



Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners

Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness

Jennifer F. Samson and Brian A. Collins April 2012



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Introduction and summary

There is a sea change occurring in education across the country in the systematic way that we consider *what* students should be learning and *how* teachers should be evaluated. Recently, nearly all states have adopted and have begun to roll out the Common Core Standards as the benchmark for what students nationwide should know and be able to do at each grade level, K-12. Additionally, in an effort to become eligible for federal funds under Race to the Top, many states have altered their educational policies to match the priorities of the U.S. Department of Education, which include high-stakes evaluation of teachers. Amidst these sweeping changes in the enterprise of teaching and learning, English language learners, or ELLs, are one subgroup of students that require special attention, particularly because of their growing numbers and low-performance relative to their non-ELL peers. For schools, improving academic outcomes for ELLs is a litmus test for whether teachers are meeting their charge to truly leave no child behind. It is precisely in these times of change that opportunities arise for implementing purposeful teacher effectiveness initiatives that have promise for improving outcomes among the nation's least well-served students.

The recent increase in immigration accounts for rapid and substantial demographic changes in the United States's school-aged population. An estimated 25 percent—one-in-four—children in America are from immigrant families and live in households where a language other than English is spoken.¹ This has significant implications for schools and the current discourse about the role of teacher quality and effectiveness in improving educational outcomes. What is rarely discussed in these debates, however, is what teacher quality means for different types of students. The fact that the nation's teachers are and will increasingly encounter a diverse range of learners requires that every teacher has sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and range of skills to be able to meet the unique needs of all students, including those who struggle with English. While it is true that there are educational specialists for example, English as a second language and bilingual teachers, who have expertise in supporting ELLs, many teachers do not. Yet the reality is that most, if not all teachers have or can expect to have ELL students in

their classroom and therefore must be prepared to best support these children. In many cases, a general education teacher who knows the content and pedagogy to teach to the grade level standards will also need specific knowledge and skills to help ELLs access the curricula.

While there are still many aspects of educating ELLs that remain contested—service delivery models, native language versus English-only instruction—several comprehensive sources from the research community have begun to identify critical knowledge and skills for teachers of ELLs. Recently, university researchers Kip Tellez and Hersh Waxman² conducted a thorough review of the research that highlights important considerations for English as a second language, or ESL, and bilingual education teachers. Their review indicates that pre-service teacher education, recruitment and selection, in-service training, and teacher retention are potential policy areas to make headway in improving teacher effectiveness. While it is important to articulate standards, knowledge, and skills for ELL and bilingual education teachers, it is equally critical to consider how best to prepare mainstream, or general education, teachers to work with English language learners since they are increasingly likely to have such students in their class. To date, there has been relatively little attention paid to the essential standards, knowledge, and skills that general education teachers ought to possess in order to provide effective instruction to ELLs placed in their classroom.³

Drawing from the literature on what English as a second language and bilingual teachers should know, we extrapolated foundational knowledge about ELLs that might serve general education teachers that have these students in their classrooms. These include the importance of attending to oral language development, supporting academic language, and encouraging teachers' cultural sensitivity to the backgrounds of their students. We argue that these areas of knowledge be purposefully and explicitly integrated into the preparation, certification, evaluation, and development of all teachers in the interest of improving outcomes for English language learners.

In this report we summarize key findings drawn from the literature on promising practices that all teachers can employ when working with ELLs. We also consider the degree to which that research is integrated into the preparation, certification, and evaluation of teachers as a means for improving educational outcomes for ELLs. Through a review of professional and state level standards for teacher-education programs, state teacher-certification examinations, and teacher-observation evaluation rubrics, we examine gaps in policy and practice pertaining to general

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education teachers of ELLs. We argue that system-level changes must be made to establish evidence-based practices among general education teachers of ELLs. By comparing and contrasting five key states—California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas—that have large numbers of English language learners, we consider the way in which the specific needs of ELLs are taken into account in educational policies and school-level practices. Our specific aim is to identify essential knowledge and skills that can be purposefully integrated into teacher-development programs and initiatives. In order to improve teacher effectiveness with ELL students we recommend that consistent and specific guidelines on the oral language, academic language, and cultural needs of ELLs be addressed in:

- Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA
- Revisions to National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education or NCATE Standards
- State regulations
- Teacher-preparation programs
- State certification exams
- Teacher-observation rubrics in performance evaluations
- Professional development linked to teacher evaluations

Growing numbers of ELL students in the United States

Currently, more than one out of four of all children in the United States are from immigrant families, and in most cases these children speak a language other than English at home.⁴ In the decade between the 1997-98 and 2008-09 school years, the number of English language learners in public schools increased by 51 percent while the general population of students grew by just 7 percent.⁵ Given the increase in number of ELL students in the United States, many U.S. teachers should expect to have ELLs in their classrooms. Therefore, it is essential that schools accurately identify ELLs and understand their language proficiency in English as well as their home language. Most states have a similar protocol to determine whether or not a student is proficient in English when they enter school (see sidebar). Under federal law, ELLs must be provided appropriate English language development support services and be assessed annually until they meet a state's criteria for proficiency in English on specific language tests in order to no longer be considered an English language learner.

