The Evaluation of Texas A&M University System's Support Activities Related to Limited English
Proficient Student Success Initiative, Cycle 1 Grants

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) to establish the Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) to assist and support Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative (LEP SSI) grant recipients. The first year of TAMUS's award from TEA (2004–2005) corresponded with the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant awards. A total of 20 LEP SSI, Cycle 1 awards were made for three education service centers (ESCs), 16 school districts, and 1 charter school in Texas. The LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant period ran from May 1, 2004, to August 31, 2005. In March 2005, TEA contracted the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to conduct a formative evaluation of TAMUS's technical assistance to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients. The goal of the evaluation was to supply formative information that would help strengthen TAMUS services for future grantees and ensure the likelihood that the expected long-term outcomes would be obtained. SEDL's approach was focused on the quality and effectiveness of the TAMUS professional development services for LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients. Both the online English as a Second Language (ESL) certification preparation course based at Texas A&M–College Station and the summer ESL institute trainings conducted by ISLA staff at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi were evaluated. This report presents the findings from SEDL's evaluation carried out during the time period of March 2005 through February 2006.

SEDL's study addressed several important evaluation questions relating to quality and effectiveness of the TAMUS professional development courses in preparing LEP SSI, Cycle 1 teachers to take and pass the ESL supplemental certification exam and better address the needs of limited English proficient (LEP) students. Below are major conclusions of this study.

- TAMUS achieved many of its goals in the first year including setting up offices, hiring staff, creating the project Web site, and implementing the newly designed summer ESL institutes and online ESL certification preparation courses. Cycle 1 grantees' plans and programs were proposed without knowledge of the TAMUS support services. Upon award of grants, Cycle 1 grantees began implementing their plans independent of the TAMUS services. As such, many of the ISLA campus-level support services were not implemented in Cycle 1 campuses.

- At its present stage of development, the TAMUS online certification preparation course is grounded in current research on ESL professional development and aligned with the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam. However, the course does not align with many standards for online courses. Expert reviewers recommended that the design of the online course: present materials in a variety of ways, addressing a range of learning styles; use structured activities to provide an effective framework for online learning; and encourage more dialogue, debate, and reflection among participants, thus deepening their understanding of the content with which they are working.

- In comparison to other ESL/bilingual professional development, the ISLA summer ESL institutes were viewed as "above average" or "excellent" by participants. Further, the institutes were perceived useful both for preparing for the ESL/bilingual certification exam and improving their LEP instruction. Improvements in teaching practice and student performance were perceived as outcomes of the ISLA trainings.

- Teachers who participated in the summer institutes reported the use of instructional strategies promoted by TAMUS with some frequency throughout a term. However, a

proportion of respondents indicated that they never or rarely use certain teaching strategies especially strategies that rely on the use of the LEP students' primary language. Only a small number of respondents reported using the strategies on a regular, daily basis unless they were methods which relied on English.

- While it is a goal of the TAMUS ESL professional development to help teachers better address the needs of LEP students, this represents a long range goal that has greater potential of being met after the courses have reached a mature level of development and implementation. Expert reviewers identified several limitations within the TAMUS online ESL course that make the outcome of changing teacher practices unlikely to be achieved in its current form. Specifically, the online course lacks job-embedded, problem-solving situations in a realistic context and opportunities for lesson planning, reflection on classroom experiences, and discussions of new understandings. The ISLA summer institutes may have greater potential for changing teacher practices, however future evaluation is needed to determine whether meaningful transfer of knowledge will occur in the classroom.

It is important to put these conclusions in the context of the LEP SSI grant initiative, TAMUS's efforts to support grant recipients, and SEDL's evaluation design. The remainder of this executive summary provides a historical overview of the LEP SSI and TAMUS support services, a summary of SEDL's evaluation approach, and key findings and recommendations organized by evaluation questions. The full report provides an in-depth presentation of the evaluation methods, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## BACKGROUND

TEA provides grants to school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and shared services arrangements through the Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative (LEP SSI). The LEP SSI initiative was designed in response to the following issues:

- The number of LEP students is increasing in the nation's public schools.
- In Texas, over 32 percent of the student population speaks a language other than English (TEA, 2005a). This percentage far exceeds the national average of 17.9 percent.
- Recent data in Texas show that the performance of English Language Learners (ELLs) falls far below the average passing rate for all students (TEA, 2005b).
- Title III of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires that children with limited English proficiency "attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet."
- Valid and equitable assessments are critical components to ensuring that the needs of ELL students are addressed.
- Most states with licensing requirements, including Texas, require a teaching certificate and bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsements. Yet a shortage of certified bilingual education and ESL teachers continues to be a problem in Texas.

A total of 20 LEP SSI, Cycle 1 awards were made for three education service centers (ESCs), 16 school districts, and 1 charter school in Texas (see Appendix A for a full list of grantees). The LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant period ran from May 1, 2004, to August 31, 2005.

In June 2004, TEA contracted with Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) to provide technical

assistance to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients, including curriculum analysis and alignment, student performance analysis, improvement planning, and professional development opportunities. As a key element of its support to LEP SSI grant recipients, TAMUS established the Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi, and began offering an online ESL certification preparation course based at Texas A&M–College Station.

## Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) Summer ESL Institutes

The main goal for ISLA is to *assist high-potential schools with planning and implementing effective practices that enhance language and academic achievement of ELL students.* ISLA goals include the following:

- Establish a research and development office.
- Establish a project Web site.
- Develop a prototype for online ESL certification of secondary teachers.
- Design, develop, and implement a series of professional development workshops for teachers in high-potential ELL campuses.
- Identify materials and resources available to improve ELL student learning.
- Implement 3–4 ELL improvement teams at Texas A&M University System institutions.
- Provide technical assistance to selected ELL campuses that may include online professional development, performance analysis of ELL students, program consultation, model improvement plans, and evaluation.

ISLA staff consist of a program director, an assistant director, three program specialists, and support staff. The ISLA staff provide regional assistance to school districts and schools with high populations of ELL students.

## Online ESL Certification Preparation Course

In December 2004, Texas A&M–College Station offered its first ESL online certification preparation course through its Office of Continuing Education and Public Outreach. This online course was designed to give teachers an opportunity to prepare for the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) ESL supplemental certificate exam test #154. The 7-week course targets elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers working with LEP students who do not hold ESL certification and newly certified teachers who need to refine their skills when working with English language learners. Teachers who register for the course pay $450.

The online course consists of 7 weeks of lessons that include reading materials, links to resources, a discussion board, and quizzes over the content. The course framework is modeled after the test framework for the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam #154. The content of the exam is organized into broad areas called domains. Within each domain, the content is further defined by a set of competencies. The TAMUS online ESL preparation course covers the three domains subdivided into 10 competencies.

## SEDL'S EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

In March 2005, TEA contracted SEDL to evaluate the TAMUS support activities related to the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants. The formative evaluation was intended to review the overall quality and effectiveness of TAMUS technical assistance, research, and professional development services to the 20 LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients. SEDL's evaluation approach was designed to be flexible and to

collect and present formative evaluative information to strengthen TAMUS services for future grantees.

Although a key role of TAMUS was to provide LEP SSI grantees with outreach services and program design resources, LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees were generally unaware of the campus-level technical assistance offered by TAMUS. School districts, charter schools, and shared services arrangements (SSAs) that applied for the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants proposed plans and programs without knowledge of TAMUS's support services. Upon award of grants, Cycle 1 grantees began implementing their plans independent of the TAMUS services. As such, many of the ISLA campus-level support services were not implemented in Cycle 1 campuses. Instead, ISLA focused on providing LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees with access to professional development opportunities designed to prepare teachers for the bilingual/ESL certification exam and to better address the needs of LEP students. These opportunities included the online ESL course facilitated by instructors at the College Station campus and summer ESL institutes provided by ISLA staff from the Corpus Christi campus. To accommodate this change in direction, SEDL's evaluation was modified to focus on the quality of the TAMUS professional development courses in preparing teachers to take and pass the ESL supplemental certification exam and to better address the needs of LEP students.

The following evaluation questions guided SEDL's evaluation study:
1. To what extent were LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees supported by the TAMUS services?
2. How do the TAMUS ESL certification courses compare to "promising practices" in instructional technology and ESL professional development?
3. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL certification courses prepared teachers to take the ESL certification exam?
4. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL certification courses prepared teachers to better address the needs of LEP students?
5. How could the TAMUS ESL certification courses improve?

Methods for this evaluation included focus groups with ISLA staff, review of participation records for both the ISLA summer ESL institutes and the online certification preparation course, expert reviews of the online certification preparation course, and surveys of participants attending the ISLA summer institute trainings. Specific elements of the evaluation approach included:

- **Analyses of focus groups** conducted with ISLA staff to examine the extent to which LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantee schools were provided with technical assistance and professional development from TAMUS,
- **Analyses of participation records** for both the ISLA summer ESL institutes and the online certification preparation course to determine the extent to which participants were from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantee schools,
- **Expert reviews of the TAMUS online certification preparation course** housed at Texas A&M, College Station to determine how it compares to "promising practices" in the fields of instructional technology and ESL curriculum, and
- **Surveys of participants attending the ISLA summer institute trainings** to gauge perceptions regarding the perceived effectiveness of the institute and whether the training resulted in changes in teacher practices.

Key findings from SEDL's evaluation study as organized by the evaluation questions are presented below.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### To what extent were LEP SSI grantees supported by the TAMUS services?

Overall, TAMUS achieved many of its goals in the first year including setting up offices, hiring staff, creating the project Web site, and implementing the newly designed summer ESL institutes and online ESL certification preparation course. However, TAMUS' support services did not focus exclusively on the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients and TAMUS had limited success at providing outreach support services to Cycle 1 grantee schools. This resulted largely from the fact that the LEP SSI grant structure did not integrate the TAMUS support services into the grantees' planned scope of work.

Participation records indicated that participants of the ISLA summer institutes were fairly evenly represented by teachers from Cycle 1 schools and teachers from other schools. Because Texas A&M–College Station could not release unique identifiers, school, and demographic data on the teachers who enrolled in the online ESL course, the degree to which participants represented teachers from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 school was not possible to ascertain. When grantee status was known, 13 percent of the online participants came from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 schools.

SEDL recommends that TAMUS develop and implement a strategy-based outreach plan to deliver an expanded set of services to the target audience of LEP SSI grant recipients. This includes tracking detailed information on recipients of the services, including the online ESL course.

### How do the TAMUS ESL courses compare to "promising practices" in instructional technology and ESL professional development?

The TAMUS online ESL course is in the early stages of implementation and was assessed with an eye toward modification and refinement. Results from the expert reviews concluded that the content of the online course materials and readings are grounded in current research on ESL curriculum and instruction. However, the design and delivery of the online course does not adequately address the majority of standards for online professional development as detailed in the Checklist for Online Interactive Learning (COIL) and the Seven Principles of Effective Teaching Online. The review found the technical features of the ESL online course to be confusing and difficult to navigate. A strength of the TAMUS online course technology was the provision of discussion boards that allowed participant interaction with the instructor. However, interactions were generally characterized by questions and answers, rather than opportunities by the instructor to stimulate deeper understanding. Further, the course structure provides little opportunity for participants to interact with one another. Both participant interaction and participant/instructor interaction are key ingredients to facilitating deep content understanding through dialogue, debate, and reflection.

Because it is unrealistic to assume that a newly developed and implemented course will automatically reflect all of the promising practices in instructional technology, SEDL recommends that TAMUS use the expert reviews to prioritize refinements to the ESL online course within the parameters of the contract budget.

Results from the survey found that participants viewed the ISLA ESL trainings positively. In comparison to other ESL/bilingual professional development, all but one respondent rated the ISLA institute as "above average" or "excellent." Key influences to participating in ISLA institutes identified by teachers included the content of the training, the time of year it was offered, and the

availability of a stipend for attending. Least influential were state or district professional development requirements, recommendations by other school staff, and the sponsor or trainer of the institute. Teachers perceived the institute materials as useful both for preparing for the ESL/bilingual certification exam and for improving their LEP instruction. The majority of respondents also perceived the ISLA institute training as instrumental in current, or future, improvements in their teaching as well as their students' performance.

SEDL recommends that TAMUS continue to gather perceptions of summer institute participants and use the results to further strengthen the ESL trainings.

## To what extent have the TAMUS ESL courses prepared teachers to take the ESL certification exam?

According to participants of the ISLA summer ESL institutes, the trainings provided new and useful resources and information that prepared them for the ESL certification exam. In the months following the summer institutes, seventy one percent of those who reported taking the ESL exam indicated they had obtained ESL certification.

Results from the experts' review of the online course concluded that the content of the course is aligned with the TExES ESL supplemental exam, the online course provided useful certification resources to teachers, and the weekly quizzes were considered helpful in that the quiz questions were similar to those asked on the TExES ESL exam. These positive findings were mitigated by the expert reviewers' conclusion that the course structure was confusing and their concerns about the density of reading materials relative to the course length.

SEDL recommends that TAMUS use SEDL's evaluation results to prioritize ways to begin refining the online ESL course and summer ESL institutes in ways that will help teachers better prepare for the ESL certification exam.

## To what extent have the TAMUS ESL courses prepared teachers to better address the needs of LEP students?

While it is a goal of the TAMUS ESL professional development to help teachers better address the needs of LEP students, this represents a long range goal after the courses have reached a mature level of development and implementation. At this time, the evaluation findings speak to the teachers and reviewers' perceptions of the courses' potential to impact LEP students. Survey results indicated that most ISLA summer ESL institute participants perceived that their teaching and their students' performance had improved, or will improve, as a result of attending the institute. Teachers who participated in the summer institutes indicated that they use instructional strategies promoted by TAMUS with some frequency throughout a term. However, a proportion of respondents indicated that they never or rarely use certain teaching strategies especially strategies that rely on the use of the LEP students' primary language. Only a small number of respondents reported using the strategies on a regular, daily basis unless they were methods which relied on English.

Additionally, the expert reviewers concluded that the online course is an important step to providing teachers with access to ESL professional development opportunities. However, several limitations within the TAMUS online ESL course were identified that make the outcome of changing teacher practices unlikely to be achieved by the course alone. Recommendations for increasing the likelihood of obtaining such outcomes included providing job-embedded, problem-solving situations in a

realistic context, and opportunities for lesson planning, reflection on classroom experiences, and discussions of new understandings. The ISLA summer institutes may have greater potential for changing teacher practices, however future evaluation is needed to determine whether meaningful transfer of knowledge occurs in the classroom.

SEDL recommends that TAMUS prioritize refinements to the online ESL course and summer ESL institutes in ways that will help teachers better address the needs of LEP students.

## How could the TAMUS ESL courses improve?

The overall purpose of SEDL's evaluation is to identify both strengths and weaknesses of the TAMUS ESL certification courses so that modifications or refinements can be made to increase the effectiveness of the courses for future teachers. Drawing from the TAMUS site visits, summer ESL institute surveys, and expert reviews, SEDL presents several recommendations to improve the content and delivery of both courses.

The expert reviewers recommended a variety of ways to improve the TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course. Suggested improvements to the delivery of the course included adding a course orientation, displaying content from within the course Web pages, promoting meaningful interactions among participants, and using a variety of formats in addition to text such as streaming video. Recommended improvements to facilitate better learning and application of the course content included expanding the reflective components of the course to elicit real-work experiences and adding assessment tasks that require participants to demonstrate their knowledge in authentic ways.

Overall, participants of the ISLA summer institutes generally praised the institute, reporting that it was valuable in enhancing their instructional techniques and in impacting LEP students' academic performance. A few respondents identified what they considered to be the least helpful components of the institutes which included the second language learning theories, student assessment information, and the lecture format by the presenters.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SEDL'S STUDY

SEDL observed that the ISLA summer ESL institute and the online ESL certification preparation course have the dual goals of preparing teachers to pass the ESL/bilingual certification exam and improving teachers' ESL instruction with the intent of better meeting the needs of ESL students. As they currently exist, the two courses represent alternative delivery mechanisms for accomplishing the goals.

SEDL recommends that TAMUS develop and articulate a "theory of change" and logic map which describe and make explicit the process by which the TAMUS services achieve the goals of supporting LEP SSI grantees. Such conceptual tools will increase the likelihood that the ISLA summer ESL institute and online ESL certification preparation course lead to the desired outcomes. Both the online ESL course and summer institutes will benefit from better alignment between course content, delivery mechanism, and anticipated outcomes.

Given that the two goals may require different intervention strategies, the question arises as to whether each type of professional development course is trying to accomplish too much. Is it realistic to expect two different course formats to equally prepare teachers for the certification exam and improve their classroom instruction? SEDL recommends that TAMUS consider refining the goals of

the two courses in such a way that there is stronger alignment among the course content, delivery mechanism, and anticipated outcomes for each course. More specifically, it is recommended that TAMUS course developers and ISLA staff consider focusing the goals of the online course on preparing teachers to pass the certification exam and focusing the goals of the ISLA summer ESL institute on the improvement of teacher practices.

## Limitations of SEDL Evaluation Study

SEDL's evaluation of the TAMUS support of LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees had several limitations which future evaluations should address. In addition to a focus on the online ESL course, modifications to the evaluation design introduced a focus on the ISLA summer ESL institutes. Although the goals for online course and institutes are the same, the ISLA summer ESL institutes were assessed only in terms of the participants' perceptions of the institutes as useful and informative. The content of the ISLA summer ESL institutes was not reviewed. The TAMUS online ESL course, on the other hand, had its content assessed but did not include participant evaluations. Therefore, the findings cannot speak to the quality of both the course content and participant reactions for both of the two courses.

SEDL recommends the following components be added to the evaluation approach:

- Conduct an expert review of the ISLA summer ESL institute content.
- Assess participants' perceptions of the online course with surveys.
- Continue assessing participants' perceptions of the ISLA summer ESL institutes using the survey method.
- Evaluate the full spectrum of support services that TAMUS offers.
- Track the number of LEP SSI teachers who have taken and passed the certification exam before and after receiving TAMUS services and compare the passing rates to state averages.
- Conduct site visits to a sample of the LEP SSI grant recipients to assess the LEP SSI grant recipients' perceptions of the support they've received from TAMUS.
- Administer pre- and post-participation surveys to participating teachers from the LEP SSI grant recipient campuses. The surveys should collect information about teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and instructional practices prior to and following the receipt of TAMUS support services. A design of this type, used in conjunction with a documentation of the TAMUS support services that were received, will allow for changes and outcomes to be identified.

## Summary of the Evaluation Study

In summary, this formative evaluation of the first year of TAMUS technical assistance to LEP SSI grant recipients revealed that two of the support services, the ISLA summer ESL institute and the online ESL certification preparation course, reflect some of the field's best practices, with room for improvement. Both courses have the potential to provide excellent preparation for the ESL/bilingual certification exam, and teachers attending the ISLA summer ESL institute believed that the experience would positively impact their ability to meet the needs of their LEP students. The recommendations offered above are intended to improve the online course and summer institutes specifically, as well as the overall program initiative.

# INTRODUCTION

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides grants to school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and shared services arrangements (SSAs) through the Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative (LEP SSI). The LEP SSI was designed to
  (1) reduce the number of teachers teaching under a bilingual exception waiver;
  (2) increase the number of teachers trained in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction; and
  (3) increase limited English proficient (LEP) students' Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, English reading proficiency, and rates of credit accrual.

A total of 20 LEP SSI, Cycle 1 awards were made for three education service centers (ESCs), 16 school districts, and 1 charter school in Texas (see Appendix A for a full list of grantees). To qualify for the award, the grant recipients had to have at least 20 LEP students enrolled in their schools, and no more than 40 percent of these students may have met the standard performance level on the 2003 TAKS. Award amounts ranged from $180,000 to $425,000. The LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant period ran from May 1, 2004, to August 31, 2005.

Following the Cycle 1 awards, in June 2004 TEA contracted with Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) to provide technical assistance to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients, including curriculum analysis and alignment, student performance analysis, improvement planning, and professional development opportunities. As a key element of its support to LEP SSI grant recipients, TAMUS established the Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi, and began offering an online ESL certification preparation course based at Texas A&M–College Station.

In December 2004, TEA issued a Modified Invitation for Bid (MIFB) for a third-party consultant to evaluate the TAMUS support activities related to the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants. The evaluation was to review the content and delivery of the TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course and the effectiveness of TAMUS's technical assistance and professional development services to Cycle 1 grant recipients. In March 2005, TEA selected the proposal submitted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). Because the evaluation fell shortly on the heels of the LEP SSI grants and long-term outcomes, such as improved student achievement of ELL students, were not expected, SEDL's evaluation approach was designed to be flexible and to collect and present formative evaluative information to strengthen TAMUS services for future grantees.

