

La Lucha Continua

Becoming a Bilingual Teacher in the Era of Praxis II

Donald F. Hones, Nancy Aguilar & Stacie Thao

It is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through your examination, which, after all, is what school is all about.—Delores Umbridge, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003)

April 26, 2008, dawns cold, windy, and overcast, with a few random snowflakes swirling down. I drive 35 miles to pick up Nancy Aguilar at her apartment. She is dressed casually in blue jeans and a sweater, with shoulder-length black hair, dark, brown eyes, and a winning smile. Despite her calm demeanor, it is evident that today Nancy has a case of the nerves: She has searched everywhere but cannot locate her purse containing her identification.

Regardless, we have paid \$130 each for the Praxis II exam for English as a Second Language (ESL), and we are determined to take it. We drive up to Aldo Leopold University, maneuver through the vast campus area, past woodlands and prairies, and eventually find the testing site. Inside, about 40 others are waiting to take various Praxis I and Praxis II exams.

Nancy approaches one of the friendly exam workers to explain her predicament:

Donald F. Hones is a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the College of Education and Human Services at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, Oshkosh, Wisconsin;

*Nancy Aguilar is a teacher in the Menasha Joint School District;
Stacie Thao is a teacher in the Green Bay School District.*

She has her exam receipt, but she does not have her I.D.

I add, "I will vouch for her. She is a student of mine at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh."

The worker looks troubled. "I don't know," she says, "We are supposed to have photo identification."

"Photo identification?" I consider a moment. "Just look on the UW Oshkosh webpage...Nancy's photograph is all over the place...She's very photogenic."

This brings a smile to the face of the exam worker. "OK," she says, "I will explain it to your proctor. You are good to go."

We still have to take the 120 question exam. Nancy, one of the most skillful, caring, culturally-sensitive teachers I have ever met, still has to pass the exam in order to be licensed in the state of Wisconsin. Yet, that moment at the "gate," as it were, seemed significant: Unlike most of her dealings with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the state licensing system, Nancy was treated like a real person, not like a number.

The following pages provide portraits of two women on professional journeys to become bilingual teachers. Stacie Thao was born in Thailand. Nancy was born in California, and spent some of her childhood in Mexico. Stacie's first language is Hmong, while Nancy's is Spanish. Each learned English in school, and each helped their immigrant parents navigate the world of U.S. teachers, doctors, and daily life.

As participants in the UW Oshkosh teacher preparation program, Stacie

and Nancy have enjoyed great academic success, drawing from their own lives and extensive experiences working with immigrant children and families. Each student has had to face a final barrier to teacher licensure—the Praxis II exam. In spite of their many skills, their academic achievement, and their strong relationships with schools, Nancy and Stacie cannot be licensed to teach unless they pass this exam.

The Need for Bilingual and Bicultural Teachers

Schools in Wisconsin, like schools throughout the United States, have a growing need for teachers who can work effectively with immigrant and refugee children and families. Currently, there are over 10,000 English language learner (ELL) students in the school districts of northeastern Wisconsin (Hones, 2007). The majority of these students have either Hmong or Spanish as their first language.

Most of these students are in regular classes taught by monolingual English teachers. However, some districts in the region are adopting programs that are more developmental in nature, where a child's first language is supported, and where English and content is taught in a sheltered manner. This eagerness on the part of districts is in response to Wisconsin State Statute 115.97, which declares:

If any school...has 10 LEP students speaking the same non-English language at grades K-3, 20 students at grades 4-8, or

20 students at grades 9-12, the district must design a program and prepare a formal plan of services (PI-1849) to meet the needs of these students. The statute requires all such programs to be staffed by licensed bilingual teachers. When bilingual licensed teachers are not available, ESL licensed teachers may be used with bilingual teacher aides except in programs serving Spanish speakers. (<http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/educserv/lawsregs.htm>)

One effective approach to providing bilingual support for students is a two-way bilingual model, wherein a mixture of students from the dominant language (English) and another language (such as Spanish) learn both languages, as well as academic content (Howard & Sugarman, 2007; Lindholm-Leary, 2005). Another approach is the newcomer model, wherein students new to the country can stay together in a sheltered content classroom for a period of time before transitioning into regular classes (Boyson and Short, 2003).