Classroom instruction for ELLs varies depending upon state laws and the proportion of ELLs in the district. Instruction can range from classrooms where all students receive bilingual/dual-language instruction to structured/sheltered English immersion classrooms to general education classrooms, where content instruction from the mainstream teacher is supported by an ESL teacher working with individual students. Unfortunately, ELLs often are not properly identified or transition out of services prematurely and are placed in mainstream classroom without additional language support. Given the importance of language development for academic success, all classroom teachers with ELLs must understand the principles and best practices of supporting their unique needs.

English language learner identification process

- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act) requires all states to identify English language learners, measure their English proficiency, and include these students in state testing programs that assess academic skills.
- Most states identify ELLs upon first enrollment in the school system. An initial home language survey is typically administered (a few questions regarding home language use). For all children whose home language is not English, an assessment of English language proficiency is conducted using a state approved standardized test, for example, Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R), California English Language Development Test (CELDT), and Language Assessment Scales-Oral (LAS-O).
- Children who score below English proficiency levels determined by each state are identified as ELLs and are entitled to appropriate services and instructional programs and funding until they demonstrate English proficiency on the states' annual assessment.
- By federal law, classroom instruction must be modified to meet the needs of English language learners. Accommodations and instruction practices vary depending upon state laws and the proportion of ELLs in the district. ELL services range from bilingual/dual language instruction, where the home language and English are used, to structured/sheltered English immersion classrooms, where English is modified for ELLs, to mainstream classrooms, where ELLs receive ESL support within the classroom (push-in ESL) or spend time in an ESL classroom (pull-out).

TABLE 1
Total public school and English language learner, or ELL, population in U.S. states with high proportion of ELLs

	Total public school population 2009-2010	Percentage of ELLs
California	6,263,438	28
Florida	2,634,522	9
Massachusetts	957,053	5
New York	2,766,052	7
Texas	4,850,210	15

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Local Education Agency Universe Survey", 2009-10 Core of Common Data.

Competing Demands and Challenges in Schools

Unfortunately, the rapid growth in the ELL population has not been matched by sufficient growth in teachers' understanding of how to best educate these students.⁶ As a result many districts across the country are buckling under the weight of having to meet the needs of ELL students who are not demonstrating proficiency in academic areas such as reading, writing, and math. English language learners pose unique challenges for educators because federal mandates under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, the nation's main education law, require that all students have access to the core curriculum and meet specific academic targets. In addition, ESEA requires that states measure and report English proficiency for all ELLs. Today, schools face federal and state demands for improving student performance with limited funding and inadequately prepared teachers.

Our report focuses on five states with large proportions of English language learners: California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas (see Table 1). National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, results from 2009⁷ (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) show that in California and New York only a small proportion of ELLs are able to achieve at or above basic level in reading in the fourth-grade (25 percent and 29 percent respectively) and obviously perform far below proficient or grade level. The other states fare slightly better, with Florida having the highest percentage of fourth-grade ELL students performing at basic or above in reading. Unfortunately, performance does not seem to improve for older ELL students (see Figure 2). The percentage of non-ELLs performing at or above basic in eighth-grade reading is higher than in fourth-grade, yet the trend reverses for ELL students where lower percentages of ELLs score at basic or above in eighth-grade than in fourth-grade. Among eighth-graders in all states except Florida, 25 percent or fewer of ELLs scored at or above the basic level in reading. In Florida, 41 percent of ELLs scored at or above the basic level in reading.

NAEP Achievement Levels

National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, achievement levels categorize student achievement as *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*, using ranges of performance established for each grade. (A fourth category, *Below Basic*, is also reported.) Achievement levels are used to report results in terms of a set of standards for what students should know and be able to do. **Basic** denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade. **Proficient** represents solid academic performance. **Advanced** represents superior performance. Achievement levels are cumulative; therefore, student performance at the Proficient level includes the competencies associated with the Basic level, and the Advanced level also includes the skills and knowledge associated with both the Basic and the Proficient levels. (NAEP Frequently Asked Questions, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/faq.asp#ques11>; NAEP Glossary of Terms, http://nationsreportcard.gov/glossary.asp#achievement_levels.)

Achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs

FIGURE 1
Percentage of English language learners and non-ELLs that score at or above basic level in reading on 2009 fourth-grade NAEP Assessment

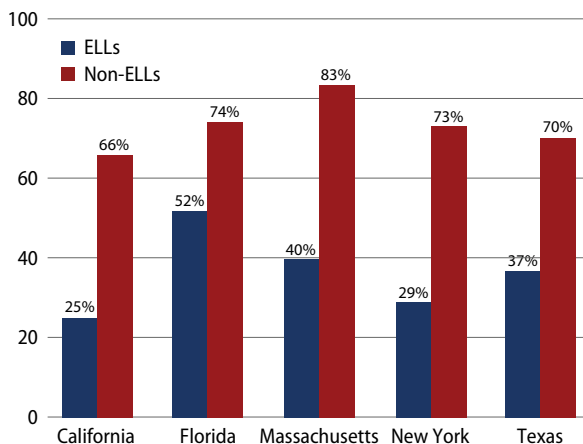
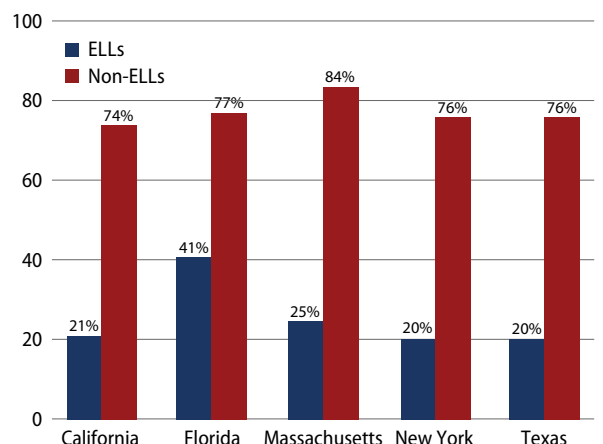


FIGURE 2
Percentage of English language learners and non-ELLs that score at or above basic level in reading on 2009 eighth-grade NAEP Assessment



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

While the causes of the discrepancy in achievement between ELLs and their non-ELL peers are debatable, it is a clear indication of the need to address the gap. Some hypothesize that ELLs begin school at a disadvantage linguistically relative to their non-ELL peers because they did not have adequate exposure and models to learn how to speak or listen in English, as well as having limited knowledge of the English vocabulary to support academic readiness. As a result the assessments may not validly assess students' knowledge of content, but instead reflect their level of English language proficiency.⁸ The achievement gap between ELLs and their non-ELL peers widens over time and could be exacerbated by teachers who do not know how to focus on and support ELLs in their oral and academic language development in the later grades. In the absence of increased teacher knowledge, skills, and support to address the needs of English language learners, the National Assessment of Educational Progress results will continue to demonstrate a significant and widening achievement gap between ELLs and their peers.

Questions abound on how best to improve outcomes for ELLs who face multiple systemic barriers that contribute to their low academic outcomes as compared to their non-ELL peers. Many of these factors extend beyond limited proficiency in English and include socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, health status, and parent resources as well as inadequate support at school, including limited language services and inadequately trained teachers. To date, there has been relatively little attention paid to the role of systemic factors that contribute to inadequately trained teachers and the associated low academic outcomes for ELLs. Research shows that a high-quality teacher can have a significant effect on student outcomes;⁹ thus improving the policies that stipulate teacher knowledge and skills for working with ELLs is one way to improve the educational outcomes for these students.

Insufficient and inconsistent information for teachers

Many teachers of ELLs are increasingly concerned about being held accountable for their students' progress as measured by standardized tests. Clearly, teachers of ELL students need the appropriate training to be able to meet their students' language and learning needs and to facilitate academic growth, yet most teachers lack this training.¹⁰ While some research indicates that there are promising teaching methods for working with ELLs, the actual knowledge and skills that teacher candidates need to support effective instruction for ELLs does not always reach them.¹¹

Currently, at the various stages of teacher preparation, certification, and evaluation, there is insufficient information on what teachers should know about teaching ELLs. A multisubject elementary school teacher candidate, for example, may be required to take courses in child development, English language arts, math, science, social studies, art, behavior management, and assessment, but not in the pedagogy of teaching ELLs. Without specific required coursework relating to the unique learning needs of ELLs, teachers will not be able to teach these students adequately. Additionally, completion of the state approved teacher-preparation program must often be accompanied by a passing score on the state teacher exam. Often, these exams do not specifically assess for teacher knowledge or skills relevant to teaching ELLs.

There are further inconsistencies across states in the required knowledge and skills regarding ELLs for all teachers as part of initial certification. While some states require specific coursework (Arizona, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and New York) and others make a general reference to the special needs of ELLs (17 states), several states (15) have no requirement whatsoever.¹² In California, for example, there are specific teacher-performance expectations that address the needs of English language learners, and teachers must meet a "Developing English Language Skills" requirement. Similarly, all teachers in Florida must take at least three semester hours of teaching English as a Second Language, ESL. If the teachers will be providing primary literacy instruction, Florida

requires that they take 15 semester hours in ESL. New York, on the other hand, requires six semester hours in general language acquisition and literacy, which is supposed to apply to native English speakers and ELLs. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania recently required all teachers to complete three credits of coursework that addresses the needs of ELLs. While these requirements are a step in the right direction, they certainly do not provide all that a teacher needs to know about how to serve ELLs. Unfortunately, the majority of the states have less explicit requirements for teacher preparation relevant to ELLs.

