings outside my classes. I joined study groups, stayed for the department potluck, and sought out professors in their office hours to build mentorship relationships. I attended my first regional CATESOL conference to see one of my professors give a presentation, which is how I found out about the organization and became a member. I was pleasantly surprised by my conference experience; I am not sure what exactly I was expecting, but the audiences seemed friendlier and the topics were more accessible than I had imagined.

My 2nd year I made an effort to seek out new experiences in my program and also began to explore opportunities outside of my program. I started to take courses in a certificate program for teaching reading and applied to be an intern at my university's Intensive English Program for international students. I also joined the CATESOL Graduate Student Leadership Corps (GSLC), which is aimed at increasing graduate student participation in the CATESOL organization. I liked this idea of making the voices and work of graduate students more visible in the organization, since in my time as a member I had discovered many interest groups for a variety of issues, but none aimed at graduate students. It can be intimidating to enter an ongoing discussion without being directly asked to contribute, and the GSLC seemed to help extend this invitation to graduate students. To continue this work, and to keep challenging myself to stretch in new directions, I applied to be the next student representative on the CATESOL Board of Directors. To my surprise, I found myself being welcomed by the president of the board a short time later.

Until then, my "TESOL world" had consisted of only my own graduate program. Now I was working with peers from other programs around California and Nevada on issues that affected us all, within an organization that represented the TESOL field as a whole. This behind-the-scenes look at CATESOL—participating in board meetings, brainstorming how to increase membership, planning the next conference—demystified the once-intimidating term "professional development" for me. I realized that the individuals who were making things happen were just regular people invested in improving their field, and the fact that I was sitting among them was inspiring. I began to think that I could have something to contribute to this endeavor.

Reflection on Our Experiences

While our personalities and specific stories differ, both narratives reveal similarities in the ways we shaped our professional identities. We share certain attitudes, or "habits of mind": ways of approaching all learning, including professional development, that are both intellectual and practical (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011, p. 1). It is important to shift the discussion of TESOL professionalism to include these habits of mind, as we and our peers have found them to be an indispensable part of building our professional identities. We hope this discussion helps graduate students better understand not only what a TESOL professional does, but also why and how he or she does it.

Both of us began our professional journeys with a curiosity about the TESOL field. Graduate students have a variety of reasons for enrolling in a pro-

gram; ours was motivated by a concern that our previous experiences did not adequately prepare us to be effective English teachers. We both decided to enroll in a graduate program to "seek relevant authoritative information and recognize the meaning and value of that information" (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011, p. 4), looking for answers to questions we had about the TESOL field and our place in it. Curiosity is a very important habit of mind, but it is useful only if coupled with openness and the willingness to take risks. We both made efforts to expose ourselves to new experiences in the field, taking action even when the immediate result was unclear. CWPA, NCTE, and NWP (2011) defines openness as a habit of mind that allows individuals to "examine their own perspectives to find connections with the perspectives of others; … [and] listen to and reflect on the ideas and responses of others" (p. 4). In our narratives, we notice that we both thrive in mentor-apprenticeship–type relationships and often sought the input of peers, professors, and other professionals in the field. When these relationships were not built into our programs (for example, working with a mentor teacher as a teaching assistant), we built them ourselves by visiting office hours, initiating class observations, and creating opportunities to network with other TESOL professionals. Through being open to new experiences and willing to take risks we learned about many avenues of professional development in the TESOL field.

Engagement in the field, or "a sense of investment and involvement" (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011, p. 4), developed as we put ourselves out there. We identify this habit of mind as being critical in our professional development. At first, this engagement grew as we learned more about our programs; professors offered opportunities for us to connect our own ideas with work that inspired us and peer mentors encouraged us to get involved in department-level networking activities. Eventually, we felt confident enough to engage with the field outside our program and attend chapter, regional, and state professional conferences. We both depended on scholarships, grants, and, to a large extent, student loans, but a developed sense of engagement provided the rationale for making these activities a priority. As graduate students attempt to engage with the larger field, it is important they keep perspective; keeping the greater goals in mind is more important than any short-term setback. For example, a rejected paper submission, an unsuccessful interview, or a class observation gone wrong are all professional-development opportunities. They offer critical learning experiences to both inexperienced and established members of the field.

Like many graduate students, we did not begin our programs as engaged or open to new experiences. We depended on mandated course sequences to guide our progress and were largely unaware of opportunities outside of the program. When we recognized we were part of something bigger than just our graduate studies or our jobs, we became more secure in our professional identities. We came to this understanding by seeking out opportunities and experiences outside of our programs that helped place us and our work in a larger context than our classes offered.

By cultivating and becoming mindful of these habits of mind, graduate students engage in reflective practice, a behavior researchers point to as crucial

in professional development. Smith (2009) describes the act of reflection as "returning to the experience, attending to the feelings and then reevaluating the experience. This then leads to a potential change in behavior, new perspectives or commitments to action" (p. 114). Reflection is "one hallmark of the work of professionals" (Barnett, 1997, p. 132).