Each of these approaches relies on teachers who are well prepared to teach content, and who have extensive knowledge of the languages and cultures of the children being served. Such bilingual and bicultural teachers remain in short supply in our part of Wisconsin.

What Does It Mean To Be a "Highly Qualified" Teacher?

Several research studies address the process through which bilingual individuals become teachers (Allestaht-Snyder, 1996; Cable, 2004; Galindo, 1996; Stritikus, 2002). Like Varghese (2005), our study focuses on individuals who are in the process of becoming bilingual teachers. Our program at UW Oshkosh combines ESL and bilingual education licensure through a series of seven courses, with an additional bilingual content course for those pursuing the bilingual license.

We acknowledge the need for strong content area preparation by having bilingual licenses as add-ons for majors in early childhood, middle childhood, or secondary math, science, social studies, and language arts. We utilize extensive field experiences, background knowledge of immigrant students and their families, and teaching the whole child by acknowledging and incorporating home language and culture (Lopez-Robertson, 2006).

In addition, we promote sheltered instruction techniques and strategies for learning academic language through content (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). A background in introductory linguistics is also given to our students, as this is

considered helpful for their practice in the field.

At present, schools are experiencing growing linguistic diversity, more bilingual students are interested in becoming teachers, and more school districts are clamoring to hire bilingual/bicultural staff. Yet, the state of Wisconsin, in response to No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) "highly qualified teacher" guidelines, has mandated Praxis I (PPST) and Praxis II exams produced by ETS in New Jersey.

A nation-wide study of state and district implementation of NCLB teacher requirements found that, after five years, most districts saw little or no improvement in either teacher quality or student achievement. The study further reports that

many state and district officials felt the NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher was too narrowly focused on content knowledge...(and) suggested revising the definition to take into account teachers' effectiveness in the classroom and other qualities essential to a good teacher, such as the ability to relate to students and the ability to effectively teach students from different backgrounds and differentiate instruction according to students' needs. (McMurrer, 2007, p. 3)

In the Praxis II exam for ESL, contemporary practices of sheltered instruction are dealt with in a cursory fashion and cultural preparation is not addressed at all. The exam focuses heavily on linguistics and the study of grammar. It does not adequately match the content background needed for an ESL or bilingual teacher, nor does it reflect the course of instruction of most university preparation programs (WITESOL, 2008). Many of our students are still able to pass the exam.

However, for bilingual students whose native language is not English, this test poses a particular problem, as they must work with material that is new, and often need to translate questions in their heads before being able to answer them. One could argue that the Praxis II serves a role of keeping many non-native English speakers out of the teaching profession, just as Jim Crow laws once kept non-Whites out of the voting booths.

Mode of Inquiry

As I came to know Nancy and Stacie as successful students in our program, I asked them to become co-researchers in a year-long study of what it takes to become a bilingual teacher. At first, our study focused on good practices in the field: Nancy conducted research in a two-way bilingual program, while Stacie did the same in an elementary newcomer program.

At the school sites they conducted participant observation in classrooms, interviewed teachers, bilingual assistants and administrators, and kept reflection journals. Our research goal was to examine the role that could be played by bilingual teachers, who share the language and culture of their students, in two strong program sites.

However, just as our research project was nearing completion, issues stemming from the Praxis I and II exams took on paramount importance in the lives of these two pre-service teachers. We found that, in spite of their academic and practice-based accomplishments, *Stacie and Nancy could be denied licenses to teach based on the results of one test.*

Thus, this research project took a new direction: We began learning more about the Praxis II, and who, in our state, was responsible for choosing this test, and for setting its minimum passing score. Cross-state data on minimum scores for passing the ESL test were compiled. Our efforts to find a better assessment of student content knowledge took us to meetings of ESL professionals and college faculties, and we wrote, called, and sought meetings with representatives of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Professional Standards Board.

