

Curricular Renovations in ESOL: Preparing Our Teachers

*Karen M. Timmermans and EunJoo Catherine Kim,
Pacific University*

Oregon, the state in which we educate our in-service and pre-service teachers, recently revised the requirements for the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. The state had already published competency guidelines, or standards, for an ESOL endorsement. However, Oregon had required the ESOL endorsement candidates only to complete a 90-hour practicum with an ESOL endorsed teacher and achieve a passing score on a standardized knowledge assessment in order to add the endorsement on their teaching license.

Oregon wanted to ensure that ESOL-endorsed teachers met the competency guidelines already in place and were better prepared to teach children whose first language is not the language of instruction. The state retained the 90-hour practicum, created a new standardized knowledge assessment, and added curricular requirements to the ESOL endorsement. As part of the original ESOL endorsement standards, the state had identified six knowledge skills and abilities in which an ESOL endorsed teacher must demonstrate competency:

- 1) Language
- 2) Culture
- 3) Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction
- 4) Assessment
- 5) Professionalism
- 6) Technology (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.).

In this article, we will describe our purpose for re-evaluating Pacific University's standard course of study related to the ESOL endorsement and our process of redesigning our program.

Our intent in re-evaluating our program was to ensure an in-depth curriculum focusing not only on teaching, assessment, and learning; but also linguistics, culture, and policy for our ESOL endorsement candidates. We evaluated our current ESOL endorsement curriculum in order to determine whether the ESOL endorsement program currently in place for several years was fully aligned to the state's competency guidelines, prepared the ESOL endorsement candidates for the new standardized knowledge assessment, and led to their future success in the classroom.

As part of our evaluative process we reviewed the current course objectives, outcomes, and assignments as described in course syllabi; accessed current literature in ESOL teacher education; examined course evaluations completed by ESOL endorsement candidates; and considered other ESOL endorsement programs of study across the state. The criteria by which we evaluated the courses in the current program came directly from the competency guidelines set forth by the state.

We compared course objectives, outcomes, and assignments with the statements for each of the six fore-mentioned competencies to determine the extent to which the courses met the

state's standards. Upon initial review of our current curriculum for alignment with the state's competency guidelines, we identified the areas in which our courses met or exceeded the state's competency expectations and areas in need of improvement.

Additionally, as a framework and guideline for our ESOL endorsement program evaluation and redesign, we considered the ways in which our candidates could best demonstrate competency in the four broad areas that Dantas-Whitney, Favela, Mize, and Galloway (2008) identified as focus areas in ESOL endorsement programs:

- 1) The history and legal issues relevant to educating English-language learners (ELLs)
- 2) Cultural and linguistic diversities existing in K-12 education
- 3) Linguistic aspects of first and second language acquisition
- 4) Methods to teach and differentiate instruction and assessment for ELLs.

Dantas-Whitney et al.'s (2008) focus areas align with the state's competency guidelines as professionalism; culture; language; planning, implementing and managing instruction; and assessment.

History and Legal Issues

The course in which the impact of federal and state policies on ELLs learning in schools was addressed already went beyond the state's expectations of professional knowledge. Although we revised some of the course requirements, the most visible change to the course, focusing on the history and legal issues relevant to educating ELLs, was a change in the course title to better reflect the course content and state guidelines. The state's competency guidelines require ESOL endorsement candidates to not

only be current in political issues confronting ELLs, but also be advocates for the students and work collaboratively with their families. The course already in place supported the candidates' acquisition of knowledge of laws and policies related to how children who arrive in school not speaking the language of instruction are best served.

An assignment to support our candidates' understanding and practical application of policies and laws included in the newly redesigned policy course involves a pro and con stance on the English-only debate. ESOL endorsement candidates research one side of the issue and engage in a convincing debate with a group supporting the opposing view.

Our candidates' comments evidenced the ways in which the newly designed policy course

candidates research one side of the issue and engage in a convincing debate with a group supporting the opposing view

allowed them to better understand the struggles that those who do not speak English face when they seek equal access to public educa-

tion. Their comments included: "I learned so much from this course. Even though I am not going for the endorsement, I learned valuable information that will be applicable to my own class someday;" and "[this] class helped me further understand important policies relating to ESOL. I really liked the idea to have a debate for us to further our understanding of the 'English Only' issue."

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

One component of our program that we identified as in need of strengthening was in the area of social and cultural competence related to the particular needs of ELLs. Other programs in our college provide frequent opportunities for our candidates to expand and broaden their experiences and understanding of working with

and teaching diverse populations. The focus of these other courses tends to be about understanding your own biases, your community, and diverse populations in general, rather than about children who come to school speaking a language different from the language of instruction.