If we hope to see improvements in ELL achievement outcomes, greater continuity in how general education teachers are prepared by teacher-education programs, certified by states, and evaluated by local education agencies, or LEAs, is essential. By making sure that the special needs of ELLs are addressed at multiple stages of the teacher-preparation process, schools may gain higher quality teachers of ELLs and more importantly, higher outcomes for ELLs.

What general education teachers should know to effectively teach ELL students

Recently, consensus has coalesced on some key research findings for teaching ELLs, including the need to emphasize the development of oral language skills and the need to focus on academic language and culturally inclusive practices.¹³ Unfortunately, this knowledge is often minimally reflected in the requirements of teacher education programs, in state certification exams, or in school based teacher evaluations. Let's look at each in turn.

All teachers working with ELLs must have a strong understanding of:

Oral language development

Teachers must have a working knowledge and understanding of language as a system and of the role of the components of language and speech, specifically sounds, grammar, meaning, coherence, communicative strategies, and social conventions. Teachers must be able to draw explicit attention to the type of language and its use in classroom settings, which is essential to first and second language learning.¹⁴ The recognition of language variation and dialectal differences and how these relate to learning is also necessary.

By making sure that the special needs of ELLs are addressed at multiple stages of the teacher-preparation process, schools may gain higher quality teachers of ELLs and more importantly, higher outcomes for ELLs.

Teachers also must be aware of the core similarities and differences between first and second language development and know common patterns and milestones of second language acquisition in order to choose materials and activities that promote development.¹⁵ This includes recognizing the important role that oral language development can play in the development of literacy and academic competences.¹⁶ English language learners must develop oral language competences to be able to better communicate their ideas, ask questions, listen effectively, interact with peers and teachers, and become more successful learners. Teachers also need to have a sense of what signs to look for when ELL students struggle with language learning and communication, in addition to knowing how to assess or refer struggling students to the appropriate specialist.¹⁷

Academic language

Teachers must have a working knowledge of academic language and of the particular type of language used for instruction as well as for the cognitively demanding tasks typically found in textbooks, classrooms, assessments, and those necessary for engagement in discipline-specific areas. Recognizing the differences between conversational language and academic language is crucial in that conversational language proficiency is fundamentally different from academic language proficiency—a reality that poses cognitive and linguistic challenges.¹⁸ Extensive research has demonstrated that it takes ELLs longer than their non-ELL peers to become proficient in academic language.¹⁹ Classroom teachers must be prepared to teach ELLs and have an understanding of the linguistic demands of academic tasks and skills to address the role of academic language in their instruction.²⁰

Cultural diversity and inclusivity

Teachers must have a working knowledge and understanding of the role of culture in language development and academic achievement. Cultural differences often affect ELL students' classroom participation and performance in several ways.²¹ The norms for behavior, communication, and interactions with others that ELL students use in their homes often do not match the norms that are enforced in the school setting.²² One way this plays out is with the cultural conventions that children learn in the home about eye contact, voice volume, or attributing work to an individual versus to the group, which may conflict with the teacher's expectations in the classroom. This can result in misunderstandings or confusion on the part of the student. Teachers' understanding and appreciation of these differences help them to respond in ways that help to create a reciprocal learning environment.

Essential knowledge for teachers of ELLs

Support oral language development

- Oral language proficiency allows students to participate in academic discussions, understand instruction, and build literacy skills.
- Students with more developed first language skills are able better able to develop their second language skills.
- Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in oral language proficiency. ELLs require direct teaching of new words along with opportunities to learn new words in context through hearing, seeing, and saying them as well as during indirect encounters with authentic and motivating texts.
- Building oral proficiency in a second language can be supported by the use of nonverbal cues, visual aids, gestures, and multisensory hands-on methods. Other strategies include: establishing routines, extended talk on a single topic, providing students with immediate feedback, opportunities to converse with teachers, speaking slowly, using clear repetition, and paraphrasing supports oral communication.
- Students should receive explicit instruction and preparation techniques to aid in speaking with others by teaching words and grammatical features that are used in academic settings.

Explicitly teach academic English

- Academic language is decontextualized, abstract, technical, and literary. It is difficult for native speakers and even more difficult for ELLs.
- Academic language is not limited to one area of language and requires skills in multiple domains, including vocabulary, syntax/grammar, and phonology.

- Understanding the differences of informal language and academic language is important. Opportunities to learn and practice academic language are essential. Students must be exposed to sophisticated and varied vocabulary and grammatical structures and avoid slang and idioms.
- Opportunities and instruction on using academic language accurately in multiple contexts and texts is of critical importance for all English language learners.
- Schoolwide efforts and coordination of curriculum across content area teachers helps build on a foundation of prior knowledge.