In addition, interviews with Nancy and Stacie were conducted at various times over the year as they repeatedly took the Praxis II exam, and kept alive their dreams of becoming teachers. Throughout our study pseudonyms are used for participants and locations.

Through a process of narrative research, analysis, and dialogue (Clandinin, Davies, Huber, Rose, & Whelan, 2001; Hones, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995), the students, as co-researchers, reflect their own experiences growing up bilingual in the United States, their teacher preparation program, and the barriers, such as the Praxis II exam, that they must overcome.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be used to examine some emergent themes, and recommendations are made for ways in which schools, teacher preparation programs, and state policy makers can better prepare and license bilingual teachers for the many schools and children who need them.

Becoming a Bilingual Teacher: Nancy Aguilar's Reflections

Mother Jones elementary school has the gray, cinder-block style architecture that was a hallmark of the 1970s. The highlight of its façade is a 25 foot tall

bright yellow pencil in the doorway, pointing skyward. In the office, when I mention that I am there to see Nancy, the secretary smiles and says, "She always brightens up the day." The smell of popcorn emanates from Julie Richardson's 2nd grade bilingual classroom. Inside, there is student art on the walls, labeled "Trabajo Terrifico!" Another section of the wall contains student-produced bilingual books. There are posters of children reading ("Logramos con Libros"), and paintings of lighthouses.

Eleven students, all native Spanish speakers, are involved in literacy time, reading silently or in small groups. One group works with Mrs. Richardson at the back table. At the front table, Nancy is assisting two children with a spelling and writing worksheet. She is patient with the children, offering them encouragement in Spanish. When she moves away to assist another student, the young girl at the front table blurts out, "¡No, no te vayas!" (No, don't go!). Nancy assures her that she will be back. Later, she relates the experiences that set her on a path to become a bilingual teacher:

At the age of 12 my father moved to the state of California, and there he worked in the fields for 25 years. I know my father was afraid of going to stores to buy something, because he felt that he could get deported if someone was to find out that he was undocumented.

I remember that in the part of California where I grew up some people would live with 10 others or more. They would work in the fields and rent was very high. It was difficult for them to afford their own place. They would see this as the only way to save money and help their families in Mexico.

I have seen a large change with both of my parents since we moved to Wisconsin. My father is less worried about trying to speak English and what the other people might think about his pronunciation. I think that was one of his "impediments." My father has become a U.S. citizen. My mother understands a lot of what is being said to her in English, and tries to respond. I don't think I would have been able to see these changes with my parents if we hadn't moved here, just because I know that they worked in the fields where everyone would speak Spanish. I am very proud of my parents and what they have accomplished.

There are people out there who oppose bilingual education and feel that the extension of language rights beyond personal lives and into schools is a privilege that the public school system cannot afford or for which it is not responsible. It's sad to know that there are many who believe that

the immigrants, the speakers of languages other than English, do not deserve such privileges. I don't understand why some people think this way when research has shown that having a solid base in the mother tongue leads to success in learning English as a second or additional language (Brisk, 1998; Cummins, 1981).

I think it's true that assimilation into the U.S. may mean that the younger generation loses respect for the culture and language of its parents and grandparents. I know a few people who started school in the U.S. where they are only taught in English and only have friends who speak the English language; they begin to forget about their mother tongue. I personally think that this is pretty sad. If someday I have children of my own. I will want them to learn my native language, Spanish, as well as English. I would want my children to be enrolled in a dual language or two-way immersion program.

Providing schooling through their heritage language is a way of recognizing and protecting the rights of Latinos whose language and culture has been denied in the course of assimilationist practices in schools. Change has to occur if we want immigrants in the U.S. to be able to experience equitable, just, and successful school experiences.

Nancy's commitment to a just, successful education for all children is especially significant considering her own experiences on her professional journey: On the one hand, she is a widely admired and sought after prospective teacher in the districts in which she has volunteered. On the other hand, her struggle with the Praxis II exams has held up her student teaching placement, cost her dearly in time and money, and shaken her confidence. She has yet to pass the Praxis II exams for ESL and for Middle School, and thus remains without a license for these areas.