Although a key role of TAMUS was to provide LEP SSI grantees with outreach services and program design resources, LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees were generally unaware of the campus-level technical assistance offered by TAMUS. School districts, charter schools, and SSAs that applied for the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants proposed plans and programs without knowledge of TAMUS's support services. Upon award of grants, Cycle 1 grantees began implementing their plans independent of the TAMUS services. As such, many of the ISLA campus-level support services were not implemented in Cycle 1 campuses. Instead, ISLA focused on providing LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees with access to professional development opportunities designed to prepare teachers for the bilingual/ESL certification exam and to better address the needs of LEP students. These opportunities included the online ESL course facilitated by instructors at the College Station campus and summer ESL institutes provided by ISLA staff from the Corpus Christi campus. To accommodate this change in direction, SEDL's evaluation was modified to focus on the quality of the TAMUS professional

development courses in preparing teachers to take and pass the ESL supplemental certification exam and to better address the needs of LEP students.

This report presents the findings from SEDL's evaluation carried out during the time period of March 2005 through February 2006.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The number of LEP students is increasing in the nation's public schools. Short and Echevarria (2004) report that the fastest-growing subset of the K–12 student population is students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. According to Leos (2004), in the 2003–2004 school year, approximately 5.5 million students were ELL. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education on LEP students demonstrate the following:

- Between 1992 and 2003, national LEP student growth in school enrollment increased by 84 percent.
- The number of LEP students enrolled in school in Texas in 2002 was about 100,000; it is currently reported to be around 600,000.
- LEP students represent a significant proportion of the Texas K–12 student population.

Other data (NCES, 2004) reveal that language minorities in the United States (ages 5–24) are more likely to be Hispanic (65 percent) than to be members of other racial/ethnic groups. Within Hispanic groups, 74 percent speak languages other than English at home. Furthermore, 31 percent of students who speak Spanish at home fail to complete high school, as compared with 10 percent of students who speak only English.

In Texas, over 32 percent of the student population speaks a language other than English (TEA, 2005a). This percentage far exceeds the national average of 17.9 percent. In 2005, more than 54,000 students took the Spanish version of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which was offered in grades 3–6. The greatest number of Spanish language tests was administered in grade 3, where approximately 27,000 students took both the reading and mathematics assessments. Recent data in Texas show that the performance of ELL students falls far below the average passing rate for all students (TEA, 2005b). As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, in both reading and mathematics and in all grades, students taking the Spanish language TAKS and those who are LEP show passing rates that are the lowest of any subgroup, including special education student populations. Further, passing rates become even more disparate at the higher grade levels. As shown in the figures below, while the gap between White students and African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and Spanish language students is fairly constant in grades 3–11, the gap between White and special education and LEP students becomes increasingly wider with each successive grade. In reading, the gap between White and LEP students is 17 percentage points at grade 3. In English language arts (ELA) the gap between these student groups is 56 points at grade 10, and 50 points at grade 11.

**Figure 1**
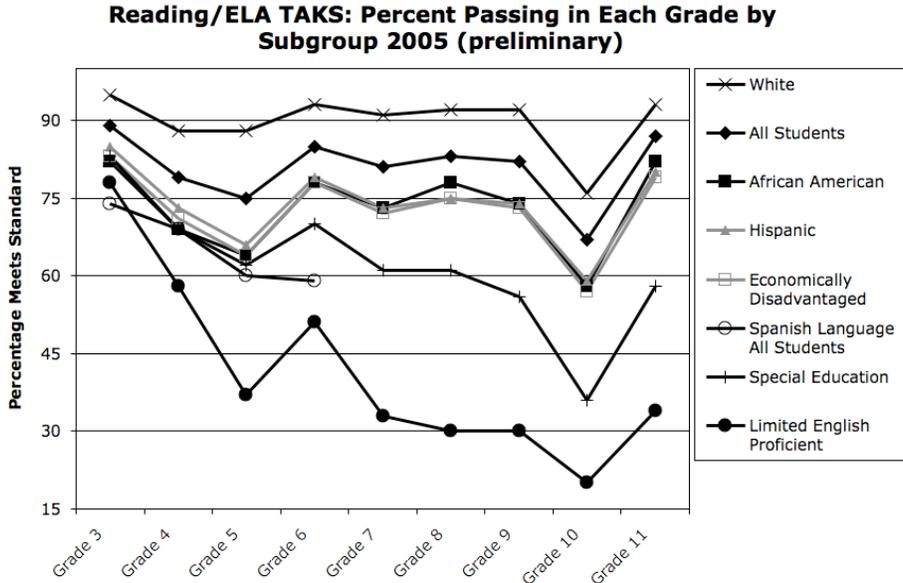


Reading/ELA TAKS: Percent Passing in Each Grade by Subgroup 2005 (preliminary)

*Source.* Texas Education Agency (2005a). *Enrollment in Texas public schools, 2003–04. (Document No. GE05 601 06).*

**Figure 2**
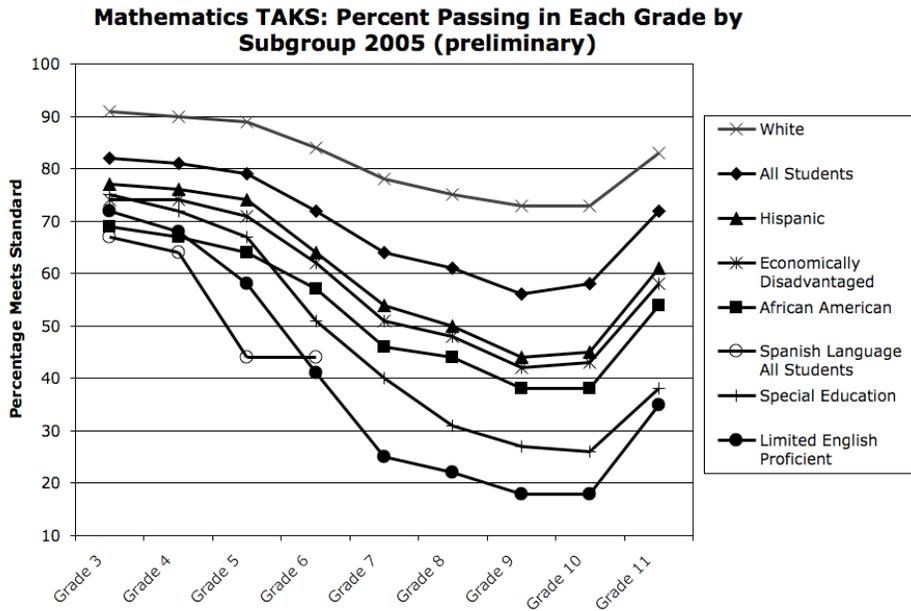


Mathematics TAKS: Percent Passing in Each Grade by Subgroup 2005 (preliminary)

*Source.* Texas Education Agency (2005a). *Enrollment in Texas public schools, 2003–04. (Document No. GE05 601 06).*

## No Child Left Behind

Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that children with limited English proficiency "attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet" (NCLB, 2001). Federal legislation requires that school districts take specific steps to ensure that students with limited proficiency in English meet the same language acquisition standards and content standards that all students must meet. Schools and school districts face a number of issues in responding to the legislation, including inadequate assessment processes for examining students' knowledge of English and other content areas and the need for training and technical assistance that enables classroom teachers to implement instructional programs focused on the needs of these students.

## Standards and Assessment Issues

In response to the mandates of Title III, state departments of education and school districts have created English language proficiency (ELP) standards. In Texas, the ELP standards are part of the state-required curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The ELP standards consist of the Spanish language arts TEKS (grades K–6) and the English as a second language (ESL) TEKS (grades K–12). Whether students are in bilingual classes or classes taught in English, their success in school depends on how well teachers meet both their language and academic needs. When teachers combine language learning with high-quality instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies, ELL students are expected to achieve the knowledge and skills specified in TEKS and reach their full academic potential.

Valid and equitable assessments are critical to ensuring that the needs of ELL students are addressed. Solano-Flores and Trumbull (2003) assert that tests are cultural products and that taking a test is an event for which each student has a conceptual frame. Students' varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds may prepare them with different schemas or principles for approaching tests and test-taking. Even when ELL students are able to read the test item, their sociocultural backgrounds can lead them to misinterpret the question.

Assessment of young ELLs (preK through third grade) presents additional issues. If the assessments are to be developmentally appropriate, guidelines need to be established for creating the assessment instruments and processes. Developers need to consider developmental and cultural appropriateness; the child's linguistic background; approaches that allow children to demonstrate what they know; and involvement of parents and family members, teachers and staff, and the child in developing assessment procedures (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 1997).

## Shortage of ESL Teachers

Most states with licensing requirements, including Texas, require a teaching certificate and bilingual education or ESL endorsements. Nonetheless, a shortage of certified bilingual education and ESL teachers continues to be a problem in Texas. In particular, it has been difficult to fill teaching vacancies in both bilingual education and special education (Boe, Bobbit, & Cook, 1997).

Results from a Texas A&M University study (2002) indicated that the greatest shortage in the bilingual/ESL area was found in the elementary grades, although critical shortages occurred at the secondary level as well. In a 2004 study conducted by the Texas A&M University Bilingual/ESL

Teacher Retention and Recruitment Coalition, 40 percent of Texas school superintendents reported a shortage of certified teachers in bilingual/ESL education. Further, 30 percent of Texas school districts indicated that more than 11 percent of their bilingual/ESL teachers were uncertified in the area (Lara-Alecio, Galloway, Irby, & Brown, 2004).

The result of teacher shortages presents a serious threat to the quality of education children receive in schools. The outcome of the inability to fill teaching vacancies is assigning teachers to classes in fields for which they were not certified and hiring teachers who lack appropriate teaching certificates. These practices are common, particularly in urban schools that have high proportions of students who are poor and of color. Such practices are detrimental to these students' academic performance (Clewell & Villegas, 2001).

## Inservice Teacher Professional Development

In their research on ways to effectively address the needs of Hispanic students (the largest population of ELLs in the United States), Padron, Waxman, and Rivera (2002) support the belief that education needs to be meaningful and responsive to students' needs as well as linguistically and culturally appropriate. They offer guidance to teachers of ELLs in the form of effective teaching practices, as do others (e.g., Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Genesee, 1999). However, in order for teachers to implement these instructional practices, there is a need for high-quality professional development.

Over the last decade, researchers have explored the best practices in professional development initiatives (Corcoran, McVay, & Riordan, 2003; Elmore, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 1999). For example, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), drawing on years of research and practical experience, developed 12 standards for high-quality professional development that offer a comprehensive framework for guiding the planning, implementation, and assessment of effective staff development. Using these 12 NSDC standards, Sparks and Hirsh (1999) synthesized the characteristics of high-quality, effective professional development. They found that high-quality, effective professional development

- is job-embedded and results-driven professional development that can be incorporated into every teacher's work day;
- focuses on improving student learning that deeply immerses teachers in their subject matter and instructional methods;
- is curriculum-centered and standards-based;
- is sustained and intellectually rigorous and provides cumulative opportunities for implementing the content learned; and
- requires strong leadership at all levels of the system to facilitate implementation.

Inservice teachers need exposure to quality experiences that transform their traditional practices into a superior level of education. Teachers need long-term professional development to integrate evidence-based practices in their classrooms. Further, research has shown that professional development approaches are more successful when they aim to enhance and expand a teacher's repertoire of instructional strategies rather than radically alter them.

## Online Professional Development

Over time, professional development efforts have taken a variety of formats, and more and more programs have begun utilizing web-based instruction to meet the educational needs of teachers

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seeking professional development and certification opportunities. In the "E-Learning for Educators," NSDC holds online learning to the same standards as other more traditional forms of professional development, stating the following (2001b):

> Because staff development available through electronic resources serves the same function as face-to-face staff development, the context necessary to support adult learning, the processes by which they learn, and the content they need to increase student achievement are the same. E-learning has the potential to expand and enrich learning opportunities for educators employing alternative learning processes not available in the face-to-face arena. However, in order to be as effective as face-to-face staff development in deepening understanding and improving performance of both educators and their students, e-learning for educators will need to meet the same high standards as those for face-to-face professional learning. (p. 4)

In addition to emphasizing the importance of high standards for online professional development, NSDC also suggests that additional considerations must be made, such as the costs of maintaining the infrastructure and support necessary for teachers to effectively use the technology associated with online learning. In addition, NSDC suggests the following:

> It is imperative that measures of the effectiveness of e-learning for educators reach beyond the number of participants, completion rates, or preference for e-learning over face-to-face staff development to application of learning and results for students. (p. 11)

In a more substantive review of research on online learning environments, Sunal, Sunal, Odell, and Sundberg (2003) found that "online learning is neither better nor worse than face-to-face classroom instruction" (p. 16). From their review of the literature they also concluded that "at the present time, the lack of adequately designed research does not allow us to rate online instruction as better, or even as the same, as traditional forms of classroom instruction" (p. 17).

The conclusion drawn from the review of literature on online learning indicates that there are generally no unique principles of professional development that apply only to online learning opportunities. What constitutes good professional development is the same for online learning as it is for face-to-face learning opportunities. Nevertheless, some specific practices may enhance the success of online learning, and special considerations should be made to ensure that the technological resources and infrastructure are in place to support it.

## TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM'S APPROACH TO IMPROVING ESL/BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of teachers certified in ESL and improving the instruction of LEP students in Texas. These initiatives include the following:

- *The High School Achievement Project,* which was designed to link high schools with one of the nine Texas A&M University centers in the P–16 Educational Improvement Consortia (PEIC), a network designed to provide innovative public school support systems. Focusing on mathematics and LEP programs, each PEIC worked with high schools in its geographic region to provide direct services, needs assessment, data analysis, and curriculum alignment

in these areas.
- *The Technical Assistance/Professional Development in Support of LEP Student Success Grants Project* was designed to provide curriculum analysis and alignment, student performance analysis, improvement planning, and professional development opportunities, including online ESL certification preparation and bilingual certification assistance to underperforming schools.

As a primary support to LEP SSI grant recipients, TAMUS established the Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) at the Corpus Christi campus to assist and support Cycle 1 grant recipients. In addition, TAMUS offered online certification preparation courses delivered by instructors from the College of Education at Texas A&M University–College Station.

## Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) Summer ESL Institutes

The overall goal for ISLA is to *assist high-potential schools with planning and implementing effective practices that enhance language and academic achievement of ELL students.* ISLA goals include the following:

- Establish a research and development office.
- Establish a project Web site.
- Develop a prototype for online ESL certification of secondary teachers.
- Design, develop, and implement a series of professional development workshops for teachers in high-potential ELL campuses.
- Identify materials and resources available to improve ELL student learning.
- Implement 3–4 ELL improvement teams at Texas A&M University System institutions.
- Provide technical assistance to selected ELL campuses that may include online professional development, performance analysis of ELL students, program consultation, model improvement plans, and evaluation.

ISLA staff consist of a program director, an assistant director, three program specialists, and support staff. The ISLA staff provide regional assistance to school districts and schools with high populations of ELL students.

## Online ESL Certification Preparation Course

In December 2004, Texas A&M–College Station offered its first ESL online certification preparation course through its Office of Continuing Education and Public Outreach. This online course was designed to give teachers an opportunity to prepare for the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) ESL supplemental certificate exam test #154. The 7-week course targets elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers working with LEP students who do not hold ESL certification and newly certified teachers who need to refine their skills when working with English language learners. Teachers who register for the course pay $450.

The online course consists of 7 weeks of lessons that include reading materials, links to resources, a discussion board, and quizzes over the content. The course framework is modeled after the test framework for the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam #154 (see Table 1). The content of the exam is organized into broad areas called domains. Within each domain, the content is further defined by a set of competencies. The TAMUS online ESL preparation course covers the three domains subdivided into 10 competencies.

**Table 1: TExES ESL Supplemental Exam Framework**

| Domain | Competency | Standard |
|---|---|---|
| Domain I: Language Concepts and Language Acquisition (25%) | Competency 1 | The ESL teacher understands fundamental language concepts and knows the structure and conventions of the English language. |
| | Competency 2 | The ESL teacher understands the processes of first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) acquisition and the interrelatedness of L1 and L2 development. |
| Domain II: ESL Instruction and Assessment (45%) | Competency 3 | The ESL teacher understands ESL teaching methods and uses this knowledge to plan and implement effective, developmentally appropriate instruction. |
| | Competency 4 | The ESL teacher understands how to promote students' communicative language and development in English. |
| | Competency 5 | The ESL teacher understands how to promote students' literacy development in English. |
| | Competency 6 | The ESL teacher understands how to promote students' content-area learning, academic-language development, and achievement across the curriculum. |
| | Competency 7 | The ESL teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and instruments used in ESL programs and uses assessment results to plan and adapt instruction. |
| Domain III: Foundations of ESL Education, Cultural Awareness, and Family and Community Involvement (30%) | Competency 8 | The ESL teacher understands the foundations of ESL education and types of ESL programs. |
| | Competency 9 | The ESL teacher understands factors that affect ESL students' learning and implements strategies for creating an effective multicultural and multilingual learning environment. |
| | Competency 10 | The ESL teacher knows how to serve as an advocate for ESL students and facilitates family and community involvement in their education. |

*Source.* State Board for Educator Certification (2003). *Texas Examinations of Educator Standards Preparation Manual 154. English as a Second Language (ESL) Supplemental*

# EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

To facilitate continuous improvement, TEA contracted the evaluation of the TAMUS support services to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients early in its initiation and implementation. At this stage, the evaluation was designed not only to monitor the progress made but also to supply information that would help strengthen TAMUS services for future grantees and ensure the likelihood that the expected long-term outcomes would be obtained.

## EVALUATION APPROACH

SEDL's evaluation approach was to collect and present formative evaluative information regarding the quality and effectiveness of the TAMUS support to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients, with a particular focus on the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses. As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on the certification preparation courses resulted from a modification in the evaluation plan, which had originally focused on evaluating the campus-level supports to grantee schools. School districts, charter schools, and shared services arrangements that applied for the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants proposed plans and programs without knowledge of TAMUS support services. Upon award of grants, Cycle 1 grantees began implementing their plans independent of the TAMUS services. As such, many of the ISLA campus-level support services were not implemented in Cycle 1 campuses. Thus, SEDL focused on the TAMUS professional development services. Both the online ESL certification preparation course housed at Texas A&M–College Station and the summer ESL institute trainings conducted by ISLA at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi, were evaluated. Both types of professional development services had two primary goals: (1) to prepare teachers to take and pass the ESL supplemental certification exam and (2) to prepare teachers to better address the needs of LEP students.

The purpose of the evaluation was to identify both strengths and weaknesses of the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses so that modifications or refinements could be made to increase the effectiveness of the professional development services for future teachers.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following evaluation questions guided SEDL's evaluation study:
1. To what extent were LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees supported by the TAMUS services?
2. How do the TAMUS ESL certification courses compare to "promising practices" in instructional technology and ESL professional development?
3. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL certification courses prepared teachers to take the ESL certification exam?
4. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL certification courses prepared teachers to better address the needs of LEP students?
5. How could the TAMUS ESL certification courses improve?

## EVALUATION METHODS AND ANALYSES

Methods for this evaluation included focus groups with ISLA staff, review of participation records for both the ISLA summer ESL institutes and the online certification preparation course, expert reviews of the online certification preparation course, and surveys of participants attending the ISLA summer institute trainings. These methods are described in detail below.

## Focus Groups With ISLA Staff

To determine the degree to which TAMUS support services and trainings were offered to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients, SEDL evaluators conducted a site visit to the ISLA center at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi from August 1–2, 2005. The purpose of the site visit was to conduct focus groups with ISLA staff to identify the staff's goals for supporting the LEP SSI grantees and determine the amount of progress, to date, in achieving them. Files containing agendas, attendance sheets, and materials for the institute trainings were mailed to SEDL staff prior to the visit. SEDL evaluators reviewed the files and developed a focus group protocol (see the focus group protocol in Appendix B). Questions asked staff to identify the goals of the center and report on the progress made related to each goal. Focus group questions also asked the ISLA staff to describe the goals and objectives of the ESL summer institutes and to generate a list of expected outcomes of the training. Questions probed for information regarding

- teaching strategies participants would acquire as a result of the training;
- resources participants were expected to use as a result of the training;
- student outcomes expected as a result of the training; and
- follow-up support provided after the training.

