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## **Preparing Teacher Candidates to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners: The TELLs Certificate**

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### **Introduction**

English Language Learners (ELLs) are transforming the American public school landscape as this growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students enters schools in increasing numbers every year. In Ohio, where the ELL student population increased 108% from 1995 to 2005 (Payán & Nettles, 2006), recent efforts to serve these students have concentrated on preparing ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) specialists to work with the language learners outside the mainstream classroom. Although this is a preferred solution to the demand, a 34% increase in ESOL teachers will be needed to attend to the expected growth of the ELL population (Editorial Projects in Education, 2009). Further complicating the issue, the preparation of mainstream teachers to meet the needs of diverse populations has not changed significantly to meet the demand (Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

Furthermore, with only three states, Ohio not among them, requiring that all classroom teachers complete specific coursework targeting instruction of ELLs, a new paradigm of teacher preparation is needed; one that requires a reconceptualizing of the curriculum such that *all* teachers are prepared to serve *all* pupils (Editorial Projects in Education, 2009; Costa et al., 2005; Gagné, 2002; Meskill, 2005). In this paradigm, it is imperative to acknowledge the role that classroom teachers play in helping ELLs achieve academic success in today's classrooms as most ELLs are mainstreamed, depending on the school's ESOL resources, either upon arrival when there is no or limited access to an ESL specialist or after participating one or two years in a pull-out ESOL program. Regardless as to how ELLs are mainstreamed, educating ELLs will not only be the job of the ESL Specialist; it will require the collective/educated effort of an entire team of teachers who have the skills and capacities to teach and reach ELLs, further establishing the need for a new teacher education paradigm that embraces this praxis.

### **The TELLs Certificate Program**

The English for Speakers of Other Languages Mentoring Initiative for Academics and Methods Infusion (ESOL MIAMI)<sup>1</sup> Project was developed in response to this need to prepare undergraduate licensure candidates who have the skills and knowledge to be able to reach and

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<sup>1</sup> The English for Speakers of Other Languages Mentoring Initiative for Academics and Methods Infusion (ESOL MIAMI) Project is funded by a National Professional Development grant from the Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education.

teach culturally and linguistically diverse students as they are mainstreamed, as well as support the school ESL specialists. The initial phase of the ESOL MIAMI Project identified existing coursework in the teacher licensure programs that could be enhanced with EL-infused content, as in-class assignments or as extensions of field experiences, to enhance candidates' awareness of the issues surrounding ELLs in the classroom. However, because the ultimate goal was to prepare mainstream teachers as highly qualified to work with ELLs in their mainstream classroom, the ESOL MIAMI Project also undertook an effort to create extra-curricular courses solely focused on preparing these teachers beyond the knowledge base established by the infusion activities. Collectively, the embedded infusion activities, extended field experiences, and the independent, elective coursework, culminate in a university-recognized Teaching English Language Learners (TELLs) Certificate, acknowledging expertise for working with ELLs in the mainstream classroom beyond standard licensure requirements (see Table 1).

The overarching goals of the TELLs Certificate are that teacher candidates:

- demonstrate awareness of issues surrounding ELLs; including the influence of culture on language learning and schooling;
- document the impact of planning, delivering, and assessing instruction for ELLs;
- apply effective instructional methodologies and assessment strategies for ELLs that exhibit an understanding of second language acquisition theory; and
- analyze ELLs' linguistic skills to develop effective experiential, interactive literacy activities for ELLs.

Table 1

*TELLs Certificate at Miami University*

| Component   | Activity   |
|---|--|
| <b>Core Curriculum Infusion Portfolio*</b><br>(*minimum of two artifacts)     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EDT 190</b>, Introduction to Teaching</li> <li>• <b>EDP 201</b>, Human Development and Learning in Social and Educational Contexts</li> <li>• <b>EDL 204</b>, Sociocultural Studies in Education</li> <li>• <b>EDP 301</b>, Assessment and Evaluation in Educational Settings</li> </ul> |
| <b>Reading and Literacy Infusion Portfolio*</b><br>(*minimum of one artifact) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EDT 246</b>, Foundations of Reading, Language, and Literacy</li> <li>• <b>EDT 346</b>, Reading Instruction</li> <li>• <b>EDT 446</b>, Reading in the Content Area</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Field Practicum Infusion Portfolio*</b><br>(*complete both artifacts)      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Engaging Learners: Constructing Meaning Activity</i> (Methods)</li> <li>• <i>ELL Assessment and Accountability Case Study</i> (Student Teaching)</li> </ul>  |

| Component   | Activity   |
|---|--|
| <b>TELLs Certificate Focus Courses</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EDT 221</b>, TELLs: Culture and Second Language Acquisition</li> <li>• <b>EDT 323</b>, TELLs: Instructional Theories and Practices</li> <li>• <b>EDT 425</b>, TELLs: Active Learning and Literacy</li> </ul> |
| <b>TELLs Certificate Social Justice and Cultural Diversity Course</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A course that addresses the concepts of social justice and cultural diversity in relation to educational practices for ELLs.</li> </ul>   |

### Infusion Portfolio

The use of an infusion approach to raise awareness of ELL needs and establish a solid foundation for more advanced study is not a new concept in teacher preparation; it has been implemented successfully in graduate and undergraduate preparation programs in multiple states. According to Nutta (Nutta, n.c.; Nutta & Stoddard, 2005), ESOL infusion entails embedding ESOL content and activities seamlessly into existing curriculum and ensuring this content becomes a natural part of each course. The ESOL MIAMI Project took as a starting point an innovative implementation of the One Plus Infusion Model (Nutta, Moktari, & Strebel, 2011) to provide mentoring and professional development to support faculty teaching courses in the core curriculum, in content pedagogy, and in literacy as they infused ESOL content into the existing curriculum. As result, early in each licensure program, candidates are introduced to the cultural and societal implications of the diverse classroom, developing an understanding that supports content and grade-specific activities in later pedagogically focused courses. Additional infusion activities specific to language development and second language acquisition are integrated in reading and literacy courses to achieve a full matrix of infusion activities and modules that provide all licensure candidates with basic knowledge and understanding for working with ELLs in the mainstream classroom. All licensure candidates document these understandings through an online infusion portfolio built from the artifacts of the infusion activities.