In May, 2008, Nancy graduated with a degree in education. She is licensed in Spanish (having passed that Praxis II exam), and has been hired, under an emergency license, to teach in a 3rd grade bilingual classroom in the school where she did her student teaching.

Becoming a Bilingual Teacher: Reflections of Stacie Thao

The newcomer classroom at Joe Hill elementary school is home to 20 children, grades 2-3, most of whom are recent arrivals from Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand. Arranged at several tables, the children cut out geometric shapes they have studied as part of a math unit. Circulating among

the children is Stacie, lending assistance with scissors, answering questions posed in the Hmong language, encouraging a boy who has given up the task at hand.

Her gentle, quiet confidence has been built through years of work as a bilingual assistant. Like these children, she has brown eyes, dark hair, and a shared refugee experience. Like them, she entered a U.S. school directly from life in a Thai camp, and the children seem to warm up quickly to this young woman who has moved from uprootedness to a new sense of identity as a Hmong American. Later, Stacie shared these thoughts about her path to becoming a bilingual teacher:

My family and I moved from Thailand to the United States in 1987, when I was six years old. We settled in Fresno, California, and lived there until I was a sophomore in high school in 1996. The education that I received in California didn't provide me the proper education that I needed to get to college.

When we arrived in the U.S., I began first grade. School was a challenge for me and my siblings. I remember being excluded from the rest of the class because I couldn't understand the language. After graduating from Appleton West High School in 1999, I worked for the Appleton Area School District as an Interpreter/Educational Assistant. I worked with English learners and preschool students from all different races and ethnic backgrounds and as well as special need students.

While growing up and going to school in Fresno, there was neither an ELL service nor an interpreter at my school. I remember being pulled out several times to work with another teacher, but it was hopeless because I couldn't understand a word she said. I did not remember learning much in California.

I want to make sure that no students have to go through the same experience I went through. I want students to have a fun and positive experience in school. For the past five years, I've been working as a Hmong Interpreter and Educational Assistant. I work with preschool students and English learners one-on-one or in small groups (usually around three to six students), and in mainstream classes.

My job is to pre-teach the students the units before the teachers introduce them. In addition, I work with students from backgrounds other than my own, such as Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern. I also work with special needs students, such as those with learning disability (LD), cognitive disability (CD), autism, and speech and language delay.

As for my community, to this day I still

help out my parents or whoever that is in need because of their lack of English.

Having gone through the poor education system in Fresno, I have become acutely aware of how fragile a child is, and how important it is for a good teacher to recognize the sensitivity of each child such, as where they come from, their situation and experience. There are many things I can teach the children in my class, but there is so much more I can learn from each child. I am looking forward to teaching the children in the future and learning from them as well.

However, the Praxis II is a roadblock. I've taken the Praxis II exam three times now. I found the test to be very difficult and wish I could request extended time, which is not allowed. I feel this is wrong because English is not my primary language and I need that extra time to take the test in order to do well. Each time I take it, I feel like I am worthless. It is very frustrating, sad, and humiliating.

I have tried using the ETS study guide to prepare for the test but each time it's totally different. You don't know what to expect or how to prepare yourself for it. Until I pass this test, I will not be licensable and will have a harder time looking for a teaching position. Yet, I feel this test does not measure what I know and can do. A better way to measure what a teacher knows and can do is to put together a portfolio demonstrating his or her skills and abilities.

In May, 2008, Stacie graduated with a degree in education, and shortly thereafter, she passed her Praxis II exam for early childhood education. She has yet to pass the Praxis II for ESL. She is currently teaching in the Green Bay School District.

Challenging the Praxis II

Let us return to another significant date on the journey of two bilingual teachers: September 28, 2007, was gorgeous, sunny, with high, white fluffy clouds on a clear blue sky. We were on a road trip to visit Madison, Wisconsin, and advocate for a change in the requirements for the Praxis II exam for ESL.