Responses to the focus group questions were captured on audiotapes and notes. Data were analyzed for major themes across each question.

## Review of Participation Records

To determine the number of teachers who participated in the TAMUS summer institutes and online ESL certification courses, SEDL obtained participant records from TAMUS. For both types of ESL trainings, records included participants' names and contact information. Records for the ISLA ESL summer institutes also included employment information such as the participant's school name, district name, and educational service center (ESC) region. Such employment records were only available for participants of the October cohort of the TAMUS online course. To the extent possible, participants' place of residence or e-mail address were used to identify the district and ESC region. Participation data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software to determine the proportion of participants who taught at LEP SSI Cycle 1 schools.

## Expert Review

A primary component of this evaluation was to determine the quality and effectiveness of the TAMUS online professional development. SEDL used two experts to conduct the reviews of the online professional development during the time period of September 1, 2006 to December 1, 2006. The content of the online course was examined and compared to best practices and national standards in ESL and bilingual teaching. A second review was conducted to examine the online medium as a vehicle for delivering the course, comparing it to best practices and national standards for online learning, as well as its ability to foster authentic learning environments.

The following individuals served as SEDL's expert reviewers:

- *Ms. Maggie Rivas*, program associate at SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC) in Louisiana. Ms. Rivas conducted the content expert review of the TAMUS online professional development.

- *Ms. Kimberly Hughes*, program associate with SEDL's SouthCentral Regional Technology in

Education Consortium (SCRTEC). Ms. Hughes conducted the review of the online delivery medium.

Each reviewer was provided with a username and password to access the TAMUS online course. Copies of course materials and resources were printed and provided to the reviewers. Each was also provided with the objectives of the study and general guidelines, developed by SEDL, for conducting the review and submitting their evaluation reports (see Appendix C for the guidelines). The reviewers were asked to (1) compare the content and delivery of the online professional development with best practices in ESL/bilingual teaching and online professional development; (2) provide the criteria by which they made their assessments; and (3) provide their list of references for the reviews.

The experts were allowed approximately 3 months to assess the materials and submit their reports. The evaluation team summarized the reports and returned them to the expert reviewers to check for clarity and accuracy. See Appendix D for the full reports.

## Survey of ISLA ESL Summer Institute Participants
SEDL developed and administered a survey to teachers who participated in the ISLA ESL Summer 2005 Institutes.

*Survey Development*
The survey was created based on the evaluation team's understanding of the ISLA summer trainings gained through (a) site visit notes; (b) document reviews of the training agendas, materials, and resources; (c) a review of relevant research and existing surveys; and (d) feedback provided by ISLA and TEA staff. Survey items were designed to collect teachers' demographic and certification information as well as perceptions regarding the following:

- Reasons for attending the summer institutes
- Quality of the summer institutes
- Previous knowledge of content presented
- Usefulness of the materials provided for preparing for the exam
- Expected teacher and student outcomes as a result of attending the institutes
- Percentage of ELL students they teach
- Structure of their ESL/bilingual program
- Frequency with which they use certain teaching strategies with ELL students

The survey instrument underwent a series of reviews to check for item clarity and relevance, including an internal SEDL review, a review by ISLA staff, a review by TEA staff, and a review by external content advisors. The instrument was submitted to TEA's Data and Information Review Committee (DIRC) and approved on November 3, 2005, for use in the study. See Appendix E for the survey instrument.

*Survey Administration*
Using TEA envelopes and letterhead (a strategy intended to increase response rates), surveys were mailed to participants of the ISLA ESL Summer Institutes on November 28, 2005. Approximately 6 months had passed since participants had completed the ISLA institute. The cover letters requested that the institute participant complete the enclosed survey and return it in the pre-paid return envelope (see letter in Appendix F). Participants were also provided the option of completing an online version of the survey if they preferred. Respondents completing the online version used a

unique identification number to access the survey. The identification number allowed the evaluation team to track the school response rates and identify nonrespondents.

To ensure a reasonable response rate, the evaluation team conducted follow-up activities (e.g., phone calls and e-mails) to survey recipients who had not responded. Because the response rate was below 50 percent by the deadline for survey returns (n=48, response rate=45%), the evaluation team conducted nonresponse bias checks to determine if differences existed between those who returned surveys and those who did not. Telephone calls were made to a random sample of nonrespondents (n=10) who were asked to complete the survey over the telephone. An analysis of their responses, in comparison to those who returned or completed surveys online, revealed no statistically significant differences in ratings on any of the survey items. These data were then consolidated into the existing data set for an overall analysis (n=58; response rate=54%).

*Survey Sample*
The initial survey population consisted of a total of 116 teachers. Nine surveys were returned as "undeliverable," resulting in a final sample size of 107 teachers. Table 2 shows the survey sample and response rates.

**Table 2: Disposition of Survey Sample and Survey Response Rates**

| Training Attended | Number of Surveys Sent | Number of Surveys Returned Undeliverable | Number of Surveys Completed by Mail | Number of Surveys Completed Online | Number of Nonresponse Bias Checks | Total Surveys Completed | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corpus Christi, TX, June 2005 | 36 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 18 | 51% |
| San Antonio, TX, June 2005 | 23 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 15 | 79% |
| San Antonio, TX, July 2005 | 57 | 4 | 10 | 12 | 3 | 25 | 48% |
| Totals | 116 | 9 | 21 | 27 | 10 | 58 | 54% |

*Source.* TAMUS participation records and survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants

The following section presents the evaluation findings organized by evaluation question. The findings section is followed by conclusions and recommendations for TAMUS as well as recommendations for future related evaluations of such grant initiatives.

# EVALUATION FINDINGS

In the section, the evaluation findings across the multiple data sources and methods are presented organized by the evaluation questions.

## TO WHAT EXTENT WERE LEP SSI, CYCLE 1 GRANT RECIPIENTS SUPPORTED BY THE TAMUS SERVICES?

SEDL examined the extent to which LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantee schools were provided with technical assistance and professional development from TAMUS. Data sources included focus groups with ISLA center staff and a review of participation records. The findings from these data sources are presented below.

### Focus Groups With ISLA Staff

SEDL evaluators conducted a site visit to the ISLA center at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi from August 1–2, 2005. The purpose of the site visit was to conduct focus groups with ISLA staff to identify the staff's goals for supporting the LEP SSI grantees and determine the amount of progress, to date, in achieving them. ISLA staff were asked to identify the center's goals and to determine progress in achieving them. The following seven goals were identified:

(1) Establish the new center and set up office space
(2) Establish a project Web site
(3) Develop a prototype for online ESL certification
(4) Design, develop, and implement a series of professional development workshops for teachers in high-potential ELL campuses
(5) Identify and distribute materials and resources to improve ELL student learning
(6) Implement 3–4 ELL school improvement teams
(7) Provide technical assistance to selected ELL campuses

During the SEDL focus groups, members of the ISLA staff noted that the first year of TAMUS's award from TEA (2004–2005) corresponded with the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant awards. This year was described as a planning year with TEA, and activities were primarily devoted to achieving the first five of the seven goals, including setting up the ISLA offices, hiring staff, meeting with the project advisory committee, creating the project Web site, designing a needs assessment process for grant recipients, and establishing relationships with the Cycle 1 schools.

With respect to the outreach goals (goals 6 and 7), ISLA staff revealed that the Cycle 1 grants recipients received limited services. The Cycle 1 grantees had proposed and implemented plans independent of the TAMUS services, and no protocol had been established for approaching the Cycle 1 schools to provide them with their services. Individual ISLA staff were assigned to groups of grantee schools and, at the time of the focus group, had established contacts among the Cycle 1 schools to determine how their services could be utilized within the scope of work planned for and implemented by the schools. ISLA staff reported that the majority of schools were seeking ESL teacher professional development. In response to such requests, ISLA staff focused on providing LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees with access to a variety of professional development opportunities, including the online ESL course facilitated by instructors at the College Station campus and the summer ESL

institutes provided by ISLA staff.

### ISLA Progress With Achieving Goals

Table 3 presents the evidence of progress for each of the ISLA center goals as of August 1, 2005 as determined by SEDL evaluators during the site visit to the ISLA offices and collected through the focus groups and document reviews of ISLA files and records.

**Table 3: ISLA Center Goals and Evidence of Progress**

| | Goals | Status | Evidence of Progress |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Establish a research and development office | Achieved | Moved into new offices and facilities. The center director hired four program specialists by December 2004. |
| 2 | Establish a project Web site | Achieved | The ISLA Web site was activated and is regularly updated with project calendars, PowerPoint presentations, and upcoming events. ESL and bilingual educational resources for teachers, parents, and students are made available. School-level needs assessment and program planning instruments are also available. The online discussion feature of the Web site was not yet implemented. Plans for the future include adding access to videos of best practices and online trainings. |
| 3 | Develop a prototype for online ESL certification of secondary teachers | Achieved | Texas A&M–College Station used contract funds to implement an online ESL certification preparation course that had been designed prior to the ISLA contract. Teachers were enrolling in the course. The course will be used as a model throughout the university system. |
| 4 | Design, develop, and implement a series of professional development workshops for teachers in high-potential ELL campuses | Achieved | At the time of the site visit, ISLA staff had provided numerous professional development workshops for teachers of ELL students. The professional development focused on effective instructional models, including sheltered instruction techniques, increasing reading and writing proficiency, and implementing research-based instruction. Three summer ESL institutes were conducted in the summer of 2005. These institutes were targeted to teachers from Cycle 1 schools but were also made available to other teachers when room was available. |
| 5 | Identify materials and resources available to improve ELL student learning | Achieved | In addition to the materials and resources provided by the Web site, ISLA staff were developing best practices products that identify strategies and program practices in exemplary Title II schools with high populations of ELLs. |
| 6 | Implement ELL improvement teams within selected ELL campuses | Not achieved | ISLA had designed a model for school improvement that included needs assessment instruments, student performance analysis, school planning, curriculum alignment, and professional development services. The school improvement process was not implemented as designed with Cycle 1 grantees. |
| 7 | Provide technical assistance to selected ELL campuses | Not achieved | Technical assistance was not provided in systematic ways to Cycle 1 grantee campuses. |

*Source.* ISLA staff focus groups

### ISLA Summer Institutes

Beginning in 2005, ISLA held three summer ESL institutes for Cycle 1 teachers. Although the training agendas varied depending on the audience, ISLA staff generally followed the same outline. The institute agenda included a review of (a) research on second language acquisition and linguistics; (b) research on ESL methodology; (c) ESL teaching strategies; (d) ESL assessment issues; and (e) the State Board for Educator Certification's (SBEC) ESL supplemental certification exam and preparation strategies for taking the exam. Each institute spanned multiple days (between 3–5 days),

and daily sessions generally ran from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with breakfasts and lunches provided. Participating teachers received stipends for attending both morning and afternoon sessions each day, documented by sign-in sheets. Guest speakers for the sessions included Kathleen Kenfield, independent speaker; JoAnn Canales and David Leo, College of Education, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi; Adelita Acosta, Region XIII Education Service Center; and Emma Garza, Texas A&M University–Kingsville.

Overall, SEDL determined that TAMUS achieved the first five of the seven goals. TAMUS had limited success, however, in achieving goals related to outreach and support of the LEP SSI grant recipients.

## Review of Participation Records

SEDL examined participation records to determine the extent to which LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantee schools were provided with professional development from TAMUS. SEDL obtained participant records from TAMUS to determine the number of teachers who participated in the TAMUS summer institutes and online ESL certification preparation courses. Records included participants' names and contact information.

In 2005, ISLA held three summer ESL institutes for Cycle 1 teachers preparing to take the ESL supplemental certification exam. Table 4 presents the attendance figures for each institute and the proportion of teachers from LEP SSI grantee districts. As shown in Table 4, approximately 58 percent of summer institute participants were from LEP SSI grantee districts. These institutes were targeted to teachers from Cycle 1 schools but were also made available to other teachers when seats were available.

**Table 4: Percentage of TAMUS ISLA Summer Institute Participants From LEP SSI Grantees**

| ISLA Summer Institute | Total Number of Participants | Total Number of Participants from Non-LEP SSI Supported Schools | Total Number of Participants from LEP SSI Supported Schools | Percentage of Participants from LEP SSI Grantees |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| June 6–10 Corpus Christi, TX | 36 | 18 | 18 | 50% |
| June 9–15 San Antonio, TX | 23 | 9 | 14 | 61% |
| July 5–8 San Antonio, TX | 57 | 21 | 36 | 63% |
| Total | 116 | 48 | 68 | 58% |

*Source.* TAMUS participation records

Between December 2004 and October 2005, Texas A&M–College Station offered seven ESL online certification preparation courses. Enrollment for the online course is presented by course date in Table 5 below. Place of employment was not consistently tracked for participants of the online course until October 2005. Thus, participant status as a LEP SSI grant recipient was categorized as "known" or "unknown" when place of residence or e-mail address made it possible to identify his or her district and ESC region. Table 5 shows the proportion of participants of the online certification preparation course that were from LEP SSI supported schools. Thirteen percent of "known" participants were from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantee campuses.

**Table 5: Percentage of TAMUS Online ESL Certification Preparation
Course Participants From LEP SSI Grantees**

| Online Course Period | Total Enrollment | Total Number of Participants From Unknown Schools | Total Number of Known Participants From Non-LEP SSI Supported Schools | Total Number of Known Participants From LEP SSI Supported Schools | Percentage of Known Participants From LEP SSI Grantees |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| December 2004 | 11 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 27% |
| January 2005 | 28 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 32% |
| March 2005 | 24 | 9 | 13 | 2 | 8% |
| May 2005 | 18 | 8 | 10 | 0 | 0% |
| June 2005 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 27% |
| August 2005 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| October 2005 | 34 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **128** | **41** | **70** | **17** | **13%** |

*Source.* TAMUS participation records

## Summary of the Extent to Which LEP SSI Grant Recipients Were Supported by the TAMUS Services

Overall, SEDL determined that TAMUS achieved five of the seven goals identified by ISLA staff, including establishing the ISLA offices and Web site, developing and implementing the professional development workshops and an online ESL certification preparation course, and identifying materials and resources for improving ELL student learning. LEP SSI grant recipients received limited support services from TAMUS in terms of campus-level outreach. This resulted largely from the fact that the LEP SSI grant structure did not integrate the TAMUS support services into the grantees' planned scope of work. Participation records indicated that participants of the ISLA summer institutes were fairly evenly represented by teachers from Cycle 1 schools and teachers from other schools. Because Texas A&M–College Station could not release unique identifiers, school, and demographic data on the teachers who enrolled in the online ESL course, the degree to which participants represented teachers from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 school was not possible to ascertain. When grantee status was known, 13 percent of the online participants came from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 schools.

## How Do the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Compare to "Promising Practices" in Instructional Technology and ESL Professional Development?

SEDL examined the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses to determine how they compare to "promising practices" in the fields of instructional technology and ESL curriculum. The purpose of this component of the evaluation was to identify both strengths and weaknesses of the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses so that modifications or refinements could be made to increase the potential effectiveness of the course for future teachers. Data sources included expert reviews of the online ESL preparation course and surveys of participants of the ISLA summer institutes. The findings from these data sources are presented below.

### Expert Reviews of the Online ESL Preparation Course

During the time period of September 1, 2006 to December 1, 2006, SEDL staff experienced in ESL professional development and online learning environments reviewed the TAMUS online course and compared its content and structure to "promising practices" using recent research on teacher education and national standards on teacher professional development. Ms. Kim Hughes, program associate with SEDL's SouthCentral Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SCRTEC), reviewed the TAMUS online ESL preparation course, concentrating on the effectiveness of the design of the online medium for delivering the course content. Ms. Maggie Rivas, program associate at SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC), conducted the expert review of the content of the TAMUS online ESL professional development. Both expert reviewers obtained access to the online course as auditors, which allowed them to view the course lessons, assignments, readings, quizzes, and comments within the discussion groups. The experts selected and referred to a variety of studies and standards while conducting their reviews. Each of their reports contains a careful review of the online course materials and resources, detailed suggestions for improving the course, and a full list of references (see Appendix D for their complete reports).

### Design and Delivery Review

To conduct the review of the TAMUS online course design and delivery, Ms. Hughes referred to a variety of research on online learning environments, including *Facilitating Online Learning: Effective Strategies for Moderators* by Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, and Tinker (2000) and the research on engaging online learners (e.g., Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). Ms. Hughes primarily used the Checklist for Online Interactive Learning (COIL) created by Sunal, Sunal, Odell, and Sundberg (2003) as a research-based evaluative instrument of courses and modules used in online learning environments. However, she also compared the TAMUS online course to the Seven Principles of Effective Teaching Online identified by Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner ,and Duffy (2001) and the National Standards for Online Staff Development that were released by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) in 2001.

The COIL instrument used for this review is divided into four sections: (1) student behaviors (8 items), (2) faculty-student interaction (16 items), (3) technology support (2 items), and (4) learning environment (25 items). Because Ms. Hughes was limited to reviewing the online course materials without observing student and teacher behaviors while interacting with the online teaching medium, she chose to focus her evaluation on the last two areas of technology support and learning environments. Table 6 shows the sets of standards used to evaluate the TAMUS online course and Ms. Hughes assessment to the degree to which the TAMUS online ESL course addressed them.

**Table 6: Standards for Online Professional Development Courses Used in Expert Review**

| Checklist for Online Learning (COIL) | | Rating |
|---|---|---|
| Category 3: Technology Support | Ensure a low level of technological difficulties in accessing Web site and communication. | Partially Addressed |
| | Provide adequate, friendly, easy, continuous technical support. | Partially Addressed |
| Category 4: Learning Environment | Use structured activities to provide an effective framework for online learning. | Not Addressed |
| | Create social interaction through group collaboration to facilitate high achievement. | Partially Addressed |
| | Use streaming audio for reading online. | Not Addressed |
| | Present course content in a manner that hierarchically structures the sequence of information. | Partially Addressed |
| | Organize Web site to enable students to interact wit the content, other students, and instructor. | Partially Addressed |
| | Create a welcoming, safe, nurturing online environment. | Partially Addressed |
| | Present problem-solving situations in a realistic context. | Not Addressed |
| | Provide opportunities for students to question the instructor to ensure accuracy of understanding. | Partially Addressed |
| | Create opportunities for students to communicate with each other to share understanding of course content. | Not Addressed |
| | Provide opportunities to collaboratively construct knowledge based on multiple perspectives, discussions, and reflections. | Not Addressed |
| | Provide opportunities for students to articulate and revise their thinking to insure accuracy of knowledge construction. | Not Addressed |
| | Include cooperative and collaborative learning to distribute workload through the group and support female student' preferred method of connected learning. | Not Addressed |
| | Allow time for reflection at end of course. | Not Addressed |
| | Include "warm-up" period with light-hearted exercises aimed to help students get to know on another. | Not Addressed |
| | Provide opportunities for students to control online learning and structure it for themselves. | Not Addressed |
| | Provide discussion forums encouraging open and honest dialog. | Partially Addressed |
| | Conduct teleconferencing during and at the end of the course to discuss successes and problems. | Not Addressed |
| | Use computer conferencing to develop overall critical thinking skills. | Not Addressed |
| Seven Principles of Effective Teaching Online | | Rating |
| | Encourage student-faculty contact. | Partially Addressed |
| | Encourage cooperation among students. | Not Addressed |
| | Encourage active learning. | Not Addressed |
| | Give prompt feedback. | Fully Addressed |
| | Emphasize time on task. | Fully Addressed |
| | Communicate high expectations. | Partially Addressed |
| | Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. | Not Addressed |

*Source.* Expert reviews

These standards highlight that online professional development should
- ensure a low level of technological difficulties;
- provide adequate, friendly, easy, continuous technical support;
- use structured activities to provide an effective framework for online learning;
- create social interaction through group collaboration and provide opportunities for participants to work together in pairs or teams;
- present materials in a variety of ways, addressing a range of learning styles; and

- present job-embedded, problem-solving situations in a realistic context.

As Table 6 demonstrates, Ms. Hughes found several characteristics of the TAMUS online certification course that did not align with practices detailed in the COIL and the Seven Principles standards in terms of technological support and learning environments.

First, Ms. Hughes found the technical features of the ESL online course to be confusing and difficult to navigate. The user interface requires that participants log in and download materials. The content of the course consists primarily of downloadable materials that require a variety of applications to open. For example, the course introductory information downloads as a PowerPoint presentation while weekly readings come as Word documents or PDF files. Ms. Hughes reported that the downloadable materials are difficult to open on some platforms. For example, Microsoft Office for Windows XP displayed error messages when attempting to open the PowerPoint files.

