

# **Implementing an English as a Second Language Institute in Higher Education**

**María Guadalupe De La Colina, Ph.D.**

**Associate Professor**

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Bilingual/ESL Education

College of Education

Texas State University-San Marcos

San Marcos, Texas

**Barbara H. Davis, Ed.D.**

**Professor**

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

Texas State University-San Marcos

San Marcos, Texas

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Preparing teachers for a linguistically diverse student population is a challenge for institutions of higher education. Texas State University (TxState) has addressed this need by requiring all elementary teacher candidates to be certified in bilingual and/or English as a Second Language (ESL). In 2009-2010 academic year, TxState started to offer only two options for elementary teacher certification: Early Childhood - 6th Grade (EC-6) Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) or EC-6/ESL. The purpose of this pilot professional development project was to help Curriculum & Instruction (C& I) faculty increase their knowledge and skills in second language acquisition theory and methods. To address this need, the authors of this paper developed and implemented a four-day professional development ESL Institute. This paper will provide an overview of the institute's format and implementation. Findings from a qualitative study that sought to determine the institute's effectiveness suggest that professional development can help university faculty increase their knowledge and skills related to teaching ELLs. The ESL Institute described in this paper is a positive first step in helping a university's C & I faculty understand the complexities of second language learning and how to integrate that learning into their existing courses.**

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The face of the United States has significantly changed during the last few years and this is reflected in today's classrooms. The population of immigrants reflects great cultural and linguistic diversity. The number of public school students who do not speak English as their primary language is increasing. In 1979, an estimated nine percent of all 5 to 17 year olds in the U.S. were language minorities; by 2006 that percent increased to 20.3% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). While these students may be identified by the acronym ELLs (English language learners), "they are far from a uniform group, differing in length of time in the United States, level of first language and literacy proficiency, previous education, socioeconomic circumstances, and individual student development" (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006, p. 1). Designing and providing appropriate instruction and materials for such a culturally and linguistically diverse group is a challenging task for teachers and administrators.

In Texas, the number of ELLs enrolled in public schools has also increased. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2010), the total number of ELLs attending public schools, increased to 800,554 during the academic year 2009-2010 while in the academic year 2000-2001 there were only 570,603. This represents an increase of 40% during the last ten years. In Texas, ELLs comprise 15% of the total population: about 90% of them are Hispanics, and over 137 languages are taught in Texas schools (TEA, 2010). This can be a challenge in a school system that is primarily conducted in English. The challenge of educating ELLs is not limited to public schools, however, higher education also faces a tremendous challenge as universities and colleges strive to better prepare teacher candidates for an increasingly diverse public school population. The College of Education at Texas State University-San Marcos (TxState), responding to the school districts' need of preparing our teacher candidates for successful experiences in a diverse professional teaching career, stepped-up to the challenge by changing the certification programs for students graduating from this institution. Starting in 2009-2010 academic year, TxState started to offer only two options for elementary teacher certification: Early Childhood - 6<sup>th</sup> Grade (EC-6) Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) or EC-6/ESL. The first step towards this tremendous challenge was to change and redesign the courses by integrating stand-alone ESL courses (this institution was offering EC-4 Generalist and EC-4 Bilingual/ESL courses only, previous to fall, 2009) and infuse the existing curricula with ESL philosophy and methodology. Thus, the next step was to offer professional development in second language acquisition (SLA) and ESL philosophy and methodology for the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) faculty.

Research has shown that effective teachers need to understand established principles of second language learning and the pedagogical practices that stem from them (Harper & deJong, 2004; Samway & McKeon, 2007). According to Cummins (2000), teachers must first comprehend second language learning as a process. They must also understand the similarities and differences between first and second language learning and its implications. Teachers must be cognizant of the process of second language development, the roles and interactions of learner variables, and the complex ways in which they can influence the process of learning a second language (Harper & deJong, 2004). Effective teachers also need a wide range of knowledge and skills, including deep content knowledge of how ELLs learn (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-

Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Without professional development support for teachers lacking the expertise in ELLs teaching and learning, issues of second language acquisition are likely to get lost within diversity courses in the larger framework of culturally responsive teaching (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). Moreover, Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) state the urgency of preparing all teachers to teach ELLs and therefore the need to change “business as usual” in teacher education given the increasing number of ELLs in mainstream classes across the nation.