In the week prior to our trip, I had contacted the state superintendent for public instruction, and I eventually received a call from the assistant superintendent. She informed me that yes, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) took the matter of the Praxis II requirement very seriously, and that they were studying test results for teachers throughout the state. However, she would be unable to meet (for even 15 minutes) with a few students whose careers were on hold because

of this test. Although we were taxpayers and citizens of the state, we did not have entrée to this public servant.

Therefore, we presented our case before the only audience that would hear us, the Wisconsin Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (WITESOL) at their annual meeting. The organization had graciously made time for us during one of the sessions of the afternoon. I presented an overview of the issue, and shared the fact that, of the 19 states that required the Praxis II for ESL, the minimum score ranged from 420 to 620, with Wisconsin at 530 (ETS, 2008; see appendix A).

After Nancy, Stacie, and the other students shared their dreams of teaching and the frustrations of their testing experiences, Sheila Hopkins, president of WITESOL helped facilitate a very engaged discussion among participants at the session. At the end of the discussion, Nell Anderson, one of the most experienced ESL professionals in Wisconsin, presented the group with a draft resolution, calling for an immediate lowering of the minimum Praxis II score and the eventual replacement of the test. Six months later, after approval by the membership, this would become the WITESOL Position Statement of April 2008:

Wisconsin has a growing linguistically diverse student population and a growing need for ESL/bilingual certified teachers. Our institutions of higher education in Wisconsin provide rigorous academic pre-service ESL/bilingual teacher education. Institutions of higher education require the ESL Praxis II to fulfill the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (WDPI) determination of content knowledge by passing scores on standardized tests approved by the state superintendent which shall include Wisconsin's model academic standards (PI34.15 2a). It is our position that the Praxis II for ESL licensure is not aligned with our State's model academic standards and therefore compromises its validity. In addition, it includes questions that are biased based on ethnicity and home language background. It is also noted that the 19 states that use the ESL Praxis II for licensure, accept score ranges from a no minimum score to 620. It is our position that WDPI should reset the State's cut score for the ESL Praxis II to 420 and that WITESOL should encourage WDPI to support the institutions of higher education in examining alternate assessment possibilities that are more valid, better align with our State's model academic standards, and maintain the cultural, linguistic, and academic diversity of our pool of educators. (WITESOL, 2008)

The support of the WITESOL participants had a huge impact on the students:

Not only were they present to hear the wording of the draft resolution, but they were actively recruited by about eight of the school district representatives who were present at the conference. The courage and perseverance of Nancy, Stacie, and the others was inspiring, and we were very upbeat on the drive home.

Yet, since then, the Wisconsin DPI has shown little inclination to change the requirements for the Praxis II exam for ESL. I talked with DPI representative Tammy Huth for one hour at a meeting of the Wisconsin State Human Relations Association in November, 2007, where the board of that organization endorsed the WITESOL draft resolution. Ms. Huth referred me to the studies that DPI had done of those taking the exam, those who had passed, and those who had taken it more than once. According to her data, only a handful of persons had not passed the ESL exam. Ms. Huth argued that, for most people, the test was not a problem. She reiterated this point in an email message to me in June, 2008:

In brief, records indicate that during the 2006-2007 data collection period: Of the 197 examinees that took the test, 186 (94%) met or exceeded the established cut score of 530 on their first (180/91%), second (5/2%), or third (1/.05%) attempt. Of the 11 examinees (6%) that failed to meet the 530 cut score, only two (1%) attempted the test a second time, while the other nine (5%) did not make another attempt...The Professional Standards Council (PSC) recommended that in anticipation of a new exam based on national TESOL standards, we do not need to investigate the ESL exam any further. We will convene a study panel to review the new exam, at which time a passing score can be established. (Huth, 2008)

In a follow-up meeting with school district, higher education, and WITESOL organization members, Huth stated that the test was slated for revision in 2010. When asked what could be done for the dozens of bilingual teachers who would be left in limbo with a bogus test for the next two years, she had no response.