In addition to the infusion activities embedded in required courses, teacher candidates in the TELLs Certificate Program complete field experience extensions with ELLs. The *Engaging Learners: Constructing Meaning Activity* and the *ELL Assessment and Accountability Case Study* are additions to required program field experiences associated with two crucial components of the teacher education program, methods of teaching, and student teaching. When completed, the artifacts from these field experiences are added to the infusion portfolio as evidence of success in working with ELLs in school and classroom settings. The *Engaging Learners: Constructing Meaning Activity* provides certificate candidates the opportunity to examine the underlying assumptions in their planning for and delivery of instruction to English language learners and to reflect on the interaction of dispositions (being), practice (doing) and professional knowledge (knowing) as they document through the combination of visual and narrative reflection the impact of the learning process with ELLs. Typical *Engaging Learners:*

*Constructing Meaning Activity* experiences range from tutoring individual ELLs, to managing instruction for ELLs in small groups, to assuming the responsibility of teaching a whole class that includes multiple ELLs.

During student teaching, TELLs Certificate candidates complete the required Teaching Performance Assessment (TPAC, 2011), an assessment system that documents teaching and learning in multi-day learning segments for one class of students, with particular attention to inclusion of language learners. The specific records of practice (evidence) in the *ELL Assessment and Accountability Case Study* consist of artifacts of teaching (lesson plans, video clips of instruction, student work samples, teacher assignments, daily reflections) and reflective commentaries, which explain the professional judgments underlying the teaching and learning artifacts developed and delivered in a language-rich classroom environment. As a culminating field experience, the *ELL Assessment and Accountability Case Study* demonstrates candidates' capacity to fully and knowledgeably manage a linguistically diverse classroom environment and put theory into practice as they document success with ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

### TELLs Focus Courses

Candidates who elect to extend the basic knowledge of ELL issues obtained through infusion activities complete three focus courses in the TELLs Certificate Program. These courses are structured so that they may be completed alongside infusion activities in other courses and concurrent with extended field experiences with ELLs.

The first of the focus courses, *TELLs in P-12: Culture & SLA*, provides the theoretical foundations necessary for P-12 teachers to work successfully with ELLs in the mainstream classroom. It employs comprehensive case study assignments, which, coupled with a field experience component, enable teacher candidates to obtain real-world understanding of the cultural and language development issues facing ELLs, their families and their teachers in schools. The difficult foray into one's own and other cultures raises awareness of the arbitrary, value-laden nature of culture, and of the pervasive effects of majority culture on schooling, teaching and learning.

With this basic foundational knowledge in place, students continue the program with the second course, *TELLs in P-12: Instructional Theory & Practice*, which focuses on the instructional methodologies necessary for P-12 teachers to work successfully with ELLs in the mainstream classroom. In this course, teacher candidates demonstrate and apply effective instructional methodologies, strategies, and techniques that promote second language development as they design and implement comprehensive instruction and assessment instruments and activities that meet the instructional needs of ELLs with different levels of second language proficiency in content areas.

The final course of the three-course sequence, *TELLs in P-12: Active Learning & Literacy*, requires students to analyze ELL linguistic proficiencies and determine appropriate instructional strategies using knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse to develop experiential and interactive literacy activities for ELLs. Additionally, this course provides a context for using current information about linguistics and cognitive processes

to deconstruct, critique, and modify literacy materials that reflect the instructional needs of students with different levels of second language proficiency in content area classes.

### **Social Justice and Cultural Diversity Course**

While the focus course sequence provides TELLs Certificate candidates with knowledge and skills to work with ELLs in the mainstream classroom, an additional course requirement ensures that students develop positive dispositions toward working with ELLs. Research has shown that developing understanding of majority privilege and its effect on minority conceptualization of self and success plays a significant role in future teacher attitudes and advocacy toward ELLs (Nieto, 2000). As part of the TELLs Certificate, teacher candidates take a course that focuses on the broad issues of social justice and cultural and linguistic diversity, reinforcing the key concepts of multicultural education. The impact of this course, typically taken concurrently with one of the focus courses, affords TELLs candidates a better grasp the relationship between school and community, thus connecting ELLs' academic success with broader social concerns.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher licensure programs today must ensure that all teacher candidates are effectively prepared to work with all students in the classroom, including those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2010; Fillmore & Snow, 2000). The elements of the TELLs Certificate follow a curricular trajectory that infuses, revisits, and builds upon ELL issues and content in response to this current need for culturally responsive teacher in P-12 schools and serves as an adaptable model for enhancing teacher preparation programs. To this end, the TELLs Certificate recognizes those candidates who elect to complete additional courses and experiences to be better prepared with the skills, knowledge and professional attitudes to work effectively with ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

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### About the Authors

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