



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

ESL Teacher Leadership: Delivering Professional Development

by [Michelle Benegas](#) and [Amy Stolpestad](#)



The Critical Need for Professional Development

Think about the English learners (ELs) in your school or district. What percentage of each day do they spend with a trained English as a second language (ESL) teacher—one who has studied second language acquisition and language teaching—especially in a distance learning format? Depending on where you live, the answer to this question will vary

drastically, given that states differ in their credential requirements for teachers and access to technology varies widely. We know that the majority of time ELs spend in school, whether face-to-face or online, is with general education (non-ESL) teachers who may not have had any formal training in working with students who are learning English. For this reason, ESL teachers also need to be equipped to be language experts and facilitators of professional development (PD) for their general education colleagues. Failing to respond to this need is failing our ELs. They deserve enriching curriculum and instruction *throughout* the day, not just for the short period that they work with an ESL teacher.

As teacher preparation programs work to redesign their curricula to better reflect new professional obligations related to collaboration, providing PD, and serving as a resident consultant or mentor within a given school, in-service teachers are also rethinking the ways in which they serve ELs. Through harnessing the capacity of ESL teachers' existing expertise, schools can experience transformative building-wide instructional growth without spending more money than is already being spent on outside consultants.

The school-wide English learning (SWEL) model is one way in which in-service ESL teachers can reconfigure their roles within the school and help to ensure that all teachers have the capacity to provide instruction that serves the academic language learning needs of ELs. The SWEL model is designed to support practicing ESL teachers as they share their expertise in language learning and teaching with general education colleagues. A school or district that implements the SWEL model can work toward improving instruction for ELs in a manner that is both efficient, relatively inexpensive, tailored to the specific needs of a school, and empowering for teachers. You can learn about the SWEL model in depth in [Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning](#) (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020), but in this article we want to focus on a read-to-deliver

professional development activity that bolsters general education teachers' attention to the four modalities—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—in their instruction.

Skills, Knowledge, Dispositions: What General Education Teachers Need to Effectively and Respectfully Serve English Learners

ESL teachers are often asked to deliver PD for their colleagues. However, few have been prepared in their teacher education programs to train adults. Andragogy, or the practice of teaching adults, is inherently different from pedagogy. Though we recommend that teacher education respond to this evolving need, there are other ways that practicing teachers can take it upon themselves to learn how to train adults in promising practices for ELs.

In *Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning* (2020), we encourage ESL teacher leaders to consider the following three categories in their PD offerings: dispositions, knowledge, and skills.

Teacher Dispositions

Teacher dispositions are the beliefs or mindset that teachers have toward working with ELs. PD in this area responds to the following six critical teacher dispositions:

1. Educators empathize with circumstances related to immigration.
2. Educators are culturally sensitive and sustaining.
3. Educators believe that marginalization and oppression affect the educational experiences of ELs.
4. Educators support their students' home language development.
5. Educators recognize the challenges of learning English and content simultaneously.
6. Educators are committed to ongoing PD.

Teacher Knowledge

Teacher knowledge is defined as mastery of the content area of instruction. PD in this area responds to the following six critical areas of teacher knowledge:

1. Educators know about second language acquisition and approaches to teaching language through content.
2. Educators know about approaches to supporting first-language literacy.
3. Educators know about the theories of cultural relevance and sustainability.
4. Educators know who immigrants are and how immigration happens.
5. Educators know systems of oppression and how they affect the educational experiences of English learners.
6. Educators know approaches to EL advocacy and the legal requirements for adequately serving ELs.

Teacher Skills

Teacher skills are defined as pedagogy. PD in this area responds to the following six critical teacher skills:

1. Educators can plan for academic language instruction.
2. Educators can teach and assess academic language.
3. Educators can differentiate for ELs.
4. Educators can support first-language literacy.
5. Educators can enact culturally relevant practices.
6. Educators can advocate for immigrant families.

A Sample Activity for Professional Development

SWEL offers a bank of PD plans, which are similar to a lesson plan, but they are designed for ESL teachers to train their general education colleagues. These ready-to-use PD plans are designed to be refined for local contexts, and we encourage those who facilitate any of the PD activities included in this book to consider how they might personalize activities to ensure their relevance to the ELs in a given school or region. The following PD plan focuses on raising teacher awareness of the modalities their ELs use most and how that information can improve future lessons.

Conducting a Modality Audit*

Objective	Participants will be able to articulate how much time English learners use each of the four modalities (speaking, writing, listening, reading) and recognize modalities that need more attention in their lessons.
Time to Complete	20 minutes
Materials and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Handout: Modality Audit (Appendix)● Laptop/computer, projector, screen, speakers
Preparation	Make hard copies or share digital copies of the Modality Audit handout.

Introduction

It is important for learners to use all of the four modalities in order to cognitively process concepts and learn language. In this activity, you will consider how much time ELs spend in each of the four modalities in a given lesson.

Directions

Begin this activity by asking teachers to fill out the Modality Audit handout (either on paper or digitally) for a recent lesson they taught. The handout looks like this:

Modality Audit	
Consider the last class that you taught that was not a test or student presentation day. From the students' perspective, estimate how much time they spend in each of the four modalities:	
Input:	Output:
Listening _____	Speaking _____
Reading _____	Writing _____

Bring the whole group back together. Ask the teachers to refer to their Modality Audit handout as they discuss the following questions with a partner or in small groups:

- In which modality did your students spend the most time in the lesson that you considered, and is this typical for most of your lessons?
- In which modality did your students spend the least amount of time in the lesson that you considered, and is this typical for most of your lessons?
- Given what you learned about how much time ELs spent in each of the four modalities, would you make any changes to this lesson in the future? If so, what changes would you make?
- Given what you learned about how much time ELs spent in each of the four modalities, what considerations would you make for the next lesson in this sequence?
- How does examining your ELs' language assessment data help you make instructional decisions?

Conclusion

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, PD needs to be adjusted for a distance delivery model. The good news is that the modality audit is equally, if not more, important for teachers to undertake as they move their instruction to an online format. The cognitive processing and language development that takes place when learners activate all four modalities is critical, regardless of the delivery method. The PD activity presented in this article will help teachers to ensure that their students are using all of those modalities, even in an online format. Ultimately, the responsibility of an EL teacher leader is to work toward closing the education gaps that persist in our student populations by sharing their expertise on language instruction with their general education colleagues.

* This PD lesson is based on "Using WIDA Can Do Descriptors to Make Content Accessible" in Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020.

Reference

Benegas, M., & Stolpestad, A. (2020). *Teacher leadership for school-wide English learning*. TESOL Press.

Michelle Benegas, PhD, is an assistant professor at Hamline University. In her work with teachers and schools, she promotes a model in which ESL teachers serve as site-based experts and coaches to their colleagues. Her research interests include ESL teacher leadership, teacher leader identity, and systemic approaches to improving EL services.

Amy Stolpestad currently serves as the director of The ELM Project and also consults with local, regional, state, and higher education institutions. Stolpestad is a Minnesota licensed K–12 ESL teacher and experienced teacher educator. Her research interests include teacher leadership, instructional coaching, teacher identity, and organizational change management.