***La Lucha Continua!* The Struggle Carries On**

When it comes to exams meant to satisfy the NCLB, non-native English speaking teachers face the same injustices as the ELL students in our nation's schools. Their cultural and linguistic heritage is not acknowledged or valued. They will be tested frequently, often on content material that they have not studied. Certainly in the case of the Praxis II test for ESL,

they will be tested on outdated material that does not represent best practice in the field.

The testing, coupled with bureaucratic refusal to offer any alternative assessments, effectively creates an institutionalized system of racism which falls hardest on the bilingual/bicultural teachers which schools so desperately need. We think it is important to consider that the NCLB is promoted by the same people who brought us the War in Iraq, illegal wiretapping, Abu Ghraib, and the pitiful response to Hurricane Katrina, and we find it amazing that states, districts, and school personnel continue to implement these policies of mis-education, rather than tossing the NCLB on the scrapheap of history where we believe it belongs.

Charles Dickens wrote about policies remarkably similar to those of the NCLB which guided educational practice in early 19th century England, policies intent on teaching facts, while ignoring the child's humanity. Dickens presents us with the example of Sissy Jupe, a poor child who could not grasp the importance of proportions:

Mr. M'Choakumchild: This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion?

Sissy Jupe: It must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million (Dickens, 1854, p. 50)

Like Miss Jupe, we must question whether the loss of even a handful of talented young bilingual teachers to an inappropriate test is justified. Teacher preparation programs, school districts, policymakers, and bilingual teachers and their allies can challenge this injustice by taking steps to remove unfair barriers at several levels.

Recommendations

For Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher educators have a duty to open the doors to bilingual teachers by removing unfair barriers to their professional advancement. Many of these barriers existed prior to the Praxis II exam. For example, entrance requirements for our teacher preparation program at UW Oshkosh include passing scores on Praxis I (PPST) and exams for math, reading, and writing. A substantial number of non-native English speakers were applying for admission and having difficulty passing

one or more parts of the PPST. Several professors who were concerned that these students might be excluded on the basis of the test advocated at department and college levels for a change in these requirements.

Now, our college accepts alternative evidence for non-native speakers of English who have not passed the PPST: This evidence includes grades of B or better for college math, English literature, and composition courses, as well as letters of support. Since this first change, the college has also supported the WITESOL resolution for changing the minimum score for the ESL Praxis II exam.

For School Districts

School districts desperate for highly qualified teachers to work with bilingual children cannot afford to accept the results of a high stakes test which excludes many excellent bilingual personnel from "highly qualified" status. Beyond granting strong candidates emergency licensure, districts need to advocate for rigorous, fair, authentic assessment of content knowledge for teaching.

Nancy was able to speak about her experiences with the Praxis II to representatives of several local districts that are part of our grant consortium. It became clear at that meeting that, when districts are informed about the negative effect this exam has on many potential job candidates, many were ready to cosign a letter to the state superintendent calling for a change in the requirements.

For State and Federal Policy Makers

NCLB influenced states to adopt the Praxis II in order to meet the law's demand for "highly qualified teachers." At the federal level, this requirement could be revised to allow for authentic assessment of teacher content knowledge, or through a range of practices that could include portfolio evidence.

Regardless of what happens at the federal level, states have the right to set testing requirements and minimum test scores. Praxis II exams for ESL range from no minimum score required to 620—there is ample room for reasonable state departments of education to set a score that can allow bilingual candidates who have successfully passed all other teaching requirements an opportunity to enter their chosen career.

For Bilingual Teachers and Their Allies

The challenges of being a bilingual person and an immigrant in the United

States are great enough without adding institutional barriers. Yet barriers exist at every step on the path to becoming a bilingual teacher. At every turn on their route through the teacher preparation program to graduation, Nancy, Stacie, and many others have faced practices which could daunt them or openly prohibit their advancement.

There are far too many people in positions of authority who believe that treating everyone the same equals fair treatment, and that if a person is not successful, then that person is to blame. Bilingual students seeking to become teachers need to remain strong, and more so, they need allies inside and outside the system. Such allies can help identify and remove barriers to advancement, working within the system where possible, and challenging the system where necessary. Sometimes it is the threat of a public outcry or lawsuit that manages to move the most rigid bureaucracy towards change.