In addition, Ms. Hughes noted that there are no directions for navigating the course features and content. For example, there is a link to the discussion board but no instructions were found on the Web site on how to read or comment within the discussion board features. In her report, she wrote the following:

> An initial difficulty for the user is that there is no orientation to the course provided upon logging in. A link to the course introduction results in a downloaded PowerPoint document. This document provides a basic orientation to the course topics; however, there is no orientation to the online course features that are to be employed, such as the discussion board, announcements, intranet mail, online assessments, organization of course materials, etc.

The home page of the TAMUS online course is shown below.

**Figure 3: Home Page of the TAMUS Online ESL Preparation Course**
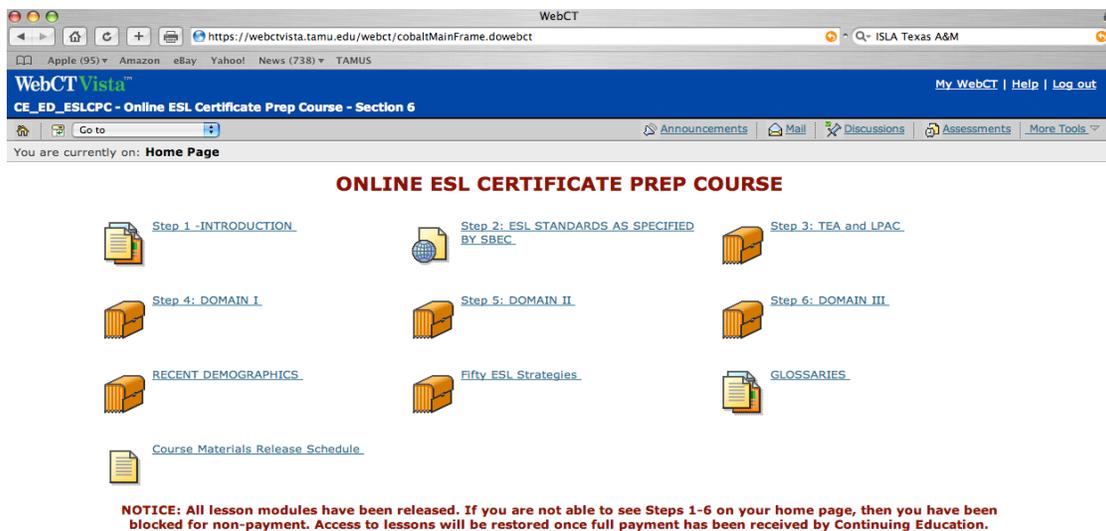


*Source.* TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course

Ms. Hughes also noted that the course instructor provides technological support to course participants. The instructor's contact information is provided in the introductory PowerPoint, and there is a discussion area devoted to questions about WebCT (the provider for the online learning environment) where the instructor responds to students' questions. However, Ms. Hughes explained that technological problems might prevent the user from downloading the slide with the contact information or accessing the discussion boards, limiting the user's access to technical assistance.

A strength of the TAMUS online course technology is that it provides discussion boards allowing participants of the course to interact with each other and the instructor. Ms. Hughes explained:

> The strongest feature of the TAMUS online course design is the inclusion of a discussion board and facilitation by a content expert. The discussion forums that were provided appeared to foster open and honest dialog around the topics presented. The instructor's tone was inviting, encouraging, and responsive to the ideas presented.

Ms. Hughes noted, however:

> Opportunities for interaction with the instructor generally appear to be question/answer interactions. The instructor's contributions in the discussion area serve to provide information for the most part. The instructor does often reply to the discussion postings of participants and validate their ideas or present her own thoughts in response to a participant's post. Her replies to the postings of others serve largely to provide her own perspective, to clarify information, or to validate the ideas presented. While her expertise is clear and her conversational tone inviting, there were missed opportunities to facilitate further discussion among participants or to push their thinking forward on a topic. The instructor could better promote professional dialogue among the group as a whole through the use of online facilitation techniques to sharpen the focus of the dialogue or to help participants dig deeper (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000).

Finally, Ms. Hughes indicated that one of the weakest features of the course was that the course structure provides very little opportunity for participants to interact with one another. She noted that the design of the TAMUS course does not encourage dialogue, debate, and reflection among participants, thus deepening their understanding of the content with which they are working. The participants of the course used the discussion forums, and the dialogue that resulted appeared to be honest and open. However, Ms. Hughes noted:

> The building of an online community is crucial to promoting high levels of learning through quality reflection (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). It is essential to foster online social elements similar to those found in face-to-face courses. In this course, not only are participants not actively engaged initially with a structured activity to promote this kind of community building, but structured collaborative learning opportunities are essentially absent from the entire course. Collaboration that occurs in the discussion area is, for all intents and purposes, accidental as there is no formal requirement that participants respond to the postings of others or that they build upon the ideas presented.

Through her review of the online medium, Ms. Hughes found that the TAMUS online course did not adequately address 12 of the 20 items within the technology support and learning environment categories of the COIL standards. A total of eight items were labeled by Ms. Hughes as partially addressed. In comparison with the Seven Principles of Effective Teaching Online, the TAMUS online course was recognized as fully addressing the principles related to giving prompt feedback and communicating high expectations. The remaining principles were viewed as only partially or not at all addressed within the online course.

### *Content Review*

To conduct the content review, Ms. Rivas compared the TAMUS online ESL course content to a variety of literature on promising practices in ESL professional development. Her references included Wong Fillmore and Snow (1999), Hamayan (1990), Richard-Amato (1988), and Epstein (2001).

First, Ms. Rivas noted the content of the TAMUS course materials and readings is strongly grounded in current research on ESL professional development. For example, a notable strength of the course was that it is based on sound educational and language learning theory with a strong focus on second language acquisition. She observed that the Domain I course readings connect to the literature in the following way:

> Hamayan (1990) suggests that in order for second language learners to be successful academically, teachers must understand the process of second language learning. While teachers do not usually get the opportunity to learn about language structures and usage the way linguists do, they need to recognize how language relates to the learning process. In support of this, Wong Fillmore & Snow (1999) have proposed that preservice teacher preparation programs should include second language acquisition theory and a general understanding of linguistics.

Ms. Rivas adds:

> The [TAMUS online ESL course] materials and activities provide an opportunity for teachers to achieve a basic understanding of what language is—that it represents a functioning, rule-governed language system. By completing Domain I successfully teachers will be able to make the distinction between the teachers' knowledge of second language acquisition and the needs of second language learners.

At the same time, during her review, Ms. Rivas detected and noted several places where there was limited use of research in the online course materials. First, Ms. Rivas considered the content of Domain II, Instruction and Assessment, to be the most critical as it relates to ESL teaching methods, knowledge of TEKS, content-based ESL instruction, and classroom management. However, she suggested that the organization of Domain II materials could be improved. She explains that:

> According to Richard-Amato (1988) an ESL *approach* consists of a succinct group of related assumptions about language and teaching. A *method* is an ordered plan on how the materials are going to be presented, and a *technique* is what the teacher uses to implement a method and accomplish the objectives. The course materials could be better organized and presented by explicitly explaining/defining what constitutes an

ESL approach, ESL method, and ESL techniques.

Second, Ms. Rivas indicated that the treatment of family and community involvement was not as strong as other elements of the training, noting that the TAMUS online ESL course has limited readings and resources on the role of families and communities in a child's learning process. She also noted that more could be provided regarding issues of diversity, culture, language, and learning. She explained that:

> Of all the competencies, the content in Competency 10, *Family and Community Involvement*, is the weakest. Although the topics (advocating for ESL students, facilitating family involvement in the education of ESL students, communicating and collaborating with parents, and accessing community) are important to know, the course does not provide opportunities for the content to be applied to real classroom situations.

## Survey Results From ESL Summer Institute Participants

To better understand how the ISLA summer ESL institutes compared with "best practices" in ESL instruction and curriculum, SEDL surveyed teachers who participated in the summer 2005 trainings to solicit their perceptions regarding the overall quality of the institutes, how the institutes compared to similar trainings they have participated in, and their level of agreement with obtaining certain outcomes. Of the 107 participants that received a survey, a total of 58 teachers completed the survey (response rate=54 percent).

### *Perceptions of Training Quality*

Institute participants were asked to respond to several items related to the usefulness and quality of the training. Respondents rated the overall usefulness and value of the ISLA Institute as "good" to "very good" on a 5-point scale (mean=4.7). Seventy-two percent of the respondents indicated that they had attended other ESL/bilingual professional development trainings in the past. When asked how the ISLA ESL summer institutes compared to similar trainings, all but one of the respondents rated the ISLA institute as "above average" or "excellent." Table 7 presents these ratings.

**Table 7: ESL Summer Institutes Participant Perceptions of Training Quality**

| | Very Poor (1) | Below Average (2) | Satisfactory (3) | Good (4) | Very Good (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How would you rate the overall usefulness/value of the ISLA institute you attended? | 0 | 0 | 2 | 13 | 43 | 4.7 | .53 | 58 |
| | Very Poor | Below Average | Average | Above Average | Excellent | M | *sd* | N |
| How did the ISLA institute compare to other teacher trainings in ESL/bilingual education? | 0 | 0 | 1 | 18 | 24 | 4.5 | .55 | 43 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

### *Perceptions of Factors That Influenced Participation*

Another important component of the evaluation was to understand the factors that contributed to teachers' decisions to participate in the ISLA summer ESL institutes. Teacher stipends to attend the institutes constitute a substantial portion of the overall cost of the training. For this reason, it was important to solicit information about the role stipends play for participants. In addition, other factors may also contribute to teachers' decisions to participate in the summer institutes, such as logistics and the reputation of the summer institutes among teachers.

First, participants were asked whether they received a stipend for their participation in the summer institutes. All participants reported receiving stipends. Participants were then asked how influential various factors were in their decision to attend the summer institutes. These survey items broadly addressed several types of influences, including monetary (stipend), logistical (time of year or location), and professional issues (district or state professional development requirements).

According to these responses, factors that most influenced teachers' decisions to attend the ISLA summer ESL institute were the content of the training (mean=4.1), the time of year the training was offered (mean=4.1), and the availability of a stipend for attending (mean=3.7). Factors that had the least influence were state or district professional development requirements (mean=2.7), recommendations by other school staff (mean=2.8), and the sponsor or trainer of the institute (mean=2.9). Table 8 presents these responses.

**Table 8: Factors That Influenced Teachers to Participate in the ESL Summer Institutes**

| To What Extent Did the Following Influence Your Decision to Attend the ISLA Institute? | No Influence (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | Strongly Influenced (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Upcoming certification exam | 18 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 18 | 3.1 | 1.69 | 56 |
| Availability of stipend for attendance | 6 | 5 | 11 | 14 | 21 | 3.7 | 1.34 | 57 |
| Principal or other campus administrator | 19 | 3 | 9 | 16 | 11 | 3.0 | 1.56 | 58 |
| Content of training | 2 | 2 | 9 | 18 | 27 | 4.1 | 1.03 | 58 |
| Location of training | 8 | 4 | 10 | 15 | 21 | 3.6 | 1.40 | 58 |
| Length of training | 9 | 7 | 14 | 12 | 16 | 3.3 | 1.41 | 58 |
| Time of year | 3 | 3 | 8 | 15 | 29 | 4.1 | 1.15 | 58 |
| Sponsor or trainer of the institute | 19 | 2 | 15 | 11 | 11 | 2.9 | 1.52 | 58 |
| State or district professional development requirements | 20 | 7 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 2.7 | 1.50 | 58 |
| Recommendation by other school staff | 19 | 5 | 11 | 14 | 9 | 2.8 | 1.50 | 58 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

### *Perceptions of Training Outcomes*

Another measure of the quality of the summer ESL institutes was teachers' perceptions of the training's outcomes in terms of affecting their ability to take the certification exam and improve their teaching practices. Table 9 presents the participants' ratings on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The highest rated aspects of the ISLA institute were receiving useful materials to prepare for the ESL/bilingual certification exam (mean=4.7) and receiving useful materials to help improve LEP student instruction (mean=4.5). Respondents reported that their teaching has improved, or will improve, as a result of attending the institute (mean=4.3) and that their students' performance has improved, or will improve, as a result of their attending the institute (mean=4.1). Finally, the majority of respondents reported they would recommend the ISLA summer ESL institutes to other teachers (mean=4.6).

**Table 9: Participant Perceptions of ESL Summer Institute Effectiveness and Outcomes**

| Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements about the institute(s) you attended: | Strongly Disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | Strongly Agree (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The ISLA institute provided me with useful materials that helped me (or will help me prepare for the ESL/bilingual certification exams. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 17 | 40 | 4.7 | *.51* | 58 |
| The ISLA institute provided me with useful materials that helped me improve the way I teach LEP students. | 0 | 0 | 3 | 23 | 31 | 4.5 | *.60* | 57 |
| The ISLA Web site will be a helpful resource for me. | 3 | 2 | 20 | 19 | 14 | 3.7 | *1.05* | 58 |
| My teaching has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the institute | 0 | 1 | 6 | 27 | 23 | 4.3 | *.72* | 57 |
| My students' performance has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the institute. | 0 | 0 | 14 | 26 | 17 | 4.1 | *.74* | 57 |
| I have shared what I learned at the institute with other teachers and/or school staff. | 2 | 6 | 12 | 27 | 11 | 3.7 | *1.02* | 58 |
| I would recommend the ISLA institute to other teachers. | 0 | 0 | 5 | 16 | 37 | 4.6 | *.65* | 58 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

## Summary of How the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Compare to "Promising Practices"

To better understand how the TAMUS ESL certification courses compared with best practices in professional development, SEDL staff experienced in ESL professional development and online learning environments reviewed the TAMUS online course and compared it to promising practices using recent research on teacher education and national standards on teacher professional development. SEDL also surveyed teachers who participated in the 2005 ISLA summer institutes to solicit their perceptions regarding the overall quality of the institutes, how they compared to similar trainings they have participated in, and their level of agreement regarding whether certain outcomes were obtained.

Results from the expert reviews concluded that the content of the TAMUS course materials and readings are strongly grounded in current research on ESL curriculum and instruction. However, the design and delivery of the online course does not adequately address the majority of standards for online professional development as detailed in the COIL and Seven Principles standards for technological support and learning environments. The review found the technical features of the ESL online course to be confusing and difficult to navigate. A strength of the TAMUS online course technology was the provision of discussion boards that allowed participant interaction with the instructor. However, interactions were generally characterized by questions and answers, rather than opportunities by the instructor to stimulate deeper understanding. Further, the course structure provides little opportunity for participants to interact with one another. Both participant interaction and participant/instructor interaction are key ingredients to facilitating deep content understanding through dialogue, debate, and reflection.

Results from the survey found that participants viewed the ISLA ESL trainings positively. In

comparison to other ESL/bilingual professional development, all but one respondent rated the ISLA institute as "above average" or "excellent." Key influences to participating in ISLA institutes identified by teachers included the content of the training, the time of year it was offered, and the availability of a stipend for attending. Least influential were state or district professional development requirements, recommendations by other school staff, and the sponsor or trainer of the institute. Teachers perceived the institute materials as useful both for preparing for the ESL/bilingual certification exam and for improving their LEP instruction. The majority of respondents also perceived the ISLA institute training as instrumental in current, or future, improvements in their teaching as well as their students' performance.

## TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE TAMUS ESL CERTIFICATION COURSES PREPARED TEACHERS TO TAKE THE ESL CERTIFICATION EXAM?

Both the TAMUS online and ISLA summer institute professional development opportunities are aimed at increasing the number of certified ESL/bilingual teachers. SEDL examined the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses and the extent to which they prepare teachers to take the ESL certification exam. Data sources for this comparison include expert reviews of the online ESL preparation course and surveys of participants of the ISLA summer institutes. The findings from these data sources are presented below.

### Expert Reviews of the Online ESL Preparation Course

In their reviews of the TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course, Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas focused on the organization of the online course and its alignment with the TExES ESL supplemental exam to determine whether the course adequately prepares participants to take the test.

***Organization of Online ESL Course Materials and Lessons***
According to SEDL's expert review, the TAMUS online ESL course materials and activities are aligned with the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam and organized by domain and competency. Participants complete a set of six steps, walking them through the introduction to the course (step 1), ESL teaching standards (step 2), important TEA documents (step 3), Domain I course materials (step 4), Domain II course materials (step 5), and Domain III course materials (step 6). Steps 4–6 contain 7 weeks of lessons over the 10 ESL test competencies. Table 10 presents the course schedule and sequence of lessons and readings for these steps of the course.

**Table 10: TAMUS Online ESL Course Sequence and Number of Activities, Required Readings, Optional Readings, and Resources**

| Week | Domain and Competency | | Number of Activities | Required Readings | Total Pages = | Optional Readings | Total Pages | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I | 1 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 12 | 273 | 4 |
| 2 | I | 2 | 3 | 4 | 54 | 8 | 192 | 3 |
| 3 | I | 3 | 1 | 2 | 35 | 1 | 15 | 3 |
| 4 | II | 4 | 0 | 5 | 97 | 8 | 32 | 2 |
| 5 | II | 5 | 2 | 3 | 45 | 5 | 123 | 1 |
| | | 6 | 3 | 2 | 29 | 2 | 41 | 0 |
| 6 | II | 7 | 5 | 4 | 18 | 5 | 56 | 0 |
| | III | 8 | 4 | 3 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 7 | III | 9 | 0 | 4 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | | 10 | 2 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

*Source.* TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course

Course materials for each competency consist of PowerPoint lessons, required readings, recommended (optional) readings, Web links to teaching resources, a discussion board, and quizzes for each competency. Within each PowerPoint lesson, participants are sometimes asked to complete activities in which they reflect on the readings and post reactions in the discussion area. For example, in Competency 3 the participants have a PowerPoint lesson (18 slides) that covers content-area instructional techniques. One slide offers eight suggestions that the ESL teachers should keep in mind to facilitate learning in the classroom. The subsequent activity asked participants to think

about their classroom and the number of suggested strategies they use in their instruction. Participants are then asked to generate additional suggestions not included on the list and post them on the WebCT discussion board. In addition to reviewing the TEKS, there is one required reading from a PDF of a book chapter (20 pages) and one optional but recommended reading from another book chapter (28 pages) on teaching strategies when working with language minority students.

Both reviewers noted the advantages of having the course materials available by domain and competency. Ms. Rivas noted their alignment to the certification exam:

> It is clear that the course content is carefully aligned with the SBEC/TexES standards for ESL certification, and in that regard should be helpful in preparing participants for the exam.

Ms. Hughes, however, considered the course structure of six steps across 7 weeks to be confusing. For example, Ms. Hughes noted:

> The organization and presentation of information throughout the course is an area of great concern. Assignments appear to be required weekly, but information is organized in a series of six steps. These steps do not correspond to the seven weekly assignments, and there appears to be no logical reason for organizing information into these six steps. In some cases, participants are directed from within one area to learning materials located in an entirely different section of the course (e.g., directing students to the Recent Demographics area from within Competency 10 information).

Furthermore, both Ms. Rivas and Ms. Hughes had concerns about the quantity of materials the participants were given to review and study and the time allotted, especially for Competencies 3–7 in Domain II.