Value cultural diversity

- ELLs typically face multiple challenges in the transition from home to school as most are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Schooling experiences should reaffirm the social, cultural, and historical experiences of all students.
- Teachers and students should be expected to accept, explore, and understand different perspectives and be prepared as citizens of a multicultural and global society.
- Opportunities for teachers and students to interact with diverse cultures can be created in multiple ways through inclusive teaching practices, reading and multimedia materials, school traditions and rituals, assembly programs, and cafeteria food that represent all backgrounds.
- Involving parents and community in a meaningful way with outreach and letters to homes, bulletin boards, and staff helps build appreciation of diversity.

Ensuring all teachers are adequately prepared to work with ELLs

A number of checkpoints are encountered en route to becoming a teacher, including education coursework, student teaching, passing state teacher examinations, induction period once hired by a district, and on-the-job performance evaluations. These checkpoints can be seen as opportunities for ensuring that teachers meet certain standards that prepare them for working effectively with students with diverse language and learning needs.

Unfortunately, under current practices the knowledge and skills that teachers are expected to demonstrate mastery of at each of these checkpoints rarely correlate from one to another and frequently do not address the needs of English language learners. New York, for example, requires that teachers take six units of coursework on general language acquisition and literacy development but these courses may not specifically address the unique needs of ELLs.²³ Typically, the required sequence for initial certification will include courses that are focused on literacy in general. There is no guarantee that through these courses teachers will gain knowledge of research-based methods for working with ELLs on oral language and academic language development as well as cultural inclusivity as a part of the curriculum. In addition to coursework, teacher candidates for initial certification in New York must pass state examinations that assess teacher knowledge and skills, but are not necessarily specific to ELLs. Our findings suggest that teachers can pass the exams with some knowledge of oral language development but there are minimal requirements related to knowledge of academic language or culture, which suggests that teachers can move onto jobs in schools without this content.

Once teachers are on the job in New York, the evaluation documents do not require them to demonstrate knowledge or skills in building students' oral and academic language development or cultural inclusiveness as part of their observation evaluations.²⁴ As we outlined above, several states have different requirements for coursework and skills related to ELLs as part of initial teacher certification. Let's turn next to our analysis of state teacher-certification examinations and on-the-job performance evaluations that often miss an emphasis on teachers' effectiveness when working with ELLs.

State teacher-certification examinations

In most states, teacher certification includes completion of a teacher-preparation program and achieving passing scores on the state teacher examination. States will typically set standards for teacher-preparation programs and oversee the teacher competency exams, which are developed in collaboration with representatives from state boards of education, teacher-preparation programs, and educators. Ideally, both teacher-education programs and teacher examinations should be aligned with states' learning standards for students.

Our review of the content guides and preparation materials of state exams (see Table 2) revealed varied degrees of focus—none, generic, some, or specific—on key themes that are specifically relevant to ELLs, those being oral language development, academic language, culture, or diversity. Some references to ELLs were very general. On the Massachusetts language arts subtest of the general curriculum exam, teacher candidates are expected to: “Recognize major linguistic origins of the English language (e.g., Anglo-Saxon roots, Celtic influences, Greek and Roman elements).”²⁵ Meanwhile, New York state requires teacher candidates sitting for the multisubject content specialty test, one of several state exams, to be skilled in “recognizing the effective use of oral communication skills and nonverbal communication skills in situations involving people of different ages, genders, cultures, and other personal characteristics.”²⁶ In Florida, teacher candidates must demonstrate an ability to “identify and apply professional guidelines for selecting multicultural literature” on the Elementary Education K-6 Language Arts and Reading subtest of the Florida Teacher Certification Examinations, FTCE.²⁷

Only the states of California and Texas specifically mention content that is relevant to ELLs in their teacher requirements. California teacher candidates are expected to “... apply knowledge of both the development of a first language and the acquisition of subsequent ones. They can describe the principal observable milestones in each domain, and identify the major theories that attempt to explain the processes of development and acquisition.” Similarly, in Texas, teacher candidates must demonstrate planning and implementation for ELLs through “systematic oral language instruction based on informal and formal assessment of all students, including English language learners, oral language development and addresses students' individual needs, strengths and interests.”²⁸

Ideally, both teacher-education programs and teacher examinations should be aligned with states' learning standards for students.

TABLE 2

Evidence of oral language, academic language, and culture/diversity for English language learners as mentioned in state teacher-certification examinations and subtests for California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas

State exam	California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET)	Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE)	Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL)	New York State Teacher Certification Exam (NYSTCE)	The Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES)
Subtest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Mathematics Social Sciences Science Visual/performing arts Health Physical education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language arts and reading Mathematics Social Science Science and Technology Music, visual arts, physical education, and health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language arts Mathematics History/Social science Science Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written analysis and expression Science/math/tech History Art Communication and research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English language arts/reading Mathematics Social studies Science Fine arts, health, and physical education
Oral language	***	*	**	***	***
Academic language	**	--	--	**	**
Culture/diversity	**	*	--	*	***

Source: Jennifer F. Samson and Brian A. Collins, Hunter College, City University of New York.