Conclusion

The poet Langston Hughes asks, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" (Hughes, 1951). The Wisconsin DPI, citing NCLB regulations, would have Nancy and Stacie defer their dreams of becoming teachers because of the results of a single flawed exam. Yet more is at stake than the personal dreams of two young people. Their dreams are inextricably linked to larger dreams for their families, their communities and their world. These young bilingual teachers seek to prepare children for a society rich in languages, cultures, and justice. Such dreams are worth fighting for. For bilingual teachers and their allies, *la lucha continua*, the struggle carries on.

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WITESOL Position Statement on Praxis II Exam for ESL, April, 2008.

Appendix A
Praxis II State Minimums
for ESL Licensure (test # 20360)

AL	540
DC	520
HA	510
ID	580
KS	500
KY	620
ME	540
MD	570
MN	600
NC	520
NJ	no test required
OH	420
OR	510
SC	540
TN	530
UT	no minimum score
WI	530
WV	no test required
WY	no minimum score

Of the states that require a PRAXIS II test for ESL licensure, minimum scores range from 620 (KY) to "No Minimum Score" (UT and WY).

Thirty-one states (including California, Texas, Illinois, and New York, with their huge ELL populations) do not require the PRAXIS II for ESL licensure.

Data from www.ets.org website.

Appendix B
Email Correspondence Regarding the Praxis II Exam for ESL

March 4, 2008

Dear Superintendent Burmaster
and Members of Professional Standards Council:

I am a professor at UW Oshkosh, where I have worked extensively with pre- and in- service teachers pursuing licensure in ESL and bilingual education. In my 11 years here we have licensed over 300 teachers for these fields, teachers who are in high demand to serve a growing English Language Learner population.

I would like to make it very clear to you that the Praxis II test for ESL is an INADEQUATE measure of the content knowledge for this field. The material on this test is outdated, much of it based on audiolingual methods which were current in the 1960s, but the field has progressed since then. For example, there is little or no mention on the Praxis II of the SIOP approach, Sheltered English content and practice, now utilized by most programs in the country. Tim Boals, former ESL consultant for DPI, has said that if we were to teach to the content of this test, we would be doing a disservice to our students.

Because of its inadequacy, most of our students struggle with the ESL Praxis II, and some have failed to pass it. These include native English speakers, but most are bilingual teachers, who could be making great contributions in most school districts of this state. Yet, this faulty test serves as a barrier to keep them out of the teaching profession. Because these teachers are so sorely needed, and because of the inherent unfairness of this test, two state professional organizations, the Wisconsin Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and the Wisconsin State Human Relations Association, as well as professors in our College of Education, have voted to support two initiatives:

1. The IMMEDIATE lowering of the minimum score for passing the Praxis II for ESL in Wisconsin to 420; and

2. The replacement, as soon as possible, of the Praxis II exam with an alternative exam developed in Wisconsin.

Please believe me when I share with you that I value high standards. The current Praxis II exam minimum score does not set a high standard, it sets an unfair hurdle. That is why I urge you to IMMEDIATELY lower the Praxis II ESL minimum to 420, and to approve a more rigorous, alternative assessment as soon as possible.

The students of our state need qualified, well-prepared ESL and bilingual teachers. Please support this change so that teachers deemed qualified by our preparation institutions and school districts will not be held up by a faulty test.

I would be happy to meet with you, Dr. Burmaster, or members of the board, at any time. I also would appreciate your response to this letter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Donald F. Hones

March 4, 2008

Dear Professor Hones,

Thank you for your insights into the Praxis. I obviously can't speak for the whole group or the superintendent, but I will tell you that the Praxis has come up many times in different subject areas with the same objections. I am an adjunct for several elementary methods classes, and I have seen the Praxis for those subjects and I totally agree with you. There are issues across the country as well. Hopefully, it will be addressed.

Sincerely,
Terry Schoessow
Professional Standards Council