

## **Position Statement on Professionalization and Credentialing for Adult ESOL Educators**

As a result of immigration patterns over the past few decades, Anglophone countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have seen an increased demand for programs and services for adult English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Meeting this increased demand, as well as the diverse needs of adult English language learners, has raised questions about not only resources and delivery systems, but also qualifications of the educators working with adult learners.

While augmenting resources for adult ESOL programs is critical, developing a qualified workforce of educators to work with adult English language learners is vital. This should go beyond providing professional development opportunities for educators, and also promote the professionalization of the field of adult ESOL education.

Professionalization is the movement within a field to enhance the quality of practice by establishing standards of competency and educational preparation. Many fields of practice within the educational spectrum have established competencies and standards for professionalization, an example being the elementary and secondary sector. However, efforts to establish such standards in adult education have been on a small scale and often in the shadow of elementary and secondary education.

Professionalization can also provide a context for developing leaders in the field. When professional competencies and corresponding paths to achieving them are structured and articulated, a fertile ground for growth and improvement is established at other levels in the field. Not only does it clarify what is deemed "professional," it provides a foothold for potential career paths, which is vital for developing and maintaining leadership in a field.

Educational authorities should view professionalization as a means to improve the quality of education and enhance program capacity, and thus make the professionalization of adult ESOL educators a priority. In order to professionalize adult ESOL educators, educational authorities at local, regional, and national levels must recognize this domain of practice as unique and distinct from elementary and secondary education.

In the *Standards for Adult Education ESL Programs* (2003), TESOL identifies the hiring of qualified instructional staff with training in the theory and methodology of teaching ESL. Therefore, education authorities should make pre-service preparation, and regular sustained professional development aligned to the standards of competency, available for all adult education program staff.

A key component of professionalization is the development of a system to recognize and document the achievement of competencies or standards, either through certification or

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credentialing. In this context, *certification* is typically based on a set of knowledge and skills demonstrated through formal qualifications, such as university coursework and practice. *Credentialing* involves the demonstration of proficiency and skills, and recognizes experience and nontraditional qualifications. Given the unique nature of the adult ESOL educator domain, a flexible system that recognizes both formal and nontraditional qualifications should be employed.

In developing a credentialing system, education authorities must work directly with educators to develop meaningful competencies and standards. For adult ESOL education, credentialing should be flexible, reflect the unique domain of adult education, and recognize the experience, knowledge, and skills of teachers. The *TESOL Standards for Teachers of Adults* (in press) can serve as a guide for educational authorities looking to establish a credentialing system for adult ESOL educators.

### *Resources*

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