Domain I content covers language concepts and language acquisition and represents approximately 25 percent of the ESL certification test. The TAMUS online course devotes 3 weeks and approximately 26 percent of the required readings to the treatment of Domain I content. Domain II content covers ESL teaching strategies and assessment and represents approximately 45 percent of the ESL certification test. The TAMUS online ESL course devoted 2.5 weeks and approximately 50 percent of the required readings to Domain II. Domain III content covers foundations of ESL education, cultural awareness, and family and community and represents approximately 30 percent of the test content. The online course covers this domain in 1.5 weeks and 24 percent of the required readings. Figure 4 shows the percentage of required readings for each domain.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Required Readings by Instructional Domain**



Percentage of Required Readings per Domain

Domain I
Domain II
Domain III

26%
50%
24%
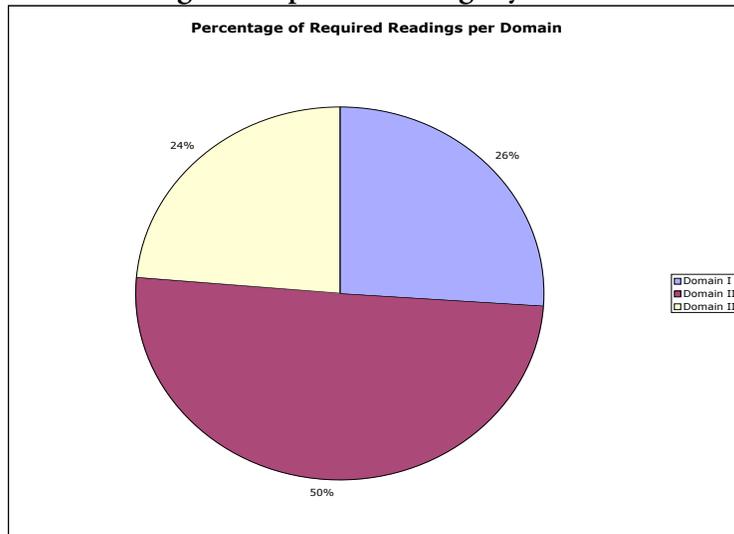
Both reviewers noted that without targeted questions that steer the reader, participants might get overwhelmed with the amount of required readings over such a short period of time. There is a large amount of information contained in the downloadable materials without directions that help participants prioritize reading the content. Ms. Rivas commented:

> The reading material for Domain II was so extensive as to potentially overwhelm the participants. It would also be beneficial to pose questions at the beginning of each lesson to guide participants as to the key ideas and concepts they are to absorb in their reading assignments.

### *ESL Certification Exam Resources*
As participants of the TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course proceed through the course, they are provided with or directed to resources and materials that help them prepare to the take the exam. These include direct links to SBEC educator standards, test preparation manuals, and the TEKS. The reviewers noted that, although these resources are available to most teachers online, the organization of them within the structure of the course and test frameworks was a benefit.

### *Weekly Quizzes*
The TAMUS online ESL certification course has a total of 10 quizzes for every competency. Each quiz consists of five multiple-choice items designed to assess participants' knowledge of the course content. Questions assess both factual information and participants' ability to think critically about the information, analyze it, or make judgments about it. According to Ms. Rivas, the TAMUS online ESL quiz questions are similar to the types of questions that are asked on the TExES ESL supplemental exam and provide participants an opportunity to practice taking items similar to the test as well as receive feedback on their responses.

## Survey Results From ESL Summer Institute Participants
A measure of the degree to which the summer ESL institutes prepared participants to take the ESL certification exam was based upon teachers' perceptions of whether the trainings provided new and useful materials and whether they had taken, or planned to take, the certification exam.

### Perceptions of Preparedness

The degree to which respondents reported their level of familiarity with the teaching strategies and subject matter presented in the institutes is presented in Table 11. These responses indicate that, prior to attending the institute, the majority of the ISLA institute participants had received little instruction or information on preparing for the ESL certification exam. Their mean rating, when asked to what extent they had already received instruction or information about ESL test preparation for certification (survey item 13, n=58), was 1.9 on a scale of *1=None, 2=A little, 3=About half, 4=Quite a bit,* and *5=All of it.*

**Table 11: Summer ESL Institute Participants' Previous Familiarity With Training Strategies and Content**

| Regarding the content presented in the ISLA institute, to what extent had you already received instruction or information about: | None (1) | A Little (2) | About Half (3) | Quite a Bit (4) | All of It (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Second Language Learning Theory | 10 | 26 | 12 | 8 | 2 | 2.4 | *1.04* | 58 |
| Methodology/Teaching Strategies | 4 | 19 | 12 | 22 | 1 | 3.0 | *1.03* | 58 |
| Assessment Practices | 9 | 20 | 17 | 12 | 0 | 2.6 | *.99* | 58 |
| ESL Test Preparation for Certification | 28 | 14 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 1.9 | *1.11* | 58 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

Another item about certification asked institute participants to rate their level of agreement, on a five-point scale anchored by *1=Strongly Disagree* and *5=Strongly Agree,* whether the ISLA institute provided them with useful materials that helped them, or will help them, prepare for the ESL/bilingual certification exams. Table 12 shows that the majority of the survey respondents *strongly agreed.*

**Table 12: ESL Summer Institutes Participant Perceptions on the Usefulness of Materials**

| Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement about the institute(s) you attended: | Strongly Disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | Strongly Agree (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The ISLA institute provided me with useful materials that helped me (or will help me) prepare for the ESL/bilingual certification exams. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 17 | 40 | 4.7 | *.51* | 58 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

### Certification Status of ISLA Summer Institute Participants

Because the social security numbers of participants of the TAMUS trainings were not available, their current certification status in ESL could not be verified using State Board Educator Certification data. However, items on the summer institute survey asked participants whether they held an ESL or bilingual teaching certificate and on which date they had taken, or planned to take, the certification exam. Table 13 shows that 27 participants reported having ESL certification and 3 reported having bilingual certification at the time of the survey administration (November 2005).

### Table 13: ESL/Bilingual Teaching Certification

|  | Yes | Percent | No | Percent | Missing Data | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESL | 27 | 47% | 30 | 52% | 1 | 1% |
| Bilingual | 3 | 5% | 52 | 90% | 3 | 5% |

Source: ISLA Summer Institute Survey. *N = 58.*

A total of 31 participants indicated that they had taken the exam in the months following their attendance in the ISLA summer institute but prior to the survey administration. Table 14 shows that 22 participants (71 percent) reportedly had taken the test and obtained ESL certification. During the same time period, 9 participants (29 percent) reported taking the test but did not have ESL certification. The remaining participants left the item blank or indicated they were planning to take the test at a later date.

### Table 14: Certification Status

| Date of Certification Exam | Do You Currently Hold a Teaching Certificate in ESL? Indicate Date on Which You Have Taken or Plan to Take Certification Exam. | |
|---|---|---|
|  | Yes | No |
| May 21, 2005 | 1* | -- |
| June 9, 2005 | 19* | 7* |
| October 1, 2005 | 2* | 2* |
| December 10, 2005 | -- | 5 |
| February 18, 2006 | -- | 4 |
| April 8, 2006 | -- | 4 |
| June 10, 2006 | -- | 2 |
| August 5, 2006 | -- | 1 |
| Total: | 22 | 25 |

*Source: ISLA Summer Institute Survey.* N = 47. *Participants who reportedly took the test prior to the survey administration in November 2005.

## Summary of How the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Prepare Teachers to Take the ESL Exam

A goal of the professional development provided by TAMUS is to increase the number of teachers who take and pass the ESL supplemental certification exam. To better understand how the TAMUS ESL certification courses prepare teachers to take the ESL exam, SEDL conducted expert reviews of the TAMUS online course, focusing on the organization of the online course and its alignment with the TExES ESL supplemental exam. In addition, SEDL surveyed teachers who participated in the ISLA summer institutes to solicit their perceptions regarding their ESL certification status and the likelihood that they will take the test in the future. Respondents were also asked to report the extent to which the training (a) provided them with new information on ESL approaches, methods, and teaching strategies, and (b) provided them with useful materials that helped them prepare to take the exam.

Results from the expert reviews concluded that the content of the TAMUS course materials and readings are aligned with the TExES ESL supplemental exam by domains and competencies and

provided certification resources that benefit teachers preparing for the exam. In addition, weekly quizzes were found to be similar to the types of questions asked on the TExES ESL exam. At the same time, the expert reviewers found the course structure to be confusing and had concerns about the amount of reading materials covered in the time allotted.

Results from the survey found that participants of the ISLA summer ESL institutes received useful resources and information targeted toward preparing for the ESL/bilingual exams that they had not previously been exposed to. The number of respondents who have taken, or plan to take, the exam suggests that ISLA institute materials are appropriate preparation resources for that exam. The majority of participants (71 percent) indicated they had taken the test and obtained ESL certification in the months following the summer institutes.

## To What Extent Have the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Prepared Teachers to Better Address the Needs of LEP Students?

In addition to preparing teachers to take and pass the ESL certification test, both types of the TAMUS professional development have goals for improving classroom instruction for LEP students. SEDL examined the TAMUS ESL certification preparation courses and the extent to which they prepare teachers to better address the needs of LEP students. Data sources for this comparison included expert reviews of the online ESL preparation course and surveys of participants of the ISLA summer institutes. The findings from these data sources are presented below.

### Expert Reviews of the Online ESL Preparation Course

In "E-Learning for Educators," NSDC holds online learning to the same standards as other more traditional forms of professional development. NSDC (2001) makes the following claims:

> Because staff development available through electronic resources serves the same function as face-to-face staff development, the context necessary to support adult learning, the processes by which they learn, and the content they need to increase student achievement are the same. E-learning has the potential to expand and enrich learning opportunities for educators employing alternative learning processes not available in the face-to-face arena. However, in order to be as effective as face-to-face staff development in deepening understanding and improving performance of both educators and their students, e-learning for educators will need to meet the same high standards as those for face-to-face professional learning. (p. 4)

In addition to emphasizing the importance of high standards for online professional development, NSDC also suggests that additional considerations must be made, such as the costs of maintaining the infrastructure and support necessary for teachers to effectively use the technology associated with online learning. NSDC suggests the following:

> It is imperative that measures of the effectiveness of e-learning for educators reach beyond the number of participants, completion rates, or preference for e-learning over face-to-face staff development to application of learning and results for students. (p. 11)

According to these standards, professional development aimed at improving classroom practices should

- be job-embedded and results-driven and incorporated into every teacher's work-day;
- be curriculum-centered and standards-based;
- provide teachers with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards;
- equip teachers with ways of providing various types of instruction based on individual differences;
- use teaching methods that mirror as closely as possible the methods teachers are expected to use with their students;

- prepare teachers to use a variety of classroom assessments;
- use collaborative problem-solving to allow for sharing of knowledge and expertise, reflection on classroom experiences, and discussion of new understandings among participants;
- be sustained, intellectually rigorous, and provide cumulative opportunities for implementing the content learned; and
- provide ongoing support for teachers to implement what they have learned.

In their reviews of the TAMUS online ESL certification course, Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas commented on the ability of the online course and materials to provide professional development aimed at improving classroom instruction for LEP students. Both expert reviewers acknowledged the importance of providing ESL test preparation via online courses and view the TAMUS online ESL certification preparation course as a step in the right direction toward improving the instruction of LEP students. Ms. Hughes explained:

> The NCLB goal that every child be taught by a qualified teacher underscores the central role that teachers play in the success of students. In rural areas of Texas, and other areas where resources are limited, it is often difficult for districts and schools to attract certified teachers, as well as to provide professional development opportunities for existing staff. Online professional development has the potential to provide teachers in these areas with the opportunity to strengthen their content and pedagogical knowledge provided the courses are of high quality. The design and delivery of online professional development is as critical as the material content in addressing the challenges associated with developing qualified teachers across the state of Texas.

However, both reviewers recognized the limits of the TAMUS online course and reported concerns that its design does not provide teachers professional development opportunities that will result in changes in the instruction of LEP students. These concerns regard three primary areas of the course: (1) organization and presentation of course content; (2) absence of activities that foster the development of an online professional learning community; and (3) the nature of the learning opportunities offered.

### *Organization and Presentation of Course Content*
As described earlier, both reviewers shared concerns about the inconsistent structure of the course lessons and learning activities. Ms. Hughes further explains:

> The alignment of the course's general framework with the TExES ESL certification test is beneficial for teachers preparing for the exam; however, the structure of the learning activities themselves is not consistent. Reading and composing discussion postings, for example, is a valuable part of most activities that should be required in all cases.

> In addition to the issue of consistency among activities, the internal organization of most of them is not as helpful as it could be, and related resources are weak. Activities (steps 2 and 3) have no overview of expectations, student instructions, or activities. There is a list of links to various types of readings and content, but no guidance on how to use this information to complete learning tasks. There are no instructions on how to visit and use the discussion area in cases where this is required

by weekly assignments. Also, the order in which weekly resources are presented is not in alignment with the order in which they are to be accessed. Steps 4 through 6 offer more consistency in the presentation of materials, although similar problems persist. Explicit and clear instructions, as well as a consistent organizational format, are key design features for reducing participant anxiety and facilitating success with learning activities.

Ms. Rivas also noted the absence of structured activities that lead to improved practice in the classroom. She identified several places where the presentation of the course content and structure of the course activities could be strengthened. For example, she suggested that the course design for presenting the content of Domain II be a combination of (a) lessons that review particular ESL approaches and (b) activities that require participants to engage in the practice and implementation of particular techniques.

In addition, Ms. Rivas felt the presentation of the content in Domain III was lacking important information on how teachers should overcome challenges that prevent family and community involvement. She noted that the Domain III lessons and activities could improve if they were structured in ways that facilitated changes in teacher practice. She explained:

> Bermúdez (1994) identifies various barriers that limit family involvement, including (1) working parents, (2) lack of confidence, (3) lack of English skills, (4) lack of understanding of the home-school partnership, (5) lack of understanding of the school system, (6) negative past experiences with schools, and (7) insensitivity and hostility on part of the school personnel. The TAMUS course does not address this.

### *Development of an Online Professional Learning Community*
In their reports, both reviewers emphasized that effective professional learning communities prepare for instruction collaboratively and take advantage of preparation as a learning opportunity. Participants form a professional community in which they examine and discuss student work in relation to standards and how it is differentially produced through a variety of instructional approaches. The reviewers observed that opportunities for such collaborative interaction with the instructor and other participants of the course are not part of the TAMUS online ESL course design. Ms. Hughes explains:

> The lack of opportunities for participants to collaborate with one another is an area of primary concern with respect to this issue. Whether online or face-to-face, without such opportunities for teachers to discuss, reflect, apply, and offer and receive constructive criticism as part of a professional learning community, the best that can be achieved with the course content is learning limited to the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of types of learning. Opportunities for application, synthesis, and evaluation of the ideas and concepts presented in the course should be added.

Similarly, Ms. Rivas noted:

> I view interaction among colleagues as one of most important sources of learning. It is apparent that the lessons were intended to provoke on-line discussion, planning, and actions that would lead participants to learn and acquire knowledge translating

into improved teacher practice. However, I found little evidence that such robust, cooperative learning actually occurred. Though the participants were passively encouraged to share their views and insights on the topics and issues by posting to the discussion board, there was only limited interaction with the instructor and fellow participants in some of the domains, particularly in the area of language.

### *Nature of the Learning Opportunities*

Finally, both reviewers voiced concerns about the nature of the learning opportunities afforded by the TAMUS online course. Both Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas stressed the importance of job-embedded learning structures for teachers in daily activities that include such elements as study groups, action research, and reflective logs. They also noted the importance of providing teachers with opportunities for lesson planning, reflection on classroom experiences, and discussions of new understandings. Both reviewers noted that there are no opportunities for the participants of the course to articulate and revise their thinking about the content and there are few activities that require the participant to reflect on their own classroom experience. Most activities involve reading handouts, articles, and book chapters and then summarizing or responding to the information. Without structured activities that engage learners in analyzing and applying information within the context of their own professional practice, it is difficult to determine whether participants are mastering the content presented. Ms. Hughes explained:

> Most of the learning fostered by the course activities is passive. Participants are occasionally instructed to reflect on the content presented but rarely to analyze, evaluate, or apply the content to their own professional practice in any authentic way.

Furthermore, both reviewers found little evidence of instructional methodologies using different learning styles. In her report, Ms. Rivas said:

> [M]ost lessons are presented in the form of PowerPoint presentations and independent readings; there was limited employment of instructional methodologies to address different learning styles. An important feature of effective learning experiences is the opportunity for learners to process information in more than one context and in more than one way. Especially important is that learners connect new information and concepts to their actual experience. Ideally, participants should be explicitly encouraged to consider how to apply new knowledge, strategies, and skills within the context of familiar situations.

Ms. Hughes agreed:

> There is no evidence that the course designers intended to accommodate for diverse talents and ways of learning among the course participants. Activities are prescriptive, and participants are not offered multiple ways to respond to the course content through the selection from among various activities or even to make choices within a single prescribed activity.

Finally, the reviewers noted that without school-based follow-up with the teachers, there is little expectation that what the teachers learn in the TAMUS online ESL certification course will translate into better instructional practices.

## Survey Results From ESL Summer Institute Participants

Of the 58 ISLA institute participants who completed surveys, 74 percent (n=43) stated that they currently taught ESL/bilingual students. Fifty percent of those respondents reported that between 1–20 percent of their current students were ESL/bilingual, and another 10 percent reported that between 21–50 percent were ESL/bilingual. Regarding the structure of ESL/bilingual programs for LEP students, 54 of the respondents reported that their programs focused on English as a second language (ESL), three reported using transitional programs, and one indicated the focus was dual language.

A series of items on the survey asked ISLA institute participants about their perceptions of the course with respect to their ability to better address the needs of LEP students after having attended the institute. As shown in Table 15, survey respondents reported that the materials from the institute are, or will be, useful in helping improve their teaching of LEP students (mean=4.5).

**Table 15: Participant Perceptions of ISLA Summer Institute Outcomes**

| Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements about the institute(s) you attended: | Strongly Disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | Strongly Agree (5) | M | *sd* | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The ISLA institute provided me with useful materials that helped me improve the way I teach LEP students. | 0 | 0 | 3 | 23 | 31 | 4.5 | *.60* | 57 |
| The ISLA Web site will be a helpful resource for me. | 3 | 2 | 20 | 19 | 14 | 3.7 | *1.05* | 58 |
| My teaching has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the institute. | 0 | 1 | 6 | 27 | 23 | 4.3 | *.72* | 57 |
| My students' performance has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the institute. | 0 | 0 | 14 | 26 | 17 | 4.1 | *.74* | 57 |
| I have shared what I learned at the institute with other teachers and/or school staff. | 2 | 6 | 12 | 27 | 11 | 3.7 | *1.02* | 58 |
| I would recommend the ISLA institute to other teachers. | 0 | 0 | 5 | 16 | 37 | 4.6 | *.65* | 58 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

Ratings also indicated that most participants perceived that their teaching and their students' performance has improved, or will improve, as a result of attending the institute. The majority of respondents further indicated that they would recommend the ISLA summer institute to other teachers (mean=4.6).

The institute participants were also asked about the frequency of specific instructional methods that they currently use with their ESL/bilingual students. The purpose of these survey items was to establish the degree to which teachers who completed the summer institutes reported using instructional strategies promoted by the institutes. Items were rated on a scale from 1–5 (*1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often,* and *5=In all or almost all of the lessons).*

**Table 16: ISLA Summer Institute Participant Perceptions of ESL/Bilingual Teaching**

| In your current class(es) with ESL/ bilingual students, how often do you: | Never | Rarely (a few times a month) | Sometimes (once or twice a week) | Often (several times a week) | In all or almost all of the lessons | M | sd | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Allow LEP students to express themselves in their primary language during teacher and group interactions? | 4 | 6 | 13 | 16 | 5 | 3.3 | 1.13 | 44 |
| Assess English language development? | 2 | 5 | 13 | 10 | 15 | 3.7 | 1.84 | 45 |
| Assess primary language development? | 14 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 2.6 | 1.41 | 45 |
| Display student work in English? | 2 | 7 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 3.6 | 1.21 | 44 |
| Display student work in students' primary language? | 22 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1.9 | 1.16 | 45 |
| Embed cultural activities in instruction? | 1 | 10 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 3.2` | .99 | 45 |
| Group LEP students for English language instruction according to language proficiency? | 6 | 9 | 11 | 11 | 8 | 3.1 | 1.31 | 45 |
| Group LEP students for primary language instruction (i.e., Spanish) according to language proficiency? | 19 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 2.3 | 1.36 | 45 |
| Have meaningful and supportive parental involvement in the classroom? | 13 | 19 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 2.2 | 1.04 | 45 |
| Limit the use of primary language use during instruction? | 10 | 16 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 2.6 | 1.37 | 45 |
| Provide instruction in language arts in English, which includes understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills? | 6 | 1 | 3 | 19 | 25 | 4.0 | 1.40 | 45 |
| Provide instruction in language arts in the LEP students' primary language, which includes understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills? | 26 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2.0 | 1.40 | 45 |
| Provide instruction in math, science, and social studies in English? | 10 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 26 | 3.7 | 1.71 | 45 |
| Provide instruction in math, science, and social studies in the LEP students' primary language? | 27 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1.7 | 1.69 | 45 |
| Use learning centers with LEP students?* | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2.8 | 1.42 | 16 |
| Use technology in lessons?* | 0 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 3.6 | .81 | 16 |

*Source.* Survey of ISLA ESL summer institute participants. M=mean; *sd*=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.
* These items were unintentionally omitted from the online survey; responses reflect mail survey ratings only.