A Plan for Professional Development

In this section we propose that TESOL graduate students make a Professional Development Plan (PDP) to structure this sort of reflective practice.[2] A PDP helps students understand professional development as an ongoing, school- and work-embedded, goal-driven activity. It encourages exploration, risk taking, and creativity, and it provides a framework for self-improvement and reflection. It is a tool to help students track their professional progress throughout graduate programs and beyond. Through time, graduate students focus and refine their PDPs. It is a recursive, reflective process and a document that should be revisited often. A sense of personal accountability is certainly part of becoming a professional, and a PDP will help students take charge of their own development.

Graduate students may find the Backward Design Model useful when considering how to structure their PDPs. The Backward Design Model is an instructional-design approach that sets goals before choosing activities or content to teach. This approach may be familiar because teachers use it when brainstorming a list of "SWBAT"s to prepare their lesson plans.[3] Similarly, it is useful for graduate students to start their professional journeys by setting a long-term goal first and then considering what action steps they can take to reach those goals.

The long-term goal of the PDP is for TESOL graduate students to professionalize themselves and their field. In other words, this document is intended to guide students toward seeking out professionalizing experiences. Many of the action steps we list below are professional-development opportunities graduate students likely are already engaged in. Engagement in professionalizing experiences may be more passive or more active, but we believe that graduate students, like other members of the TESOL field, should strive to actively contribute to the field. Regardless of the specific activity, it is important for graduate students to engage in them systematically and reflectively. Keeping a PDP current can help students stay organized and see how any one specific activity or opportunity fits into their overall professional-development trajectory. Plans can be as detailed as to include grants and fellowship deadlines and conferences dates or more undefined; this would depend on each student's preferences and goals. We hope the recommendations below inspire graduate students to parlay some of their current activities into more active participation in the TESOL field.

Graduate students begin drafting their PDPs by reflecting on activities they are already engaged in and considering how those activities may be built into their PDPs as action steps to help reach their long-term goals. For example, most of the survey respondents stated that they have conducted classroom ob-

servations. This activity is a professional-development opportunity and can be made into a more active professionalizing experience when students stay after class to follow up with mentor teachers about their pedagogical practices and professional lives. Mentor teachers are able to share practices unique to their own institutional settings and suggest more professional opportunities, such as collaborating to copresent or coauthor. Besides classroom observations, graduate students also work on literature reviews, action research projects, and other academic papers. Rigorous course work in a number of California and Nevada TESOL graduate programs has fostered inquisitive minds and produced groundbreaking research, but graduate students often do not share their ideas with a larger TESOL audience. Submitting their work for publication or presentation would not only help graduate students build their professional identities by giving them a point of entry into larger TESOL conversations, but their contributions would also further professionalize the TESOL field.

Once graduate students adapt to their programs and settle into their "student" identities, it is important for them to familiarize themselves with other TESOL programs' professional-development resources. Many programs list valuable professional-development resources on their websites but do not explicitly mention them in orientation or courses and lack follow-up because of a number of capacity restraints. It is up to the graduate student to explore resources from a number of TESOL programs and actively pursue these opportunities.

Several TESOL and TESOL-related graduate programs provide noteworthy professional-development opportunities that can serve as models or inspiration for graduate students. The introductory TESOL courses at California State University, East Bay include assignments such as attending and reporting back on a professional conference or workshop. This program also hosts an annual entry-level job workshop and invites alumni, local ESL coordinators, and recruiters for international teaching programs to share their experience and opportunities with current MA TESOL students. Biola University encourages attendance at a regional CATESOL conference in the 1st-year methods class by allowing it to count for an assignment worth 5% of the final course grade. Additionally, it requires a conference presentation (usually a poster session at a regional conference) in the 2nd-year classroom research course. Members of the graduating MA TESOL class at San Francisco State University organize and participate in their own conference and complete an online portfolio assignment to compile and showcase their graduate work. Finally, the University of California, Davis hosts a Professional Development Series (PDS) that provides a variety of free workshops for graduate students to learn about and prepare for careers in and out of academia.[4]

Graduate students can take advantage of program-specific professional-development opportunities, but to further develop their professional identities they also need to engage with the larger field. Membership in professional organizations can serve as a guided introduction to the field at large and broaden graduate students' conception of "the TESOL field" to include interests, issues, and professionals outside of their graduate programs. TESOL Inc. acknowl-

edges that "many students believe they must be teachers or have achieved some level of success before becoming a TESOL member. This is not true. Membership in a professional association during your formative years can give you a head start in your career development" (TESOL Inc., n.d. b, para. 1). Students pay a reduced membership rate to gain access to a wide variety of resources, such as online journals, teaching forums, and job postings. Members are also eligible to apply for grants and awards offered by the organization. In addition to providing resources for graduate students to learn more about the field, professional organizations offer opportunities for graduate students to participate in the field. As mentioned above, graduate students can submit proposals to publish in journals and present at conferences in order to share their work with a wider TESOL audience. Reviewer feedback on these proposals will help them fine-tune their writing skills and better articulate their ideas and beliefs. Graduate students who have published or presented are more likely to stand out among their peers—they are more competitive doctoral, fellowship, and job candidates.