The new certification program at TxState is intended to prepare teacher candidates to teach ELLs in the new, more diverse, public school setting. Nevertheless, most of the TxState C&I faculty members, when this change came about, did not have the background or the experience in ESL philosophy, methodology, and SLA needed to implement such drastic change. Although the specific required ESL designated courses were assigned to be taught by faculty who have this expertise and at least 18 graduate hours of ESL instruction, the Dean of the College of Education and the Chair of the C&I Department had the vision not only to add ESL courses but to transform the curricula of non-ESL department courses and the faculty’s teaching philosophy.

This paper describes how the authors attempted to accomplish this objective by developing and piloting an ESL Institute for the department. The goals of the institute included the following: (a) understanding that language is part of identity; (b) understanding the sociopolitical and socio-historical influences that impact language instruction in schools; (c) identifying the educational policies that govern language instruction; and (d) examining the theoretical and philosophical frameworks of language learning.

As part of the institute, the authors conducted a descriptive study to determine the project’s effectiveness in helping faculty increase their knowledge of ESL philosophy and methods. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What pre-existing knowledge do the participants possess about ESL theory and methods?
2. What knowledge do the participants possess about ESL theory and methods after having completed the four ESL Institute modules?

This paper will (a) provide an overview of the ESL Institute format, (b) describe the methods of data collection, (c) share findings from the data analysis, and (d) discuss conclusions drawn from the study.

### **Method**

The principal investigator of this project (first author) volunteered to implement an ESL Institute for the faculty and staff of the Department of C&I in the College of Education. Two other members of the department joined this project and helped produce the first ESL Institute as a professional development pilot model. Curriculum and Instruction faculty members were offered the opportunity to attend the first ESL Institute

that included four half-day workshops, 16 contact clock hours. In addition, the participants were required to complete homework assignments for at least 14 hours. Some of the assignments included extensive reading of professional articles in second language acquisition, *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach* (1994), and transforming and infusing their syllabi with English as a second language philosophy and strategies. Twenty-five (25) participants attended at least three or more of the four sessions.

The ESL Institute consisted of four distinct modules (see Appendix A), which were piloted during the spring term. Each module offered participants opportunities to a) enhance their knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and instructional practices about principles of first and second language learning, including English as a second language education, and b) modify their course syllabi, assignments, and materials by integrating the theories, methods, and learning strategies in which they engaged. Each training module of the ESL Institute enabled faculty members to integrate ESL theory and methods with their mode of instruction in order to enhance their students' knowledge and skills to teach ELLs. The ESL Institute was aligned with the Texas ESL Learning Standards (State Board of Educator Certification, 2001; see Appendix B) and also helped to prepare institute participants who were seeking ESL certification.

To determine the impact of this pilot project on faculty knowledge and understanding about ESL philosophy and methodology, data were collected throughout the institute. The data sources and methods of analysis are described in the following sections.

### **Data Collection**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in order to determine the effectiveness in achieving the objectives of the institute. A 10-item open-ended pre- and post-assessment was used to determine participants' knowledge of ESL theory and methods (see Appendix C). Participants completed the assessment at the beginning of the institute to determine their pre-existing knowledge and again at the end of the final session to determine what they had learned. The pre- and post-assessments were compared using frequency counts and percentages. Additional quantitative data were collected using a Likert-scale evaluation, which asked participants to rate the institute's effectiveness on various items using a five-point scale (1=not effective to 5=very effective; see Appendix D).

Qualitative data were collected through journal reflections, which were written anonymously. While journal prompts were provided (e.g., "What did you learn from this session?" "What impact do you think this will have on your teaching?"), participants were free to write whatever they wanted. The journal reflections were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This procedure involved the authors reading the written comments and coding for patterns and themes that emerged. They discussed their findings and came to agreement as to the themes reflected in the written comments.