As displayed in Table 16, the most often used methods included:

- providing instruction in language arts in English;
- providing instruction in math, science, and social studies in English; and
- assessing English language development.

Least often used instruction methods included:

- providing instruction in math, science, and social studies in the LEP students' primary language;
- providing instruction in language arts in the LEP students' primary language; and
- displaying student work in students' primary language .

Overall, the results indicate that many of the teachers who participated in the summer institutes use instructional strategies promoted by TAMUS with some frequency throughout a term. However, a proportion of respondents indicated that they never or rarely use certain teaching strategies especially strategies that rely on the use of the LEP students' primary language. Only a small number of respondents reported using the strategies on a regular, daily basis unless they were methods which relied on English.

## Summary of How the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Prepare Teachers to Better Address the Needs of LEP Students

A goal of the TAMUS ESL professional development is to help teachers better address the needs of LEP students. SEDL expert reviewers reviewed the TAMUS online course, focusing on the course's ability to provide professional development aimed at improving classroom instruction for LEP students. In addition, SEDL surveyed teachers who participated in the ISLA summer institutes to solicit their perceptions regarding the percentage of their students who are LEP and the types of programs they use to teach them. Respondents were also asked to report the extent to which the training resulted in (a) improvements to their teaching of LEP students, and (b) improvements in LEP student performance. Respondents also reported the frequency with which they used specific instructional methods with their current ESL/bilingual students.

Results from the expert reviews concluded that the TAMUS online ESL certification course is an important step to providing teachers with access to ESL professional development opportunities. However, the review pointed out several limitations of the online course that make the outcome of changing teaching practices challenging. These concerns address three primary areas of the course: (1) organization and presentation of course content; (2) absence of activities that foster the development of an online professional learning community; and (3) the nature of the learning opportunities offered.

Survey results from the teachers who have attended the ISLA institute indicated that they perceived the course to provide useful information and resources to better address instructional needs both for teaching and student learning. As such, most believed that their teaching and their students' performance has been, or will be, positively impacted by their participation in the ISLA institute. The large majority of ISLA institute participants indicated that they were currently teaching ESL/bilingual students and that the typical program at their school focused on English as a Second Language. The majority of the participants indicated they would recommend the ISLA institute to other teachers.

## How Could the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Improve?

The purpose of SEDL's evaluation was to provide TEA and TAMUS with formative information that will help the TAMUS staff identify modifications or refinements to the ESL certification preparation courses that can be made to increase their effectiveness for future teachers. Data sources for this evaluation question included expert reviews of the online ESL certification preparation course and survey responses from participants of the ISLA summer institutes. The findings from these data sources are presented below.

### Expert Reviews of the Online ESL Preparation Course

Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas made several recommendations to improve the TAMUS online ESL course. A full set of recommendations is listed in their expert review reports in Appendix D. To ensure a low level of technological difficulties in accessing the TAMUS online course, Ms. Hughes recommended the following:

- Adding a comprehensive, Web-based orientation to the course that includes a description of the technical requirements to access course content, an overview of the weekly course structure, participant outcomes, a preview of weekly activities, a discussion of how participants will be assessed, WebCT features to be used in the course, and instruction for accessing technical assistance
- Displaying course instructions and content from within the course Web pages to the extent possible with the additional option to download copies of the materials
- Providing all downloadable materials in a consistent and universal format, such as PDF

Regarding the development of an online professional learning community, both Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas recommended that structured opportunities for participants to interact with one another socially should be added. They provided the following suggestions to increase opportunities for building a cohesive online learning community:

- Adding an initial activity designed to provide participants with an introduction to other participants in a lighthearted, nonacademic context
- Adding activities throughout the course to promote meaningful interaction among participants, especially activities requiring small and large group discussions and activities to be completed by small groups of participants
- Expanding and emphasizing the reflective components of the course so that they appear in more activities. These reflections should be designed to elicit real-world experiences, background information, and applications of the concepts being discussed rather than simply a summarization of information learned. For example, the discussion prompt in Week 3 to read an article and respond by "discussing several factors that are involved in L2 acquisition" could be expanded to elicit the impact that these factors have on classroom instruction. These reflective activities should also be designed to require participants to build on the ideas of others presented in the discussion area.

Finally, regarding the nature of the learning opportunities offered, Ms. Hughes and Ms. Rivas suggested that active learning opportunities should be added. They recommended activities that promote analysis, evaluation, and application of course content to professional practice in authentic ways. They provided the following suggestions to improve the likelihood that participants actually transfer new knowledge and skills to their own professional practice:

- There should be learning activities designed for every learning task. For example, if a course participant is asked to read something, an activity should be designed that provides focus for that reading.
- Content should be provided in multiple formats, not just text. The use of best practices video is advisable, especially video depictions of teacher interactions with students where particular concepts are illustrated. For example, regarding Competency 3, which deals with ESL instruction, the use of either video or audio for instructor-delivered content is advised. The use of interactive chat for discussions of newly presented content is also a desirable feature for online learning.
- Design of more learner-centered activities that provide an opportunity for participants to organize the information they have learned in ways that are personally meaningful should be considered. Participants would be asked to apply what they are learning in various ways. Ideally, activities would require them to apply what they are learning to their own classroom and students in order to ensure transfer of their learning into their professional practice. Activities similar to the Competency 8 activity where participants are instructed to research and report back on ESL programs available in their district are a good start.
- Assessment tasks should be added that require learners to demonstrate their knowledge in an authentic manner, rather than through mere rote memorization of facts for a quiz. An emphasis on discussion postings and reflection as a component of assessment should be considered.

## Survey Results From ESL Summer Institute Participants

Survey findings indicated that the ISLA institute provided useful materials for teachers in preparing for the ESL/bilingual exams and that materials and information from the institute were valuable in enhancing teachers' instructional techniques and impacting their LEP students' academic performance. One open-ended question asked institute participants about the components of the institute that most enabled them to assist their LEP students. Of the 42 respondents to this question, more than half indicated that the focus on teaching methodology/strategies provided practical information that enhanced their instructional practices with LEP students. Teachers mentioned gaining insight into constructive practices through visual instruction techniques and communication activities. They further noted that learning about scaffolding strategies, as well as the instructors' modeling of various teaching practices for use with LEP students, were beneficial aspects of the institute. Another fourth of the participants found the instruction on language learning theory to have enriched their knowledge for effectively teaching ESL students. Two of the respondents mentioned assessment and evaluation information as useful, while a few others perceived the entire institute as containing content that was very valuable.

When asked about what were the least useful components of the institute, 68 percent of those responding to this open-ended question (n=37) perceived all that was offered as important and helpful to assisting LEP students' performance. Of the remaining 32 percent, three participants mentioned the second language learning theory as least useful, two stated that the student assessment information was not needed as others at their schools fulfilled that role, another two mentioned the test preparation component, and one felt the strategies instruction was not useful. The other four comments addressed the presenters at the institute and the lecture format as least useful aspects of the institute.

## Summary of How the TAMUS ESL Certification Courses Could Improve

The overall purpose of SEDL's evaluation was to identify both strengths and weaknesses of the TAMUS ESL certification courses so that modifications or refinements can be made to increase the effectiveness of the courses for future teachers. To do this, SEDL gathered the expert reviewers' recommendations for the online ESL course and participants' reactions to the ISLA summer institutes.

Expert reviewers provided recommendations for course improvements that addressed ways to improve the delivery of the online course to better impact teacher transfer of new knowledge and skills. Among their recommendations were ways to more effectively orient participants to the course and types of presentation formats and participant activities that would facilitate learning and application of the course content in teachers' classrooms.

ISLA summer institute participants described aspects of the training that were most and least helpful in enabling them to assist their LEP students. Overall, participants generally praised the training for enhancing their instructional techniques and impacting their LEP students' performance. Only a few respondents described "least helpful" components of the training. These included specific topics addressed at the institute as well as the presentation format.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TAMUS

This report summarizes SEDL's formative evaluation that occurred during the latter part of the first year of TAMUS's technical assistance to LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients. The goal of this evaluation was to supply formative information that would help strengthen TAMUS services for future grantees and ensure the likelihood that the desired long-term outcomes would be obtained. Specifically, the evaluation was to examine the quality and effectiveness of TAMUS's support services aimed at preparing teachers for ESL certification exams and improving teachers' proficiency in meeting the needs of ESL students. The following five evaluation questions guided SEDL's evaluation approach and methods:

1. To what extent were LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees supported by the TAMUS services?
2. How do the TAMUS ESL courses compare to "promising practices" in instructional technology and ESL professional development?
3. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL courses prepared teachers to take the ESL certification exam?
4. To what extent have the TAMUS ESL courses prepared teachers to better address the needs of LEP students?
5. How could the TAMUS ESL courses improve?

Methods for this evaluation included focus groups with ISLA staff, review of participation records for both the ISLA summer ESL institutes and the online certification preparation course, expert reviews of the online certification preparation course, and surveys of participants attending the 2005 ISLA summer institute trainings. The following conclusions and recommendations were drawn from the evaluation data gathered using the various methods.

- **TAMUS achieved many of its goals in the first year, including developing and implementing the summer ESL institutes and online ESL certification preparation course. However, because Cycle 1 grantees proposed and implemented programs prior to the TAMUS contract, a limited number of outreach support services were provided to Cycle 1 grantee schools.**

The first year of TAMUS's award from TEA corresponded with the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant awards. TAMUS's activities in Year 1 were primarily devoted to setting up offices, hiring staff, meeting with the project advisory committee, creating the project Web site, designing a needs assessment process for grant recipients, and implementing the newly designed summer ESL institutes and online ESL certification preparation course.

While the expectations for TAMUS in Year 1 were clearly focused on program development, school-based technical assistance and outreach toward the 20 LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grant recipients did not occur as planned. This resulted largely from the fact that the LEP SSI grant structure did not integrate the TAMUS support services into the grantees' planned scope of work. School districts, charter schools, and shared services arrangements that applied for the LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grants proposed plans and programs without knowledge of the TAMUS support services. Upon award of grants, Cycle 1 grantees began implementing their plans independent of the TAMUS services. As such, many of the ISLA campus-level support services were not implemented in Cycle 1 campuses. Instead, ISLA focused on providing LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees with access to a variety of professional

development opportunities including the online ESL course facilitated by course instructors at the College Station campus and ESL summer institutes provided by ISLA staff at the Corpus Christi campus.

Participation records indicated that participants of the ISLA summer institutes were fairly evenly represented by teachers from Cycle 1 schools and teachers from other schools. Because Texas A&M–College Station could not release unique identifiers, school, and demographic data on the teachers who enrolled in the online ESL course, the degree to which participants represented teachers from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 school was not possible to ascertain. When grantee status was known, 13 percent of the online participants came from LEP SSI, Cycle 1 schools.

Through the focus groups with ISLA staff, SEDL became aware that the grant structure was modified to greater align the TAMUS services with the needs of Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 grantees. With the infrastructure of ISLA secured and the development of support materials complete, SEDL is confident that outreach efforts will be greater utilized by future LEP SSI grant recipients. SEDL **recommends** that TAMUS develop and implement a strategy-based outreach plan to deliver an expanded set of services to the target audience of LEP SSI grant recipients. This includes tracking detailed information on recipients of the services, including the online ESL course.

- **At its present stage of development, the online ESL certification preparation course is on its way to reflecting "promising practices" in instructional technology and ESL professional development, but has many areas that could be strengthened.**

SEDL staff experienced in ESL professional development and online learning environments reviewed the content and delivery of the TAMUS online ESL course and compared it to promising practices using recent research on teacher education and national standards on teacher professional development. The online course is in the early stages of implementation and therefore should be assessed with an eye toward modification and refinement. It is unrealistic to assume that a newly developed and implemented course will automatically reflect all of the promising practices in instructional technology and ESL professional development.

That said, results from the expert reviews concluded that the content of the online course is grounded in current research on ESL professional development—an important, yet sometimes overlooked, component. In subjecting the online course to a comparison against the standards set forth by the COIL standards and the Seven Principles, the expert reviewers identified several areas for improvement. First, the review found the technical features of the online course to be confusing and difficult to navigate. The reviewers offered several **recommendations** to improve the technical interface of the online course, as well as a recommendation to provide students with more explicit instruction on how to utilize the online format.

Another area of suggested improvement concerned the number of opportunities the online course provided for instructor and student interaction. Promising practices have identified student and instructor participation and discussion to be an essential component of online learning environments. The reviewers acknowledged that the course was strengthened by the inclusion of discussion boards, yet the use and structure of the discussion boards were not being implemented to their full potential. Beyond the inclusion of discussion boards to promote student and instructor interaction, the reviewers **recommended** that the overall design of the online course encourage more dialogue, debate, and reflection among participants, leading to a deeper understanding of the content with which they are working. SEDL **recommends** that TAMUS online course developers

examine the expert reviews to prioritize ways to begin refining the online ESL course.

- **The ISLA summer ESL institutes and online ESL certification preparation courses are providing teachers with useful preparation for the ESL/bilingual certification exam. Importantly, summer ESL institute participants indicated that the exam preparation that they received consisted of information and resources they had not previously been exposed to. This suggests that the institutes are responding to an unmet need and do not reflect duplicate services.**

In addition to participants' survey responses indicating that they received new and useful resources and information that prepared them for the ESL/bilingual certification exam, results from the expert reviews concluded that the content of the online course is aligned with the TExES ESL supplemental exam. Further, the reviewers noted that the online course provided useful certification resources to teachers and the weekly quizzes were considered helpful in that the quiz questions were similar to those asked on the TExES ESL exam. These positive findings are mitigated by the expert reviewers' conclusion that the course structure was confusing and their concerns about the density of reading materials relative to the course length. SEDL **recommends** that TAMUS online course developers and ISLA staff use SEDL's evaluation results to prioritize ways to begin refining the online ESL course and summer ESL institutes in ways that will help teachers better prepare for the ESL certification exam.

- **The ISLA summer ESL institute and online ESL certification preparation course have the potential to prepare teachers to better address the needs of LEP students. However, several limits of the online course make the outcome of changing teaching practices challenging.**

While it is a goal of the TAMUS ESL professional development to help teachers better address the needs of LEP students, this represents a long range goal after the courses have reached a mature level of development and implementation. At this stage in the program model, it is necessary to first evaluate the quality and value of the course content and the delivery mechanisms. This current formative evaluation produced several recommendations to improve the content and delivery of the courses. Once the modifications are made, future evaluation approaches can begin to evaluate the intermediate goal of improved teacher practices. SEDL **recommends** that TAMUS online course developers and ISLA staff use SEDL's evaluation results to prioritize ways to begin refining the online ESL course and summer ESL institutes in ways that will help teachers better address the needs of LEP students.

At this time, the evaluation findings are limited to teachers' and reviewers' perceptions of the courses' potential. Because not every teacher had applied their course learning from the ISLA summer institutes by the time of the survey, many of the teachers could only speak to their expectation that their skills would improve and that their new knowledge and skills would positively impact their LEP students' academic success. The reviewers' perceptions of the online course were limited to their analysis of the course content and delivery medium, which provides a one-dimensional assessment of the online course. Because course content and delivery go hand-in-hand, the reviewers' perceptions would benefit from the additional analysis of the teachers' experiences with the online course, including their perceptions of the degree to which the course is useful in impacting their knowledge/skills and positively influencing their students.

Speaking to the potential of the two courses, survey results indicated that most ISLA summer ESL institute participants perceived that their teaching and their students' performance had improved, or

will improve, as a result of attending the institute. The majority of the participants further indicated that they would recommend the ISLA summer ESL institute to other teachers. Participants reported using instructional strategies promoted through the training with some frequency throughout a term. However, a proportion of respondents indicated that they never or rarely use certain teaching strategies especially strategies that rely on the use of the LEP students' primary language. Additionally, the expert reviewers concluded that the online course is an important step to providing teachers with access to ESL professional development opportunities. However, several limitations within the TAMUS online ESL course were identified that make the outcome of changing teacher practices unlikely to be achieved by the course alone. Recommendations for increasing the likelihood of obtaining such outcomes included providing job-embedded, problem-solving situations in a realistic context, and opportunities for lesson planning, reflection on classroom experiences, and discussions of new understandings.

- **The ISLA summer ESL institute and the online ESL certification preparation course have the dual goals of preparing teachers to pass the ESL/bilingual certification exam and improving teachers' ESL instruction with the intent of better meeting the needs of ESL students. As they currently exist, the two courses represent alternative delivery mechanisms for accomplishing the goals.**

Both the ESL summer institutes and the online ESL course share two goals: (1) prepare teachers to take and pass the ESL/bilingual certification exam; and (2) improve teachers' ESL instruction with the intent of better meeting the needs of ESL students. As presented to SEDL, the two courses represent alternative delivery mechanisms for accomplishing these goals. One delivery mechanism provides face-to-face training, while the other presents the content in a virtual environment. Each of the two goals is significant and challenging to accomplish in its own right, but they are not necessarily related to one another. In other words, the ability to pass the ESL/bilingual certification exam may not be related to a teachers' classroom instruction, and an effective and qualified classroom teacher may not be prepared to pass the certification exam. SEDL **recommends** that the development and articulation of a "theory of change" and logic map will increase the likelihood that the ISLA summer ESL institute and online ESL certification preparation course lead to the desired outcomes. Each course would benefit from a better alignment between course content, delivery mechanism, and anticipated outcomes.

Given that the two goals may require different intervention strategies, the question arises as to whether each course is trying to accomplish too much. Is it realistic to expect two different course formats to equally prepare teachers for the certification exam and improve their classroom instruction? SEDL **recommends** that the program developers consider refining the goals of the two courses in such a way that there is stronger alignment among the course content, delivery mechanism, and anticipated outcomes for each course.

More specifically, it is **recommended** that TAMUS course developers and ISLA staff consider focusing the goals of the online course on preparing teachers to pass the certification exam and focusing the goals of the ISLA summer ESL institute on the improvement of teacher practices. The rationale for this recommendation comes from the perspective that the online delivery mechanism is better suited for the transmission of the types of knowledge and test-taking skills necessary for passing the certification exam, whereas the face-to-face, multiday format of the summer ESL institute meets the conditions needed for meaningful transfer of knowledge and skills related to improved classroom instruction and student learning.

By refining the goals of each course to better match the delivery mechanism, each course is expected to maximize its impact. In addition, the differentiation of goals minimizes a duplication of efforts, strengthens the value of each service, and provides a stronger argument for teachers to participate in both courses. With the way the courses are now structured, there is no real benefit to taking both courses because they purport to have the same goals and objectives. If the courses were differentiated, however, teachers would be more likely to see the value in taking both. One course would prepare them for the certification exam, and the other course would provide an opportunity to improve one's teaching.

- **SEDL's evaluation of the TAMUS support of LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees had several limitations including unbalanced methods. Future evaluation is needed.**

It is relevant, at this point, to discuss the limitations of SEDL's study. In addition to a focus on the online ESL course, modifications to the evaluation design introduced a focus on the ISLA summer ESL institutes. Although the goals for each course are the same, the ISLA summer ESL institutes were assessed only in terms of the participants' perceptions of the institutes as useful and informative. The content of the ISLA summer ESL institutes was not reviewed. The TAMUS online ESL course, on the other hand, had its content assessed but did not include participant evaluations. Therefore, the evaluation methods became unbalanced and the findings cannot speak to the quality of both the course content and participant reactions for both of the two courses. The findings are limited to the following: (1) participants perceived the ISLA summer ESL institutes to be useful, but the quality of the summer ESL institute content is undetermined; and (2) conversely, the online ESL course consists of high-quality content, but we don't know what, if anything, the online course participants gained from the experience.

It is **recommended** that future evaluations of the TAMUS ESL professional development include assessments of content, delivery, and participant outcomes for both the online courses and summer institutes. Additionally, future evaluation activities should document and track the number of teachers who subsequently take and pass the exam following the course. The percentage of teachers who take and pass the exam following course participation can then be compared to state averages. Because such analyses are dependent on obtaining social security numbers of the participants of the TAMUS courses and workshops, and such information is generally not available to outside sources, SEDL **recommends** that TEA require that TAMUS provide such information in the future for TEA staff to analyze. This type of data will provide the best indication of whether the courses are adequately preparing teachers for the exams.