We want our ESOL endorsement candidates to be more than just culturally competent; we want the candidates to move toward a more critical cultural consciousness. Our candidates, in order to be successful ESL teachers, need to participate in a critical self-examination of their own preconceived ideas beyond superficial acknowledgement or awareness of cultural issues. Dantas-Whitney and Waldschmidt (2009) emphasize this self-examination as an important component of teacher education in ESOL.

We wanted to deepen our candidates' cultural knowledge and consciousness. We created a two semester credit hour course in which our candidates consider the particular linguistic, social, and cultural aspects of ELLs and how these aspects impact the children's learning. We designed this cultural constructs course to equip our candidates with the skills to assist them to be culturally responsive in an environment supportive of learning for all students. The new course addresses the cultural and linguistic diversities found within K-12 classrooms. It provides an environment in which our candidates can reflect upon and develop a deep understanding of the cultures, language, values, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors our ELLs bring with them to the classroom.

The assignments are designed to facilitate a deeper understanding of our ELLs. Assignments include online and offline discussion and reflection on cultural and linguistic diversities existing in our schools, service learning opportunities within diverse schools and communities, observations of and interviews with ELLs to understand their experience, and interviews with ESL

teachers to learn about the unique challenges they face when working with ELLs from diverse backgrounds. The focus of the course and assignments is to allow our candidates to develop a critical view and understanding of what it means to become an intercultural educator who provides culturally responsive education.

Our candidates commented in the course evaluations how this course provided them with valuable opportunities to gain new insights into ESOL education and how much they learned from doing service learning, observations, and interviews with ESL teachers and students. Candidates mentioned that the assignments all allowed them to deepen their understanding of cultural and linguistic diversities existing among ELLs. Their course evaluations included comments such as: "We were able to interview ESOL instructors and students, which gave us a better understanding of what goes on in ELL classrooms;" "[this course] is a must in ESOL education;" "[this course] makes me want to

we want the candidates to move toward a more critical cultural consciousness

be an ESOL specialist;" "[this course] will definitely help me as an emerging ESOL teacher and opened my eyes to a lot of topics that I was not aware of before;" and "[h]onestly, I was wondering whether I should take this class or not, but I was right to take the class. This class totally changed my perspective about ESL students and how to interact with their parents."

Linguistic Aspects

The state's competency guideline in the area of language acquisition requires candidates to fully "understand, and use the major concepts, theories, and research related to the nature and acquisition of language to construct learning environments that support English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and bilingual students' language and literacy development and content area achievement" (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.).

The course in which linguistics and language acquisition for ELLs was addressed already exceeded the state's expectations of the skills and abilities candidates needed to demonstrate for their ESOL endorsement. In terms of the state's competency guidelines, the course allowed the students to gain a solid understanding of first and second language acquisition, both at the theoretical and practical levels. Again, the most visible change for the linguistics course was a course title that better reflected the course content and aligned with the state's guidelines.

Candidates in our program commented that this three semester credit hour educational linguistics course allowed them to develop a strong foundation in linguistics relevant to teaching and learning and language acquisition theories. Candidates' responses on course evaluations that directly pointed to the course content included the following: "Many assignments required reflective, critical thinking;" "I feel that I have a good grounding to go forward with the endorsement;" "I have learned much regarding the ESL language development and find it an excellent course;" and "I will certainly use much of what I learned on a daily basis in my future teaching practice."

Differentiating Instruction and Assessment

We were aware that our ESOL courses placed a great emphasis on research-based and standards-based practices from the assessment of our curriculum and the evaluations from our candidates. Still, we found the course in which the candidates explored instructional and assessment methods was too narrow in focus and did not fully cover aspects of how technology could be used to enhance learning for ELLs. In order to provide more depth and breadth for our candidates, we added a single semester credit hour to the three semester credit hour course, and split the course into two consecutive, two semester credit hour courses.

This strategic move allowed us to provide two classes with more focused content and extended opportunities for learning, rather than one course covering a shallow breadth of content. Our goal was to assist the candidates in building a strong theoretical foundation in the five areas of language arts, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. Candidates also learned how these skills connect to one's culture through a variety of instructional models and techniques.

The second course of the two-course sequence addressing our candidates' knowledge skills and abilities takes what the students learned in the first of the two-course sequence to a practical level: assessing, planning, and learning. For the second course, the candidates are required to complete a unit designed for ESL instruction. The unit includes the lesson plans, the Oregon ELP (English Language Proficiency) standards that each lesson addresses, assessment plans detailing how students' progress and achievement are assessed, and all the accompanying materials necessary to teach the unit successfully.

Candidates who participated in the new format reported they had learned many effective instructional strategies for ELLs that were not addressed in their previous teacher education coursework. Their comments on this course showed that they felt well prepared for actual ESL classroom teaching: "I learned a lot of practical things in this class (how to teach reading, grammar, and listening...);" "I learned so much from this course on how to teach ELLs. It was a great class to start off with and learn about;" and "[this] was such an amazingly helpful class. It took up a lot of time and was very challenging, but helpful for the future teaching."