Transformed syllabi were also collected at the end of the institute. This data set is currently in the process of being analyzed using a rubric adapted from Morey and Kitano (1997).

### Results

Results of the data analysis indicated positive outcomes from the ESL Institute. A comparison of the pre- and post-assessments revealed an increase in participants' knowledge about ESL theory and methodology on all (100%) of the items (see Figure 1).

Question	Correct/Partially Correct Answers	
	Pre N=18	Post N=13
1. BICS	22%	100%
2. CALP	22%	100%
3. Cummin's CUP	.5%	62%
4. L2 Acquisition	33%	100%
5. L2 Stages	39%	77%
6. Difference between L1/L2	44%	85%
7. Krashen's 5 Hypothesis	.5%	69%
8. ESL teaching methods	50%	100%
9. Factors that affect ESL learning	72%	100%
10. Advocate for ESL students and families	67%	92%

*Figure 1.* Results of pre/post assessment.

In addition, results of the Likert-scale evaluation indicated the participants perceived the institute to be a positive experience that helped them develop knowledge in ESL theory and methods (see Figure 2).

Item	Mean Scores
Institute was organized effectively	4.41
Presenters were knowledgeable	4.66
Information was useful to my teaching	4.25

Figure 2. Results of post-survey (N=13).

Scoring criteria:	not effective=1	2	3	4	5=very effective
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To more fully understand participants' increased knowledge, the authors analyzed the journal responses. Several themes related to the Texas ESL Learning Standards ([www.sbec.state.tx.us](http://www.sbec.state.tx.us)) emerged from this inductive analysis. These included increased knowledge and a deeper understanding of (a) second language acquisition (ESL Standard III), (b) ESL teaching methods (ESL Standard IV), and (c) factors that affect ESL students' learning (ESL Standard V). Moreover, a theme related to an approach used during the institute (i.e., collaboration) emerged from the data. The following sections provide a more detailed description of each of these themes.

### Second-Language Acquisition

This standard relates to understanding the processes of first-and second-language acquisition. As the following examples demonstrate, several participants commented on factors important to SLA.

“This session was very helpful in demonstrating the crucial role of prior knowledge in language learning. In working with ELL students it is so very important to provide as much context as possible to help students acquire the second language. It is important to keep in mind that language modes don't necessarily develop at the same rate . . . promote interaction with native speakers and provide lots of small group work.”

“I appreciated learning about Steven [sic] Krashen's hypotheses for language acquisition:

- that it is a subconscious process as well as a conscious act
- that conscious learning acts as a monitor
- that there is a natural order—it's predictable, yet L1 and L2 may not be identical

- that the input needs to be concrete (i.e., acting out, manipulatives, paraphrasing, etc.)
- that the affective filter is that social and emotional domain that truly affects all learners.”

“I learned the importance of using a fully developed first language to help when acquiring a second language. Hence, the importance of public schools helping develop the first language, before rushing students into learning of the second language at the expense of the first language.”

“Now I realize how much more I need to learn. . .Krashen’s hypotheses, Cummin’s model. I know I need to understand these, not to regurgitate, but to really understand the theory behind the second language learner.”

### **ESL Teaching Methods**

This theme relates to ESL Standard IV “The ESLteacher understands ESL teaching methods and uses this knowledge to plan and implement effective, developmentally appropriate ESL instruction” ([www.sbec.state.tx.us](http://www.sbec.state.tx.us), p. 4). In sessions three and four of the institute, participants were introduced to the various aspects of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA; Chamot & O’Malley, 1994) to teach ELLs. CALLA is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research. CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks. Thus, numerous participants reflected on what they learned about the ESL teaching methods from the CALLA approach. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

“I learned the importance of having a systematic plan for teaching strategies to ELLs (e.g., plan-present-assess). . . One of the most important things I learned was that ELLs can learn L2 in an academic context—this was a new insight for me.”

“[I] learned about the importance of first developing that background knowledge before any type of lesson. . . Made me think that teaching ESL students is much more than just using good, effective strategies—“best practices”—it involves so much more . . .”