As the grant program matures beyond the stage of intensive development, the program can begin to offer a wider selection of support services beyond the two professional development courses. In the next grant cycle, it is expected that TAMUS will focus on developing partnerships with the LEP SSI grant recipients and will respond more directly to the specific needs of the individual campuses. SEDL recommends the following components be added to the evaluation approach:

- Conduct an expert review of the ISLA summer ESL institute content.
- Assess participants' perceptions of the online course with surveys.
- Continue assessing participants' perceptions of the ISLA summer ESL institutes using the survey method.
- Evaluate the full spectrum of support services that TAMUS offers.
- Track the number of LEP SSI teachers who have taken and passed the certification exam before and after receiving TAMUS services and compare the passing rates to state averages.

- Conduct site visits to a sample of the LEP SSI grant recipients to assess the LEP SSI grant recipients' perceptions of the support they've received from TAMUS.
- Administer pre- and post-participation surveys to participating teachers from the LEP SSI grant recipient campuses. The surveys should collect information about teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and instructional practices prior to and following the receipt of TAMUS support services. A design of this type, used in conjunction with a documentation of the TAMUS support services that were received, will allow for changes and outcomes to be identified.

In summary, this formative evaluation of the first year of TAMUS technical assistance to LEP SSI grant recipients reveals that two of the support services, the ISLA summer ESL institute and the online ESL certification preparation course, reflect some of the field's best practices, with room for improvement. Both courses have the potential to provide excellent preparation for the ESL/bilingual certification exam, and teachers attending the ISLA summer ESL institute believed that the experience would positively impact their ability to meet the needs of their LEP students. The recommendations offered above are intended to improve the courses specifically, as well the overall grant initiative.

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**LEP SSI Cycle 1 Grant Recipients and Award Amounts**

|  | Grantee | ESC Region | Award Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Edinburg ISD | 1 | $424,998 |
| 2 | Santa Maria ISD | 1 | $273,825 |
| 3 | Weslaco ISD | 1 | $408,386 |
| 4 | Alvin ISD | 4 | $183,930 |
| 5 | Pearland ISD | 4 | $326,574 |
| 6 | Sulpher Springs ISD | 8 | $220,753 |
| 7 | Dallas ISD | 10 | $425,000 |
| 8 | ESC Region 10 | 10 | $425,000 |
| 9 | Fort Worth CAN! Academy | 11 | $180,915 |
| 10 | Fort Worth ISD | 11 | $180,915 |
| 11 | Lake Worth ISD | 11 | $425,000 |
| 12 | Pilot Point ISD | 11 | $196,920 |
| 13 | Belton ISD | 12 | $215,426 |
| 14 | ESC Region 12 | 12 | $425,000 |
| 15 | ESC Region 13 | 13 | $425,000 |
| 16 | Georgetown ISD | 13 | $425,000 |
| 17 | Amarillo ISD | 16 | $424,312 |
| 18 | Yselta ISD | 19 | $425,000 |
| 19 | North East ISD | 20 | $223,676 |
| 20 | Northside ISD | 20 | $424,202 |

## Focus Group Protocol

Hello. This is Erin McCann and my name is Melissa Dodson. We both work for SEDL, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). The Texas Education Agency has contracted SEDL to conduct a study of support activities provided under the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Student Success Initiative Grants. The purpose of this focus group is to collect information about the goals and objectives of ISLA and the degree to which progress has been made in achieving them.

Please note that comments made by individual's will not be attributed to them and will be kept confidential.

I would like to tape-record the session to ensure that I do not miss any important information. The tape will be used to take notes from the focus group and then will be erased or discarded. Does anyone object to the tape-recording?

**Questions**

1. Let's go around the room, introduce ourselves, and if you will, please describe each of your roles in ISLA. How long have you been working at ISLA?

2. O.K. Let's begin by identifying the goals and objectives of ISLA. Can you walk us through the centers goals and planned activities and whether the work proceeded as planned?

3. What problems, if any, arose that delayed the ISLA's progress in supporting LEP SSI, Cycle 1 grantees?

4. Because we will be developing a survey of participants of the ESL Summer Institutes, it is helpful for us to understand more about what the institutes are trying to accomplish. Can you describe the goals of the summer institutes?

5. What are the expected teacher outcomes?  Please explain what participants will gain from the training.

Probe for **teaching strategies**

Probe for **resources provided**

Probe for **student outcomes expected**

Probe for **follow-up support provided after the training**

## APPENDIX C

## TEA EVALUATION EXPERT REVIEW GUIDELINES

## Overview of Evaluation Project

In March 2005, TEA awarded a contract to SEDL to evaluate the Texas A&M University System's support activities related to the Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative Grants. TEA asked SEDL to review the overall quality and effectiveness of TAMUS technical assistance, research, and professional development services related to the following areas:

1.  Curriculum analysis and alignment;
2.  Student performance analysis;
3.  Improvement planning;
4.  Professional development opportunities, including online ESL certification preparation and bilingual certification assistance; and
5.  Identification of promising practices used in grantee school districts.

## Purpose of Expert Reviews

A major component of this evaluation study is to determine the quality and effectiveness of the TAMUS online professional development by examining its content and delivery and comparing it to "promising practices" and national standards in ESL teaching and online learning. Two approaches using expert reviews of the online professional development will be used:

1.  a content review of the ESL information and materials provided by the online training and certification, and
2.  a review of the delivery and structure of the online professional development focusing on the effectiveness of the online medium and its ability to foster authentic learning environments.

## Expert Review Panel

The expert review panel members are:
*   Maggie Rivas, Program Associate at SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center (SECAC) in Louisiana, will conduct the content review of the TAMUS online professional development.
*   Kim Hughes, Program Associate with SEDL's SouthCentral Regional Technology in Education Consortium (RTEC), will conduct the review of the delivery of the online medium.

## Overview of Expert Review Tasks

Each reviewer will be provided with copies of CDs that contain the online professional development materials and resources along with a username and password. Each reviewer will also be provided the objectives of the study and general guidelines for conducting the review and submitting their evaluation reports. The reviewers will be asked to compare the content and delivery of the online professional development with promising practices in ESL teaching and online professional development, to provide the criteria for making their assessments, and to list references for their reviews. Questions to guide these reviews include the following:
*   Is the TAMUS online professional development grounded in promising practices and clinical knowledge of teaching and learning in the fields of ESL education and online learning?

- Is the TAMUS online professional development grounded in national and state standards for ESL teaching and online learning?

No other directives will be given to ensure a fair, impartial review of the materials. Each will have an opportunity to review the draft report to make sure that their comments and opinions are reported accurately.

## Timeline

| Tasks: | Completed By: |
|---|---|
| Melissa Dodson sends letters of request to reviewers describing the evaluation project and expectations for what reviewers will do | August 3, 2005 |
| Melissa Dodson provides training materials for review | August 19, 2005 |
| Reviewers submit their comments to Melissa Dodson | October 31, 2005 |
| Melissa Dodson provides summary of expert review to reviewers for accuracy check. | November 18, 2005 |
| Reviewers provide feedback on expert review summary to Melissa Dodson | December 1, 2005 |

## Reviewer Tasks

Each member of the Expert Panel is being asked to:
1. Review all the materials, using these guidelines to assist with the evaluation.
2. Provide written responses to the list of questions in Section 1 of the Expert Panel Feedback Guide.
3. Refer to specific sources and references to help you formulate your responses.
4. Provide final comments in Section 2 of the Feedback Guide.
5. Provide list of references in Section 3 of the Feedback Guide.
6. Submit your responses electronically to Melissa Dodson by the deadline arranged.
7. Retain copies of your responses and the materials provided for future conversations with SEDL evaluation staff.
8. Refrain from sharing the contents of your evaluation with anyone outside of the assigned SEDL evaluation staff.
9. Be available in the future to review SEDL's summary of the Expert Review section of the TEA Evaluation report for accuracy in reporting.

## Special Considerations

- Your evaluation is one piece of the overall evaluation project. Please be sure your responses are concise and clear.
- Your responses will be summarized by SEDL evaluation staff to incorporate this part of the evaluation into the final report. SEDL will send summaries to you to be certain the summaries are accurate.
- Quotes may be taken directly from your provided responses.

- Findings from this evaluation are politically sensitive. Please be mindful of the way you choose to describe your findings and be prepared to defend your evaluation to critical policy makers and policy influencers.
- Please do not release your evaluation findings to anyone outside of the approved list of SEDL contacts.

# EXPERT REVIEW OF THE DELIVERY OF THE TAMUS ONLINE ESL CERTIFICATE PREP COURSE

Kimberly Hughes, M.Ed.

## Section 1. How does the TAMUS online professional development compare to "promising practices" in instructional technology and online learning environments?

The NCLB goal that every child be taught by a qualified teacher underscores the central role that teachers play in the success of students. In rural areas of the Texas, and other areas where resources are limited, it is often difficult for districts and schools to attract certified teachers, as well as to provide professional development opportunities for existing staff. Online professional development has the potential to provide teachers in these areas with the opportunity to strengthen their content and pedagogical knowledge provided the course are of high quality. The design and delivery of online professional development is as critical as the material content in addressing the challenges associated with developing qualified teachers across the state of Texas.

In a 2003 meta-analysis of 155 empirical research studies of online learning, Sunal, Sunal, Odell, and Sundberg (2003) found that while the research base in the area of online course design is still emerging and not yet conclusive, current studies can inform us in regard to variables and best practices, especially when the results of the studies are viewed in concert with effective, research-supported, classroom pedagogical practices.

The authors, therefore, created a 51-item *Checklist for Online Interactive Learning* (COIL) based on the results of their meta-analysis, suggesting that it "could form the basis for evaluation of courses and modules used in online learning environments." As such, it is the only research-based evaluative tool that focuses upon attributes of online learning environments drawn from a large number of empirical studies. The instrument is currently being tested for validity and reliability. It is divided into four categories: student behaviors (8 items), faculty-student interaction (16 items), technology support (2 items), and learning environment (25 items). The last two categories include criteria that are appropriate for this review of the TAMUS course materials and design. These practices emphasize that good online learning environments do the following:

### *Category 3: Technology Support*

- Insure a low level of technological difficulties in accessing Web site and communication,
- Provide adequate, friendly, easy, continuous technical support,

### *Category 4: Learning Environment*

- Use structured activities to provide an effective framework for online learning;
- Create social interaction through group collaboration to facilitate high achievement;
- Uses streaming audio for reading online;

- Present course content in a manner that hierarchically structures the sequence of information;

- Organize Web site to enable students to interact with the content, other students, and instructor;

- Create a welcoming, safe, nurturing online environment;

- Present problem-solving situations in a realistic context;

- Provide opportunities for students to question the instructor to insure accuracy of understanding;

- Create opportunities for students to communicate with each other to share understanding of course content;

- Provide opportunities to collaboratively construct knowledge based on multiple perspectives, discussion and reflection;

- Provide opportunities for students to articulate and revise their thinking to insure accuracy of knowledge construction;

- Include cooperative and collaborative learning to distribute workload through the group and support female student' preferred method of connected learning;

- Allow time for reflection at end of course;

- Include "warm-up" period with light-hearted exercises aimed to help students get to know on another;

- Provide opportunities for students to control online learning and structure it for themselves;

- Provide discussion forums encouraging open and honest dialog;

- Conduct teleconferencing during and at the end of the course to discuss successes and problems; and

- Use computer conferencing to develop overall critical thinking skills.

What follows is a review of the design and delivery of the TAMUS online ESL course materials within the framework of those criteria which apply from categories 3 and 4 of the COIL instrument.

## Category 3: Technology Support

25. *Insure a low level of technological difficulties in accessing Web site and communication.*
An initial difficulty for the user is that there is no initial orientation to the online course environment. Upon logging in, the user is simply provided a link to the course introduction in the form of a downloadable PowerPoint document. This document provides an overview of the course material; however, there is no information about how to use the online features that are to be employed, such as the discussion board, announcements, Intranet mail, online assessments, organization of course materials, etc.

Of particular note is that I was initially unable to open this PowerPoint document. Microsoft Office for Windows XP displayed the following message: "PowerPoint cannot open because part of the file is missing." Eventually, a colleague working on another computer platform was able to access the file and convert it to PDF format, which I was able to view. Although this may have been an isolated incident, it demonstrates a basic tenant of online course design: To the extent possible, course

instructions and content should be displayed on the course Web pages with the additional option to download copies of the information. In addition, such materials should be provided in a more universal format, such as PDF, whenever possible.

Moving past the introduction to the course, I found navigating to and through the various activities and areas of the course a challenge. The organization of material is not intuitive and finding my way was accomplished largely by trial and error. It would be helpful, for example, if there were a consistent format for the presentation of weekly assignments and content. Coded: Partially Addressed.

26. *Provide adequate, friendly, easy, continuous technical support.*
Although I did not have an opportunity to request technical assistance, phone and e-mail access to the instructor is provided in the introductory PowerPoint. Not being able to access this information due to technical problems, as mentioned above, would obviously limit the user's access to technical support. Once again, providing this information on the Web pages of the course would be a helpful alternative. One avenue for accessing technical support that I found easy and useful is the discussion area devoted to WebCT issues. Here, the instructor can respond directly to students' questions. Coded: Partially Addressed.

## Category 4: Learning Environment

27. *Use structured activities to provide an effective framework for online learning.*
The alignment of the course's general framework with the TExES ESL certification test is beneficial for teachers preparing for the exam; however, the structure of the learning activities themselves is not consistent. Reading and composing discussion postings, for example, is a valuable part of most activities that should be required in all cases.

In addition to the issue of consistency among activities, the internal organization of most of them is not as helpful as it could be, and related resources are weak. Activities (steps 2 and 3) have no overview of expectations, student instructions, or activities. There is a list of links to various types of readings and content, but no guidance on how to use this information to complete learning tasks. There are no instructions on how to visit and use the discussion area in cases where this is required by weekly assignments. Also, the order in which weekly resources are presented is not in alignment with the order in which they are to be accessed. Steps 4 through 6 offer more consistency in the presentation of materials, although similar problems persist. Explicit and clear instructions, as well as a consistent organizational format, are key design features for reducing participant anxiety and facilitating success with learning activities. Coded: Not Addressed.

30. *Create social interaction through group collaboration to facilitate high achievement.*
This is a particular area of concern. The building of online community is crucial to promoting high levels of learning through quality reflection. (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind & Tinker, 2000; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004) It is essential to foster online social elements similar to those found in face-to-face courses. The TAMUS ESL online course does not actively engage participants initially with a structured activity to promote this kind of community building. Further, structured collaborative learning opportunities are essentially absent from the entire course. Collaboration in the discussion area is, for all intents and purposes, accidental, as there is no formal requirement that participants respond to the postings of others or that they build upon the ideas presented. Coded: Partially Addressed.

31. *Use streaming audio for reading online.*
There is no use of audio or video for delivering content. This might be especially helpful due to the sheer volume of content being presented in the course. The use of best practices video is advisable, especially video depictions of teacher interactions with students where particular concepts are illustrated. For example, with regard to Competency 3, which deals with ESL instruction, the use of either video or audio for instructor delivered content would be helpful. Coded: Not Addressed.

32. *Present course content in a manner that hierarchically structures the sequence of information.*
The organization and presentation of information throughout the course is an area of great concern. Assignments appear to be required weekly, but information is organized in a series of 6 steps. These steps do not correspond to the 7 weekly assignments, and there appears to be no alternative reason for organizing information into these 6 steps. In some cases, participants are directed from within one area to learning materials located in an entirely different section of the course (e.g. directing students to the Recent Demographics area from within Competency 10 information).

As mentioned above, there is no orientation information presented on the main course Web page; there is also no introductory information on any of the main pages of the individual course sections (steps). In each case, the information is found in PowerPoint "lessons." Instructions for participant activities are embedded within course content which is presented in these PowerPoint lessons. In at least one case (Step 1), there appears to be a discussion area for introductions but there are no participant instructions to post there. Coded: Partially Addressed.

33. *Organize Web site to enable student to interact with the content, other students, and instructor.*
The TAMUS ESL content is presented, for the most part, in text format. There are few activities which require participants to interact with, analyze, and apply the content to their own professional practice. As mentioned above, opportunities for students to interact with each other are mostly absent from the design of this course. Opportunities for interaction with the instructor generally appear to be question/answer format. Coded: Partially Addressed.

The instructor often responds to the discussion postings of participants. Her responses serve largely to provide her own perspective, to clarify information, or to validate the ideas presented. While her expertise is clear and her conversational tone inviting, there were missed opportunities to facilitate further discussion among participants or to push their thinking forward on a topic. The instructor could better promote professional dialogue among the group as a whole through the use of online facilitation techniques to sharpen the focus of the dialogue or to help participants dig deeper (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind & Tinker, 2000). Coded: Partially Addressed.

34. *Create welcoming, safe, nurturing online environment.*
The instructor herself sets an inviting and comfortable tone in her discussions with participants, and this is very important. It is the shortcomings of the course design itself that are likely to cause user distress. The absence of Web pages providing orientation to the course and to the weekly content and assignments creates a disorienting initial experience as the participant figures out how the course is structured and what the expectations are. The lack of a consistent template is likely to create an unsure rather than safe environment as the participant attempts to wade through and prioritize the content found in voluminous readings. A nurturing online environment is signified by a strong online professional community where participants learn through ongoing collaboration and where new knowledge is constructed though reflecting on the experiences of others. As mentioned earlier,

this course has not been designed to promote the development of an online professional community. Coded: Partially Addressed.

35. *Present problem-solving situations in a realistic context.*
The Competency 8 activity where participants are instructed to research and report back on ESL programs available in their district is an good example of this type of authentic task. Unfortunately, there are few other activities that require participants to reflect on and make connections to their own experiences. Most activities involve reading handouts, articles, and book chapters, and then summarizing or responding to the information. Without structured activities that engage learners in analyzing and applying information within the context of their own professional environment and practice, we cannot be sure that participants are mastering the content presented much less implement what they have learned. Coded: Not Addressed.

36. *Provide opportunities for students to question instructor to ensure accuracy of understanding.*
The instructor clearly appears responsive to student questions and observations in the discussion area. While I was unable to observe specific student-to-instructor interactions apart from the discussion area, there is no reason to believe that the instructor did not make herself available privately for questions and clarifications. Creating a public thread specifically reserved for student questions and instructor responses in the discussion area would provide allow participants to view and benefit from the entire exchange. Coded: Partially Addressed.

37. *Create opportunities for students to communicate with each other to share understanding of course content.* and 38. *Provide opportunities to collaboratively construct knowledge based on multiple perspectives, discussion and reflection.*
As addressed above, the TAMUS course is not designed to provide structured opportunities for participant collaboration in these ways. Coded: Not Addressed.

39. *Provide opportunities for students to articulate and revise their thinking to insure accuracy of knowledge construction.*
The reviewer did not see any evidence of opportunities for these kinds of learning activities. The obvious opportunity for this type of activity would be following the assessments, however there were no opportunities afforded participants to discuss their assessment results and revise their thinking. Coded: Not Addressed.

41. *Include cooperative and collaborative learning to distribute workload through the group and support female students' preferred method of connected learning.*
The TAMUS course is not designed to provide structured opportunities for participant collaboration. Cooperative and collaborative learning opportunities encourage negotiation, dialogue, debate, and reflection among participants, thus deepening their understanding of the content with which they are working. Coded: Not Addressed.

44. *Allow time for reflection at end of course.*
There is an end-of-course survey employed, but no opportunity for discussions among participants. There is no end-of-course unifying activity that requires participants to reflect on professional applications of all that they have learned as a result of the course. Coded: Not Addressed.

45. *Include "warm-up" period with light-hearted exercises aimed to help students get to know one another.*

As discussed earlier, there are no activities that foster the development of an online learning community through structuring social interactions similar to that found in face-to-face courses. Coded: Not Addressed.

48. *Provide opportunities for students to control online learning and structure it for themselves.*
There do not appear to be opportunities for students to make choices about the readings or other elements associated with any of the learning activities presented. Activities are for the most part prescriptive. At most, the participants are sometimes to select an area of focus for a discussion posting. Coded: Not Addressed.

49. *Provide discussion forums encouraging open and honest dialog.*
While the design of the discussion forums does not promote high levels of collaboration, the discussion forums appeared to have fostered open and honest dialog around the topics presented. The instructor's tone was inviting, encouraging, and responsive to the ideas presented. Coded: Partially Addressed.

50. *Conduct a teleconference during and at the end of the course to discuss successes and problems.*
As discussed above, there was an end-of-course survey employed, but no structured opportunities to solicit participants' thoughts with regard to successes and problems experienced while taking the course. Coded: Not Addressed.