Key:

- No mention
- * Generic mention
- ** Some mention
- *** Specific mention

On-the-job performance evaluations

A district’s teacher-observation rubrics are one mechanism used to determine teacher effectiveness. While there is growing pressure at the federal level to institute the use of value-added models in the evaluation of teachers, some research suggests that subjective evaluation measures such as observations can be just as informative as other measures when evaluating teacher effectiveness.²⁹ Teacher-observation rubrics can serve as practical, formative evaluation tools that teachers can use to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of their students at a level of specificity that may not be afforded with the value-added models. Below we list dimensions that were drawn from teacher-observation rubrics from five large cities in states that were included in our analysis. (see Table 3) What was evident was just how much variation there was in the level of specificity in each of the rubrics,

with some being rather general (California, New York) while others were more detailed and comprehensive (Florida, Massachusetts, Texas) and included supporting materials. The more comprehensive teacher evaluation rubrics share specific references to the needs of ELLs. Coincidentally, fourth-grade ELL students in Florida, Massachusetts, and Texas did better on the NAEP than their peers in California and New York. School districts that clearly articulate expectations for teachers may as a result foster specific teaching practices and behaviors that lead to improved outcomes for students.

TABLE 3
Evidence of content on oral language, academic language, and culture/diversity as mentioned on teacher-observation rubric dimensions for five large metropolitan areas

	Teacher-observation rubric				
	Los Angeles, CA	Miami-Dade, FL	Boston, MA	New York, NY	Houston, TX
	• Achievement of instructional objectives	• Learner progress	• Equity and high expectations	• Personal and professional qualities	• Active, successful student participation in the learning process
	• Preparation and planning	• Knowledge of learners	• Professionalism	• Pupil guidance and instruction	• Learner-centered instruction
	• Classroom performance	• Instructional planning	• Safe, respectful, culturally sensitive and responsive learning communities	• Classroom or shop management	• Evaluation and feedback on student progress
	• General professional skills	• Instructional delivery and engagement	• Partnership with family and community	• Participation in school and community activities	• Management of student discipline, instructional strategies, time, and materials
	• Punctuality and attendance	• Assessment	• Instructional planning and implementation		• Professional communication
	• Achievement of instructional objectives	• Communication	• Content knowledge		
	• Preparation and planning	• Professionalism	• Monitoring and assessment of progress		
		• Learning environment	• Reflection, collaboration, and personal growth		
Oral language	*	**	***	*	**
Academic language	--	**	**	--	**
Cultural diversity	*	***	***	*	***

Source: Jennifer F. Samson and Brian A. Collins, Hunter College, City University of New York.

Key:

- No mention
- * Generic mention
- ** Some mention
- *** Specific mention

Pathways for improving teacher preparation

Given the increased diversity of students in most U.S. schools and the high-proportion of English language learners accounting for the majority of K-12 enrollment growth in the past decades, it is essential for all teachers to be prepared to meet the unique needs of these students.³⁰ There are three potential pathways in which change is typically introduced in educational reform:

- Accreditation/state teacher program standards
- Legislative policies
- Court rulings

The degree to which each of these pathways can represent consistent information for teachers on ELLs may be one way to ensure that teachers develop a deeper understanding at each of the junctures.

The first pathway—accreditation/state teacher program standards—requires that teacher-preparation programs submit reports to accreditation bodies. The largest accreditation body, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, or NCATE, articulates six standards that programs must meet, some of which relate to ELLs. Specifically, there is NCATE Standard 4: Diversity, which urges teacher-preparation programs to attract diverse candidates, employ faculty from a variety of backgrounds, and include curricula and field experiences that increase teacher candidates’ knowledge of and experience with a diverse student body.³¹

Unfortunately, despite NCATE’s urging, the diversity in our nation’s schools is not fully reflected in the teaching force or for that matter, in teacher education program faculty. In the 2008-09 school year, it was estimated that approximately 45 percent of the country’s students were from ethnic minority families, yet 83 percent of teachers were white.³² This potential *cultural mismatch* could contribute to teachers’ lack of understanding about how to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds. This mismatch means that it is especially important to ensure that teachers have opportunities to develop cultural competence as part of their teacher education experiences.³³ It is precisely because of this mismatch in linguistic and cultural backgrounds that most teachers will need development and support on how best to address the learning needs of ELLs.

There is reason, however, to question the effect of these standards on the quality of teacher-education programs as NCATE does little to “ensure the nature, quality, or

extent of that preparation.”³⁴ Despite the fact that 49 states have programs that are accredited by NCATE, we find that the enforcement of diversity standards and the use of research-based knowledge on best practices when it comes to ELLs is often not reflected in program requirements. As a consequence, preparing all teachers to work effectively with ELLs is lacking in many teacher-preparation programs.