“[It was] interesting how everyone brought their experiences to the [CALLA] presentations! It was so wonderful to learn from others.

“How to teach CALLA [the format] connects to lesson plan format used in classrooms: preparation—prior knowledge; presentation—explanation of new knowledge; practice; evaluat[ion]—independent/group practice; expansion—extend learning.”

Several noted they were glad to learn that practices they currently use (e.g., cooperative learning, concrete materials, guided inquiry) are suggested strategies for ESL students. Therefore, this institute helped the participants view their current practices through an additional lens—that of preparing students to become teachers of ELLs. Not feeling that they had to completely revamp their coursework but could build on to what they are currently teaching was comforting to most. As one participant put it,

I am continually reminded of how similar teaching strategies for ESL are to the strategies we use in early childhood: assessing the learner’s prior knowledge; hands-on, concrete learning; working with families and knowing what they bring to the child’s school experience; and using authentic and multiple forms of assessment.

### **Factors that Affect ESL Students’ Learning**

This theme relates to being sensitive to students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as their individual needs. Various institute activities related to the sociolinguistic nature of learning language. For example, following one such activity that involved participants in trying to figure out unknown languages in printed materials (e.g., children’s books, newspapers, brochures, etc.), several reflected on the experience:

“I was reminded again and again about the complexity involved in learning a second language. As an educator, I want to instill in myself and in my students the importance of sensitivity and learned wisdom in recognizing how unique and how fragile children can be in their attempts to learn a second language.”

“I learned a lot about how we feel when we encounter a new language. I will be more sensitive to the needs of others.”

“I loved being able to look at the different texts from other cultures. I learned that social interaction is vital to supporting an ESL student. By going through the books, newspapers, and brochures, I felt confused on what the information was saying—this is going to help me better understand how “lost” my ESL students might feel when I am teaching in English.”

“I learned that there are varying levels of knowledge in the second language environment. Teachers need to be aware that each student is different and comes with varying degrees of competency, so each one needs to be treated individually to aid in their affective, cognitive, and social development in the second language.”



“My hope is that these trainings will enable us to instill in our [university] students a higher regard for the diverse learning needs of children.”

A sociolinguistic activity that helped us examine assumptions about ourselves and others led to the following insights by participants:

“The learning of self and assumptions exercise was very helpful in making us aware of how we might be teaching our students: through our own experiences, rather than finding out our students’ backgrounds and work from there.”

“The activity in session two made me feel uncomfortable and anxious. I can now see how ESL students feel when they are unaware of the language or cultural norms in my classroom.”

### **Collaboration**

Cooperative learning strategies (Kagan & Kagan, 2009) were integrated throughout the institute sessions. Cooperative learning has been shown to be an effective method of teaching ELLs (Chamot & O’Malley, 1994; Kagan & High, 2002; Ovando, Combs, and Collier, 2006). By integrating cooperative learning throughout the sessions, the authors modeled for faculty what they could do in their university courses to demonstrate an effective strategy for promoting peer interaction and language development with ELLs. The following excerpts from participants’ journal reflections illustrate how collaboration helped promote positive interactions during the institute sessions.

“The cooperative learning period provided insight into some of the issues from the readings. It is so important to listen and to learn from others . . . to give everyone a voice in the process.”

“Strategies to promote interaction in the group helps us form a true learning community as we take this journey together.”

“I loved the cooperative, collaborative activities that demonstrated the rationale.”

“Activities today were engaging and reflective—enjoyed the interaction among the group.”

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Increased diversity in the U.S. presents a challenge to both public schools that serve ELL students as well as institutions of higher education that prepare teacher candidates. The results of this pilot study suggest that professional development can help university faculty increase their knowledge and skills related to teaching ELLs. The ESL

Institute described in this paper is a positive first step in helping the TxState C&I faculty understand the complexities of second language learning and how to integrate that learning into their existing courses. Opportunities to help faculty develop their knowledge of ESL theory and methodology are ongoing and include activities such as multicultural book studies and monetary support to attend ESL seminars.