Many professional organizations value and encourage graduate student participation. TESOL Inc. hosts its Graduate Student Forum, a full-day student-run conference, at the annual international convention. CATESOL promotes graduate student involvement through the Graduate Student Leadership Corps. Corps members (ideally, one or two students from each graduate program in California and Nevada) assist the student representative on the Board of Directors in disseminating information about graduate student activities and opportunities to their graduate student peers. Organizations outside the TESOL field also provide useful models for graduate student participation. In 2004, the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) authorized the development of student chapters. RSA student chapters provide a forum for visiting scholars and allow students to discuss matters of professionalization such as publishing in the field, applying for fellowships or jobs, and matters related to graduate curriculum. Also, the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), in conjunction with the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), hosts a forum for NCTE and CCCC members to discuss "how to" graduate student topics such as surviving course work, navigating conferences, planning a dissertation, and networking with professors.

TESOL graduate programs and professional organizations provide a number of professional-development opportunities specifically for graduate students. In our online survey, student and alumni respondents identified some of these opportunities and pointed out that they were the ones ultimately responsible for taking advantage of them. For example:

> I think they [my professors] tried to prepare me well, but since I had no idea what I was getting into, I didn't "get it" all until later. ... I now look back and wish *I* had put more into the program.

Other survey comments also emphasized this self-directed activity. As one simply put it, "I think a lot depends on what you do on your own."

Not only do graduate students need to be independent and proactive, but they also need to create opportunities if they find a gap exists. For example, in her 1st year on the CATESOL Board of Directors, Christina noticed that information about CATESOL professional-development opportunities—awards, scholarships, events, conferences—was not reaching all the TESOL or TESOL-related graduate programs in California and Nevada. In her 2nd year on the board, she founded the aforementioned Graduate Student Leadership Corps (GSLC) to try to fill this gap. Julia created professional-development opportunities even before enrolling in a graduate program. She arranged to observe a local ESL teacher who eventually became her first mentor in the field. By the time she began her graduate studies, she was more prepared than she otherwise would have been. It is important for graduate students to be producers of knowledge as well as consumers, to contribute to the field as well as benefit from it. A PDP can help TESOL graduate students keep track of the professional-development opportunities they are finding, taking advantage of, and creating. When graduate students take agency over their own professional development, they individually build a professional identity and collectively further professionalize the TESOL field.

Conclusion

As student representatives on the CATESOL Board of Directors we have had the unique opportunity to speak with TESOL graduate students, faculty, and program coordinators from all over California and Nevada about TESOL professionalism. Their experiences and ideas, together with our own and those of TESOL Inc., guided this article's investigation of what it means to be a "TESOL professional." We learned that TESOL graduate students focus more on the teaching aspects of professionalism, whereas TESOL faculty and TESOL Inc. define "TESOL professional" as one who keeps up with the larger field by going to conferences, reading journals, and networking. While graduate students found it easy to adopt the "graduate student" and "apprentice" identities, they often did not see themselves as members of this larger field and, in turn, found it difficult to build a professional identity. We identified habits of mind such as curiosity, engagement, willingness to take risks, and perspective as important to professionalization and suggested structured and constant reflection, in the form of a PDP, as a way to track professional-development opportunities and action steps that help graduate students reach their short- and long-term goals. We concluded that TESOL graduate students do not *become* professionals, but instead they *are* professionals. They shape what being a TESOL professional means as they participate in and contribute to the field.

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Authors

Christina Lorimer received a MA TESOL degree from San Francisco State University and served as the student representative on the CATESOL Board of Directors from 2009 to 2011. She has taught academic and nonacademic English in the US and abroad. Her primary interests are community-based ESL, immigrant literacies, and curriculum development/assessment. In 2012, she will be conducting teacher training in Brazil with the support of the Fulbright Program.

Julia Schulte will complete her MA TESOL degree at San Francisco State University in Spring 2012. She has been an ESL/EFL tutor and has taught community-based ESL classes for San Francisco nonprofits. She is now teaching reading, writing, American culture, and social issues in an Intensive Preacademic English Program. She is also serving as student representative on the board of CATESOL for 2011-2012.

Notes

[1]This article is not a research study meant to prescribe the best way for TESOL graduate students to become professionals, nor is it a statement that this sort of transformation links to higher achievement scores for English language learners. The authors used SurveyMonkey to design an informal survey and distributed it to the CATESOL student Listserv. We also e-mailed the link to TESOL graduate program coordinators and asked them to distribute it to students and alumni.

[2]PDPs are most in fashion with K-12 school districts. TESOL Inc. professional-development programs such as the TESOL Core Certificate program, an online training program designed for teachers or administrators who have little to no formal training in English language teaching, or TESOL Academies, 2-day retreats featuring workshops focused on specialized aspects of the field, also sometimes include a professional-development plan as part of their requirements. In many cases, the PDP satisfies a professional growth requirement for educator-preparation programs.

[3]SWBAT stands for "students will be able to," which is how graduate students traditionally learn to write the objectives in a lesson plan.

[4]http://iccweb.ucdavis.edu/graduates/pds

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