Currently, NCATE is in the process of merging with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, or TEAC, to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, or CAEP. This merger presents a unique opportunity for educational leaders to be proactive in shaping the knowledge and skills that teachers ought to have in order to make a difference for ELLs. As part of that effort, the soon-to-be-formed CAEP should insist that teacher-education programs prepare teachers for working with ELLs in order to gain accreditation.

A second method for increasing the focus on English language learners in teacher preparation is through implementation of legislation at both the federal and state level. Recent federal standard-based reform movements that have emerged in anticipation of the reauthorization of ESEA and some of the proposed changes potentially have a significant impact on the education of ELLs. The original accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind brought the achievement gaps that exist between ELLs and non-ELLs into sharp focus because schools were required to report on the progress of ELLs, particularly on standardized tests, at a level of specificity that was not previously required. As a result of this accountability, school administrators and teachers were forced to attend to the needs of ELLs. Prior to NCLB, students at the fringes, including ELLs and students with disabilities, were not counted in the evaluation of schools and teachers. The context changed dramatically after 2001 and now all schools are focused on the achievement scores of *all* students. While the reauthorization of the law is still in question, there has been a recent development that causes concern—the introduction of waivers that allows states to bypass some of the key requirements of NCLB. There are both pros and cons associated with differentiated accountability that is offered through waivers, yet it is still vitally important that the specific needs of ELLs are carefully considered. Specifically, it is important to consider how teachers (general, ESL, content, elementary/secondary) are evaluated with respect to the language and content knowledge growth of ELLs.³⁵

State initiatives have also had a significant impact regarding the education of ELLs. In California, for example, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, or CTC, is the government agency that awards certification to graduates of programs

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that meet the standards for educator preparation. Citing California Assembly Bill 537, Chapter 587 which relates to discrimination—the Commission of Teacher Credentialing requires that teacher-education programs ensure that teacher candidates be prepared to demonstrate the ability to teach and engage all types of learners. The commission also requires that teacher-preparation programs ensure that their graduates meet a specific standard on equity, diversity and access to the curriculum for all children.³⁶ This standard stipulates that all teachers know how to address the academic needs of all students from a variety of ethnic, racial cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, it requires that candidates:

“study and discuss the historical and cultural traditions of the cultural and ethnic groups... and include cultural traditions and community values and resources in the instructional program of a classroom... recognize and eliminate bias ... systematically examine his/her stated and implied beliefs, attitudes and expectations about diverse students...”³⁷

Explicit recognition of the need to prepare teachers for working with English language learners in state-level policies is a step in the right direction, particularly if it includes a change to teacher-preparation programs to include specific content and experiences that ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to meet the needs of all students.

The final lever for institutionalizing change is through the courts. Historically, the courts have played a key role in the advocacy of educational rights and equity for ELLs. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) ruled that schools have a legal obligation to address both the language and curricular needs of ELLs. Later rulings mandated that the education of ELLs must be based on sound educational theory,³⁸ implemented adequately, and evaluated for its effectiveness. The U.S. Department of Justice³⁹ recently found that in Massachusetts, teachers of ELLs were not adequately trained to provide for their instructional needs, which was a violation of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act. As a result, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to mandate training and also specified the preparation that will be required of teachers of ELLs. Similar increases in training and program supports are currently being instituted in New York City schools as part of a state-mandated “Corrective Action Plan”⁴⁰ aimed at improving service areas for ELLs.

A 1990 class action suit filed in Florida on behalf of a group of minority rights advocacy groups significantly altered the quality of teacher preparation for

working with ELLs.⁴¹ The landmark case resulted in the Education of Speakers of Other Languages, or ESOL, Consent Decree and included stipulations related to assessment, program planning, and training of personnel who come in contact with ELLs. Beginning in 2003, these requirements applied to all school districts in the state of Florida and mandated that ESOL teachers take coursework in methods, curriculum/design, cross-cultural communication, applied linguistics, and testing and evaluation. In addition, all Florida teachers of the basic subjects are required to take 60 in-service points or the equivalent college credit of three semester hours in coursework related to the effective teaching of ELLs. Finally, teachers in other subject areas are required to participate in 18 in-service points or three semester hours on teaching ELLs. These more rigorous standards for teaching ELLs may be a contributing factor in the impressive academic gains that ELLs have made in Florida since 2003.

Recommendations

In order to make significant progress in improving the outcomes for ELLs, sweeping changes are needed in the way that teachers are prepared and supported to better serve this growing population. Given the current reform efforts in learning standards and teacher evaluations, a unique opportunity exists to get things right for all students, including ELLs whose subpar educational performance requires urgent attention. In our review of the research, we identified oral language development, academic language, and cultural diversity as critical bodies of knowledge and skill areas for all teachers of ELLs that were noticeably absent in the areas of policy and practice. By addressing the lack of accountability and alignment among teacher-education programs, state certification offices, and local school districts in terms of what knowledge and skills teachers must possess relative to ELLs, there is potential for improving student outcomes. In our analysis of existing policies for accreditation standards, state requirements for certification, and teacher-observation rubrics, we found limited references to the specific needs of ELLs, which may be a reflection of the systemic inadequacies that lead to insufficient teacher preparation.