This new learning occurred in part because of the hands-on nature of the newly redesigned courses focusing specifically on instructional methods, technology use, and assessments of ELLs. Compared to our previous ESOL endorsement curriculum, the newly revised two-course

sequence has a stronger focus on effective ways to apply the knowledge of instructional methodology, technology, and assessment.

We wanted to further strengthen the methodology component of the newly redesigned curriculum and to equip our candidates with effective teaching strategies and theoretical foundations for teaching reading to ELLs. We added a literacy course dedicated to literacy instruction for ELLs. The new literacy course allows our candidates to focus specifically on best practices in the area of reading and writing instruction. This course, required as part of the reading endorsement as well as ESOL endorsement, considers literacy instruction for academic English acquisition through content areas and children's and adolescent literature. It also allows candidates with diverse knowledge and expertise to come together to support each other's learning.

Again, the students' responses focusing on course content in their course evaluations assured us that our efforts in redesigning a more in-depth and effective program was well worth

the effort: "This was a great class filled with vibrant discussion and debate. Reading the text (which was relevant) and responding was a great way to critically think about the material. The lesson plan was thoughtful and made me think about my potential role as a literacy advocate for ELL students;" and "I believe the information covered in this course should be required curriculum for all pre-service teachers. I found the information to be some of the most useful I have encountered since beginning the MAT program."

Assessment of Candidates' Knowledge and Skills

Finally, we addressed the ways in which candidates demonstrate achievement of the state's competency guidelines. Previously, the

candidates submitted a portfolio in which they collected items during their 90-hour practicum. The portfolio was to include artifacts to demonstrate their experience in the areas of pre-assessment and analysis, planning and designing, instructional plans, evaluation, documentation and reporting, and research. The candidates included photocopies of assessments administered in order to determine the children's English competence, articles they read to indicate knowledge of research about ELLs, and handouts either they or their mentor teacher had used with the ELLs under their care during the practicum.

In this format, there was insufficient evidence to suggest our candidates were sufficiently prepared to effectively teach ELLs. Since we began our redesign process by aligning courses to the state's competency guidelines, we re-framed the portfolio to be a source of comprehensive evidence that our candidates met each of

we reframed the portfolio to be a source of comprehensive evidence that our candidates met each of the state's competencies

the state's competencies. It became the responsibility of the candidates to gather artifacts from their courses and practicum to evidence their achievement of the state's com-

petency guidelines. The candidates no longer included photocopies of assessments and journal articles, but rather evidenced their learning in each of the six competency areas with projects and papers from each of their courses and lesson plans they created from their practicum. Each item was prefaced by a brief explanation as to how the artifacts demonstrated the candidate's understanding of each of the state's competency guidelines. These portfolios are evaluated using a scoring rubric designed to assess whether they show enough evidence that the candidates' work met each of the six competency areas.

As part of our redesign, we developed an observation tool to guide us as we observe our students in their ESOL practicum placements. The observation tool aligns with the state's competency guidelines and best practices in the field

of education. We also added a mentor teacher evaluation aligned with the state's competency guidelines to the candidate evaluation process. The mentor teacher can now provide direct feedback to the university's ESOL endorsement program coordinator and candidate supervisor about the student's ability to effectively teach ELLs within a self-contained ESL classroom or a mainstream classroom. Both the observation tool and the mentor teacher feedback form add to the evidence of our students' capability to successfully educate ELLs.

To conclude, we took great care in redesigning and aligning our ESOL endorsement program to the state's competency guidelines. As a result, we are now more confident that our candidates can better meet the linguistic, social, cultural, and academic needs of the ELLs in their classrooms and schools and are now better prepared to become highly competent teachers who provide effective instruction for ELLs.

We will continue to evaluate our new curricular changes through continuous monitoring and assessment of program effectiveness. We believe our reflective practice will help us keep

our ESOL endorsement curriculum relevant for the needs of Oregon schools.

References

- Dantas-Whitney, M. & Waldschmidt, E. D. (2009). Moving toward critical consciousness in ESOL and bilingual teacher education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 32, 60-76.
- Dantas-Whitney, M., Favela, A., Mize, K. & Galloway, M. (2008). They're everyone's kids: Supporting teachers who support ELLs. *ORTESOL Journal*, 26, 1-6.
- Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Endorsements for initial and continuing teaching licenses: Knowledge skills and abilities for English to speakers of other languages*. Retrieved <http://www.tspc.state.or.us/ors.asp?op=7&id=0>

Karren Timmermans is Assistant Professor of Education at Pacific University. She coordinates the ESOL/Bilingual Endorsement Program at the university's Eugene campus.

E. Catherine Kim is Assistant Professor of Education at Pacific University. She coordinates the ESOL/Bilingual Endorsement Program at the university's Forest Grove campus.