The present study adds to the emerging body of literature on this issue by describing one university's attempt to meet this challenge through faculty development. The ESL Institute outlined in this study can serve as a starting point for other universities to develop their own professional development in this area. Further, this study leads to additional questions that need to be investigated. For example, what happens when faculty actually implement these changes in their courses? What impact does the infusion of ESL theory and methods across courses have on teacher candidates' learning? And, ultimately, what impact does this learning have on the students in our teacher candidates' future classrooms? A future study is planned to examine these questions.

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**Appendix A**  
 Session Overview

**Session 1**

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Topic</b>
11:30-1:00	Opening Session Welcome Lunch Launching the Institute
1:00-2:00	Session A “Understanding ESL Standards through a Theoretical Framework”  Session B “The Implications of Teaching Through a Sociocultural Perspective”
2:00-3:00	Repeated Sessions
3:00-3:30	Closing Session Reflection Assignments Closure

**Session 2**

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Topic</b>
11:30-1:00	Opening Session Lunch “Creating the Context for Learning”
1:00-2:00	Session A “Implications of ESL Research”  Session B “Using Additive Approaches to Teach Language Minority Students”
2:00-3:00	Repeated Session
3:00-3:30	Closing Session Reflection Assignments Closure

**Session 3**

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Topic</b>
11:30-12:00	Opening Session Lunch
12:00-2:00	CALLA Chapter Presentations
2:00-3:15	Revising Syllabi Integrating ESL Standards and Benchmarks
3:15-3:30	Closing Session Reflection Assignments

**Session 4**

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Topic</b>
11:30-12:00	Opening Session Lunch
12:00-1:30	CALLA Chapter Presentations
1:30-3:15	Modified Syllabi Presentations
3:15-3:30	Closing Session Reflection Post-Assessment Closure

**Appendix B**  
English as a Second Language (ESL) Standards

**Standard I.** The ESL teacher understands fundamental language concepts and knows the structure and conventions of the English language.

**Standard II.** The ESL teacher has knowledge of the foundations of ESL education and factors that contribute to an effective multicultural and multilingual learning environment.

**Standard III.** The ESL teacher understands the processes of first- and second-language acquisition and uses this knowledge to promote students' language development in English.

**Standard IV.** The ESL teacher understands ESL teaching methods and uses this knowledge to plan and implement effective, developmentally appropriate ESL instruction.

**Standard V.** The ESL teacher has knowledge of the factors that affect ESL students' learning of academic content, language, and culture.

**Standard VI.** The ESL teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and instruments (language proficiency and academic achievement) used in ESL programs and uses assessment results to plan and adapt instruction.

**Standard VII.** The ESL teacher knows how to serve as an advocate for ESL students and facilitate family and community involvement in their education.

Source: [www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/standtest/edstancertfieldlevl.asp](http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/standtest/edstancertfieldlevl.asp)

**Appendix C**  
ESL Institute Pre/Post Assessment

1. What is BICS? Please explain:
2. What is CALP? Please explain:
3. Please explain Jim Cummins' common underlying proficiency.
4. How long does it take to acquire a second language? Months, years, how many? Why?
5. Please name and describe the stages of second language development.
6. Please explain the difference between learning a first and a second language.
7. Please name Stephen Krashen's five hypotheses for learning a second language and briefly describe them.
8. Please name and explain specific ESL teaching methods.
9. Please name factors that affect ESL students' learning of academic content, language, and culture.
10. Please explain ways on **how** an ESL teacher could serve as an advocate for ESL students and facilitate family and community involvement in their education.

**Appendix D**  
ESL Institute Evaluation Form

Please use the following scoring guide to evaluate this professional development experience:

not effective    1    2    3    4    5    very effective

Circle your response.

1.    The Institute was organized effectively.

1    2    3    4    5

2.    The presenters were knowledgeable.

1    2    3    4    5

3.    The information will be useful to me in my teaching.

1    2    3    4    5

Additional comments and/or suggestions to improve the Institute:

Thank you for participating!