Certainly, the stark contrast between ELL student performance in Florida versus all other states is important to investigate empirically. Future research on whether there is a correlation between detailed formative evaluation rubrics (as provided in Florida) and student outcomes would be worthwhile. It seems reasonable that when teachers receive clearly articulated, consistent expectations on how best to work with ELLs as part of their preparation, certification, and evaluation, the outcomes for their ELL students will reflect this increased emphasis. To be sure, there is significant room for improvement in how teacher-education programs prepare teachers for working with ELLs and one possible solution is for teacher-education programs to become more closely aligned with the school districts that hire their graduates.

When teachers have a large proportion of English language learners in their classroom, which is likely the case in Los Angeles, Houston, New York, Boston, and Miami, the question becomes: Are these teachers capable of providing the

necessary support to their students to ensure that they reach the required grade-level achievement standards?

It is a question that largely remains unanswered, but one that nonetheless requires closer examination, particularly when it comes to determining if teacher-preparation programs and state certification agencies are sufficiently aligned with what teachers ought to know to improve outcomes for ELLs.

In light of our findings we recommend that consistent, specific guidelines on the oral language, academic language, and cultural needs of ELLs be addressed in:

- Reauthorization of ESEA
- Revisions to NCATE standards
- State regulations
- Teacher-preparation programs
- State certification exams
- Teacher-observation rubrics
- Professional development linked to teacher evaluation

As discussed earlier, the involvement of the courts is a catalyst for change that has led to important educational policy in the past. This type of action, however, requires constituents who feel sufficiently empowered and confident about their right to seek change on behalf of their children. Because the parents of ELLs are often immigrants who are socially, economically, and politically vulnerable, it is unlikely they would initiate legal action involving the courts. Therefore, if we wish to see change in teacher-preparation programs, guidance at the federal level is essential as is the involvement of accrediting bodies and state agencies.

Again we cannot stress enough just how vital it is to articulate the need for teacher-education programs to prepare teachers for all of the students that they will encounter in the schools. Certainly, NCATE through its standards and review process can insist that teacher-education programs demonstrate how they are addressing the diverse needs of ELLs in order to gain accreditation. Similarly, state regulations ought to include specific mention of the need for state-approved teacher education and alternative teacher-preparation programs to require coursework and field experiences that prepare teacher candidates to work with ELLs (as is the case in Florida and California). In addition, state agencies can require that teacher candidates demonstrate their knowledge and skills on state exams or performance evaluations.

If we wish to see change in teacher-preparation programs guidance at the federal level is essential as is the involvement of accrediting bodies and state agencies.

Finally, school district policy can include a section on teacher-observation rubrics that requires teachers to demonstrate how they are meeting the language and learning needs of ELLs in their classrooms. This information can in turn be used to support professional development aligned with teacher needs.

The recommendations outlined above are by no means meant to be comprehensive, but rather a starting point of the knowledge content and skills that teachers ought to possess in order to be better prepared to work with ELLs. Indeed these are areas that fall under the expertise of ESL and bilingual teachers who can serve as collaborators in helping general education teachers meet their students' needs. Still we believe strongly that all teachers would benefit from a more detailed understanding of the assessment, curricula, and instructional methods that would meet the unique needs of ELLs. We argue here that teacher preparation and development should require some basic knowledge relevant to ELLs for all teachers as a first step in helping ELLs to realize greater academic gains.

About the authors

Jennifer F. Samson is an assistant professor of special education and faculty associate at the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College, City University of New York where she studies teacher quality to improve outcomes for students at-risk for low academic achievement, including English language learners and students with disabilities. She is currently investigating literacy intervention programs for urban at-risk students and how to assess value-added models of intervention within urban charter schools in New York City. Her recent work includes a national review of special education teacher-preparation programs for cultural and linguistic diversity to prevent disproportionate representation of ELLs and a meta-analysis of effectiveness of special education services. Samson's research has been published in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Reading and Writing*, and *Teaching Exceptional Children*. She holds a doctor of education degree in human development and psychology from Harvard University.

Brian A. Collins is an assistant professor in the department of curriculum and teaching at Hunter College, City University of New York and works to support bilingual education and emerging bilinguals. He holds a doctorate in bilingual education from New York University, a master's in Spanish from Middlebury College, and a bachelor's in education from New England College. Collins has diverse research experience investigating issues surrounding education, immigration, dual-language development, mental health, and culture. His recent research on immigrant children includes the Harvard Project on Child Language and Developmental Psychiatry, Partnership for Teacher Excellence, and current work on the CUNY New York State Initiative for Emergent Bilinguals. He has published on language development, teacher-child relationships, cultural competence, and dimensions of children's social, psychological, and academic wellbeing in *American Educational Research Journal*, *International Journal of Sociology of Language*, *Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, *Journal of Moral Education* and *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

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