51. *Use computer conferencing to develop overall critical thinking skills.*
The lack of opportunities for participants to collaborate with one another is an area of primary concern with respect to this issue. Whether online or face-to-face, without such opportunities for teachers to discuss, reflect, apply, and offer and receive constructive criticism as part of a professional learning community, the best that can be achieved with the course content is learning limited to the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of types of learning. Opportunities for application, synthesis, and evaluation of the ideas and concepts presented in the course should be added. Coded: Not Addressed.

Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner & Duffy (2001) identified "seven principles of effective teaching" online as a way to evaluate online courses. These principles are generally accepted by evaluation practitioners as they have been applied again and again. While there is some overlap with the COIL criteria listed above, considering the TAMUS course content in light of these principles provides a different framework for discussing strengths and weaknesses of the course design.

*Principle 1: Good practice encourages student-faculty contact.*
While I had no opportunity to assess private communication between the instructor and her students, the instructor's tone in the discussion area was certainly inviting, encouraging, and responsive to the ideas presented by participants. Coded: Partially Addressed.

*Principle 2: Good practice encourages cooperation among students.*
As discussed earlier, this aspect is missing from the course design. Coded: Not Addressed.

*Principle 3: Good practice encourages active learning.*
Most of the learning fostered by the course activities is passive. Participants are occasionally instructed to reflect on the content presented, but rarely to analyze, evaluate, or apply the content to their own professional practice in any authentic way. Coded: Not Addressed.

*Principle 4: Good practice gives prompt feedback.*
The course instructor did provide feedback to the ideas presented by participants in the discussion area; however, there were no opportunities for feedback following assessments. Coded: Partially Addressed.

*Principle 5: Good practice emphasizes time on task.*
Regularly scheduled deadlines in the form of weekly assignments are a positive design feature of the course. This practice promotes time on task by participants while providing a context for regular interaction between participants and with the instructor. Coded: Fully Addressed.

*Principle 6: Good practice communicates high expectations.*
Graham et al. suggest using "challenging tasks, sample cases, and praise for quality work" to communicate high expectations for learners. While the instructor does offer praise in response to discussion postings, it is mostly limited to "keep up the good work" comments. It would be helpful to identify exemplary contributions by participants to communicate the expectation of higher levels of discussion. Generally speaking, the activities required of participants are not challenging as they do not promote analysis or evaluation of the content, or authentic application to participants' professional practice. Coded: Partially Addressed.

*Principle 7: Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.*
There is no evidence that the course designers intended to accommodate for diverse talents and ways of learning among the course participants. Activities are prescriptive, and participants are not offered multiple ways to respond to the course content through the selection from among various activities or even to make choices within a single prescribed activity. Coded: Not Addressed.

National standards for online staff development that were released by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) in 2001 echo most, if not all, of the criteria presented above. The NSDC addresses context, process, and content in their standards. They suggest that "ongoing teamwork, discussions, product and project development, research, reflection, demonstrations, and modeling are just some of the ways technology facilitates active engagement of the learner," and they strongly encourage the use of these and similar techniques in online staff development. Such features, with the exception of discussions, are either absent or only superficially available (i.e., reflection opportunities) in the TAMUS course.

**Section 2. Does the TAMUS Online Professional Development meet your standards of high quality online professional development?**

The strongest features of the TAMUS online course design are the inclusion of a discussion board and facilitation by a content expert. Although, for the reasons discussed in the previous section, the TAMUS online course falls short of established standards of high quality online professional development. My concerns with the course are in three primary areas: poor organization and presentation of course content; absence of activities that foster the development of an online professional learning community; and the passive nature of the learning opportunities offered.

What follows are a number of suggested additions or changes that, if implemented, might bring the TAMUS course more into line with the standards and research-based evidence cited in this evaluation.

With regard to the organization and presentation of course content, overall, there is too much information and too little targeting of focus in the form of activities. The following suggestions could improve the accessibility and use of course materials:

- Adding a comprehensive, Web-based orientation to the course that includes a description of the technical requirements to access course content, an overview of the weekly course structure, participant outcomes, a preview of weekly activities, a discussion of how participants will be assessed, WebCT features to be used in the course, how to access technical assistance, etc.

- Reorganization of course materials by week so that all materials necessary for that week are accessible from that week's Web page. When a participant navigates to that page, they should be presented with information about that week's assignments rather than prompted to automatically download materials.

- Preparation of text materials so that they are easy to read. I also wonder whether the course designers have secured the necessary permissions to re-publish copyrighted works. If not, they should do so immediately. If they do have such permission, a statement of such should accompany all copyrighted materials being made available to participants.

- Adding a weekly instruction Web page that orients the participant by providing an overview of the content for the week, student expectations or outcomes for the week, and a preview of student activities and tasks for the week.

- Preparation of weekly course instructions and content in PDF format to the extent possible. Text-based course content should be prepared using a consistent document format.

- Student instructions should be presented separately from the instructional content for the week. Additionally, instructional content should be organized into shorter, mini-lesson documents to better "chunk" the voluminous information being presented.

With regard to the development of an online professional learning community, structured opportunities for participants to interact with one another socially should be added. The following suggestions will provide increased opportunities for building a cohesive online learning community:

- Adding an initial activity designed to provide participants with an introduction to other participants, especially in a lighthearted, non-academic context.

- Adding activities throughout the course to promote meaningful interaction among participants, especially activities requiring small and large group discussions and activities to be completed by small groups of participants.

- Expansion of and more emphasis given to the reflective components of the course so that they appear in more activities. These reflections should be designed to elicit real-world experience, background and applications of the concepts being discussed rather than simply summarization of information learned. For example, the discussion prompt in Week 3 to read an article and respond by "discussing several factors that are involved in L2 acquisition" could be expanded to elicit what impact these factors have on classroom instruction. These reflective activities should also be designed to require participants to build upon the ideas of others presented in the discussion area.

Finally, with regard to the nature of the learning opportunities offered, active learning opportunities, especially those that promote analysis, evaluation, and application of course content to professional

practice in authentic ways should be added. The following suggestions will improve the likelihood that participants actually transfer new knowledge and skills to their own professional practice:

- Ideally, there should be learning activities designed for every student task. For example, if a student is asked to read something, an activity should be designed which provides focus for that reading. Merely reading information does not ensure that learners can effectively apply that information to their own professional practice. For example, an activity in Domain II, Competency 4 instructs the learner to access and review the listening and speaking portions of the second language acquisition TEKS. This task should be followed up with an activity which requires the learner to apply this information they have just read. Perhaps participants could be asked to design a learning activity incorporating the TEKS.

- Content should be provided in multiple formats, not just text. The use of best practices video is advisable, especially video depictions of teacher interactions with students where particular concepts are illustrated. For example, with regard to Competency 3, which deals with ESL instruction, the use of either video or audio for instructor delivered content is advisable. The use of interactive chat for discussions of newly presented content is also advisable.

- Design of more learner-centered activities that provide an opportunity for participants to organize the information they have learned in ways that are personally meaningful. Students should be asked to do something in response to what they are learning. Ideally, activities would require them to apply what they are learning to their own classroom and students in order to ensure transfer of their learning into their professional practice. Activities similar to the Competency 8 activity where participants are instructed to research and report back on ESL programs available in their district are a good start.

- Assessment tasks should be added that require learners to demonstrate their knowledge in an authentic manner, rather than rote memorization of facts for a quiz. Also needed would be an emphasis on discussion postings and reflection as a component of assessment.

## Section 3. Reference List

Collison, G., Elbaum, B., Haavind, S. & Tinker, R. (2000). *Facilitating Online Learning: Effective Strategies for Moderators*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

Conrad, R.M. & Donaldson, J.A. (2204). *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Graham, C., Cagiltay, K., Lim, B.R., Craner, J. & Duffy, T.M. (March/April 2001). Seven Principles of Effective Teaching: A Practical Lens for Evaluating Online Courses. Available: http://technologysource.org/article/seven_principles_of_effective_teaching/

National Staff Development Council (2001). E-Learning for Educators: Implementing the Standards for Staff Development. Available: http://www.nsdc.org/library/authors/e-learning.pdf.

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Sunal, D.W., Sunal, C.S., Odell, M.R. and Sundberg, C.A. (Summer 2003). Research-Supported Best Practices for Developing Online Learning. The Journal of Interactive Online Learning 2.1, Available: http://www.ncolr.org/.

# EXPERT REVIEW OF THE CONTENT OF THE TAMUS ONLINE ESL CERTIFICATE PREP COURSE

Maggie Rivas, M.A.

The review and evaluation of the TAMUS On-line ESL certification preparation course was conducted by examining the downloadable course materials, the bulletin board correspondence between the course instructor and participants, the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) Preparation Manual, and related literature in the area of ESL instruction.

## Section 1. How does the Texas A&M University (TAMUS) on-line professional development compare to "promising practices" in ESL professional development?

To better evaluate the TAMUS on-line course material, I first reviewed the literature on promising and best practices for ESL professional development. Overall, the content of the TAMUS course is of high quality and grounded in current research on ESL professional development. However, the content delivery could be improved by implementing a constructivist teaching approach that allows participants opportunities to explore, question, and discuss the material in order to better integrate new knowledge and ideas. This would not only increase the likelihood of participants passing the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam, it would better prepare them for actual classroom practice. More detail on this approach is presented in answering specific questions below.

In light of current mandates from the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, it is worth noting that this course is potentially beneficial for all educators, not only those specializing in bilingual and ESL instruction. Darling-Hammond (2000) and Villegas (2000) have found a correlation between the academic achievement of English language learners (ELL) and their teachers' effectiveness and competencies. Nonetheless, many teachers have not received the essential professional development needed to meet the demands of a changing and diverse student population. Lucas (2002) reported that teachers greatly benefit from knowledge about the nature of language, the relation of language to culture, first and second language development, and approaches to content area instruction that facilitate learning for students with limited English proficiency.

Wong Fillmore and Snow (2002) have identified the following critical competencies that effective teachers of English language learners should develop:
- knowledge of linguistics and language
- language and cultural diversity
- sociolinguistics,
- language development and second language acquisition, and
- an understanding of academic discourse.

The content of the TAMU on-line course appears to address these critical competencies. In addition, I observed the following strong points of the course as a whole:
- Recognizes the demand for services for Bilingual/ELL students and shows a need for trained professional to provide services to facilitate student learning.
- Recognizes that the bilingual/ELL course must be based on sound educational and language learning theory, implemented through effective strategies, uses a variety of resources, and taught by properly prepared educators.

- Recognizes the need to develop knowledge and skills in second language acquisition to increase the competency of teachers of English language learners.

**1. Is the professional development grounded in research and clinical knowledge of teaching and learning in ESL?**

The TAMUS On-line ESL certification preparation course is designed to help the participants expand their knowledge and skills that an entry-level educator in the area of bilingual ESL must possess to pass the TExES ESL supplemental certification exam #154 and to become effective ESL teachers. The course's framework and content are in clear alignment with the framework and content of the exam, which is itself based on research related to practices that promote student learning. Essentially, the exam is organized into three domains, which are each defined by a set of competencies. What follows is an outline of each domain, a summary of teacher expectations as found in referenced research, and a review on the course's manner of addressing them.

**Domain I: Language Concepts and Language Acquisition**
- Competency 1: The ESL teacher understands fundamental language concepts and knows the structure and conventions of the English language.
- Competency 2- the ESL teacher understands the processes of first-language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition and the interrelatedness of L1 and L2 development.

| Research Related to this Domain | Summary of Teacher Expectations |
|---|---|
| August, D. & Hakuta, K. (Eds.) 1997 <br><br> Bailey, Butler, LaFramenta, & Ong, 2004; <br><br> Chamot & O Malley, 1994 <br><br> Collier, V. (1997) <br><br> Cummins, J. (2001a) <br><br> Freeman, D. & Freeman, Y. (2001) <br><br> Krashen S. (1982) <br><br> Villegas, A.M. (1991) <br><br> Wong Fillmore, L., & Snow, C. (1991) <br><br> Vygotsky, L.S.(1962) | • Understands the principal theories of Second language acquisition <br> • Compares L2 development to L1 development, <br> • Understands the role of L1 in acquiring L2 <br> • Compares and contrast speech patterns, <br> • Identifies various affective filters that influence the learning process <br> • Defines BICS and CALP |

Hamayan (1990) suggests that in order for second language learners to be successful academically, teachers must understand the process of second language learning. While teachers do not usually get the opportunity to learn about language structures and usage the way linguists do, they need to recognize how language relates to the learning process. In support of this, Wong Fillmore & Snow (1999) have proposed that preservice teacher preparation programs should include second language acquisition theory and a general understanding of linguistics.

The online course materials and activities provide an opportunity for teachers to achieve a basic understanding of what language is—that it represents a functioning, rule-governed language system. By completing Domain I successfully teachers will be able to make the distinction between the teachers' knowledge of second language acquisition and the needs of second language learners.

While the course content within this domain is sound, it is my opinion that delivery of the material needs to take into account constructivist principles of teaching and learning. The course's PowerPoint presentations and readings are useful as an introduction and background to the topics

addressed. However, there is room for more variety and creativity in the learning activities. Engaging participants through active learning and discovery would increase the likelihood of their success in passing the exam, as this domain comprises 25% of the test. While a discussion board is provided and reading and posting of comments is sometimes required, more could be done to promote a richer discussion of the material, as well as collaborative interaction to complete assigned tasks. The KWL strategy, for example, could be woven into an activity to help participants explicitly articulate for the purpose of discussion their progress in integrating the course content into their existing knowledge and understanding.

> K: This is what I know about language and second language acquisition
> W: This what I want to learn about language and second language acquisition
> L: This is what I learned about language and second language acquisition.

An opportunity to engage in a live on-line discussion with guest speakers or experts in the field of language and language concepts would provide participants another type of authentic learning experience.

**Domain II: ESL Instruction and Assessment**

- Competency 3: The ESL teacher understands ESL teaching methods and uses this knowledge to plan and implement effective, developmentally appropriate instruction.
- Competency 4: The ESL teachers understands how to promote students' communicative language and development in English.
- Competency 5: The ESL teacher understands how to promote students' literacy development in English.
- Competency 6: the ESL teachers understands how to promote students' content-area learning, academic-language development, and achievement across the curriculum.
- Competency 7: The ESL teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and instruments used in ESL programs and uses assessment results to plan and adapt instruction.

| Research Related to this Domain | Summary of Teacher Expectations |
| --- | --- |
| Bartolomé, L.I (1993)<br><br>Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L, (2002)<br><br>Calderón, M.E., Hertz-Lazarowitz, R., & Slavin, R. (1998)<br><br>Chamot & O Malley, 1994<br><br>Chomosky, N. 1995<br><br>Cloud, N., Genesee, F. Hamayan, E. (200)<br><br>Cuevas, J.A. (1996)<br><br>Cummins, J. (2001b)<br><br>Echevarria, J., Vogt, M.E., & Short, D. (2002)<br><br>Farr, B. & Trumbull E. (1997)<br><br>García, G.G. (ED) (2003)<br><br>Gibbons, P. (1993)<br><br>Hamayan, E.V. (1990)<br><br>Kusimo, P., Ritter, M.G., Busick, K., Ferguson, C., Trumbull, E. & Solano-Flores, G. (2000)<br><br>Perez, B. &Torres-Guzman, M.E. (1992)<br><br>Tinajero, J. V. & Hurley, S., R. (Eds.)(2001) | • Prepares lessons in content area using specific academic dialogue to explicitly teach language structure<br>• Plans effective lessons according to different levels of language proficiency<br>• Develops effective strategies instructional practices for students of all ages<br>• Compares and contrasts the orthographies of other languages<br>• Uses approaches to assessment that are congruent with instructional goals<br>• Ensures that assessment criteria and standards are clearly communicated<br>• Promotes vocabulary development through a variety of approaches<br>• **Identifies key elements to effective instruction.**<br>• Explores own attitude about and approach to teaching ELL students.<br>• Uses high order thinking skills questions in reading, predicting content outcomes. |

According to Richard-Amato (1988) an ESL *approach* consists of a succinct group of related assumptions about language and teaching. A *method* is an ordered plan on how the materials are going to be presented, and a *technique* is what the teacher uses to implement a method and accomplish the objectives. The course materials could be better organized and presented by explicitly explaining/defining what constitutes an ESL approach, ESL method, and ESL techniques.

The Domain II competencies were clearly addressed by the content. As with other domains, however, the delivery of the material could be improved. In this case, I would recommend the addition of "social working opportunities" such as cooperative learning and learning communities activities. To some extent the e-mail and discussion board activities were intended to fill this role, but I found these activities were being accessed by very few participants. Ideally, the course would contain activities to promote participant interaction and collaboration to enhance personal understanding of the material.

The required reading was adequate in terms of quality, but overwhelming in terms of volume. More concise books or articles are available that cover the same material, such as: (1) Collier's *Promoting Academic Success for ESL Students,* which addresses the need by probing three main dimensions of language acquisition, linguistic, sociocultural, and cognitive process all in instructive contexts for all age learners, (2) Echevarria, Vogt, Short's *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model,*

which provides teachers of ELLs and other diverse students with a model of sheltered instruction, and (3)*Gibbons'Learning to Learn in Second Language*, which offers a variety of best practice strategies and practical ideas for the classroom instructor. These are just three examples that provides the same information as many of the selected readings.

With respect to standards, simply reviewing the TEKs is not sufficient. The course should contain activities that have participants practice integrating the TEKs into actual lesson plans and learning activities.

One of my concerns is that this particular domain comprises 45% of the test and these competencies are the heart of how to effectively teach ESL students. They are critical as they relate to such topics as ESL teaching methods, knowledge of TEKS, content-based ESL instruction, and classroom management. The materials need to be better organized and presented. Using the jigsaw strategy in cooperative learning, for example, would require the participants to explain/define what constitutes an ESL approach(s), ESL method(s), and ESL techniques. This would provide participants an opportunity to take an active role in monitoring and reflecting on their learning experience.

The goals of this important section should more explicitly address the following:
- Demonstrating knowledge of language learning stages, processes, methods, and strategies
- Applying knowledge of major concepts from the readings to issues discussed on-line
- Demonstrating a critical awareness of issues, methods, and theories of research in both individual second language learning and teaching of ESL learner

**Domain III: Foundations of ESL Education, Cultural Awareness, and Family and Community Involvement.**
- Competency 8: The ESL teacher understands the foundations of ESL education and types of ESL programs.
- Competency 9: The ESL teacher understands factors that affect ESL students' learning and implement strategies for creating an effective multicultural and multilingual learning environment.
- Competency 10: The ESL teacher knows how to serve as an advocate for ESL students and facilitates family and community involvement in their education.

| Research Related to this Domain | Summary of Teacher Expectations |
|---|---|
| Chavkin, N. F. & Williams, D.L. (1993)<br><br>Epstein, J.L. (1995)<br><br>Epstein, J.L. (2001)<br><br>Moll, L. (1992)<br><br>Gay, G. (2000)<br><br>Luder,D.C. (1998)<br><br>Shartrand, A.M., Weiss, H.B., Kreider, HM,. & Lopez, M. (1997)<br><br>Sheets R.H. (2005)<br><br>Shields, P.M. (1995)<br><br>Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., Greenfield, P. (2000)<br><br>Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., Greenfield, P., & Quiroz, B (2001)<br><br>Zeichner, K. (1996) | • Develops an awareness of issues related to culture and impact on ELLs.<br><br>• Knowledgeable in the area of culture<br><br>• Identifies the impact of culture and linguistic differences on the teaching and learning processes<br><br>• Provides and promotes high level challenging, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction<br><br>• Uses culture knowledge in communicating with families |

Research confirms the important role that families and communities play in a child's education. (Epstein, 2001; Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap, & Epstein, 1995). Teachers should be encouraged to view families and communities as a potentially rich resource for supporting student learning. To utilize them effectively involves taking time to understand the relevant cultural environment.

It is particularly important for the participants to explore what the research says about professional development for teachers of diverse learners. There is a need to enhance teachers understanding about the connections among culture, language, and learning, and to increase their knowledge about instruction that embraces diversity. As the Holmes Report Group (1990) cites:

> "Much of the basic knowledge necessary for better teaching and learning in classroom with widely diverse students is not yet part of the essential core of education studies. Along with their subject matter, teachers need to become students of their students—their *cultural metaphors*, *languages* and *linguistic understandings, learning styles*—to recognize them as resources for learning. Similarly, teachers need to study themselves. To revisit their own experiences as learners and to gain greater understanding of the cultural assumptions they bring to their students (p. 41).

The lessons for Competency 8 cover the history of bilingual education and reviews different models of bilingual and ESL programs. (It is should be noted that no source information was provided on two of the assigned book chapters). A TEA PowerPoint covers bilingual and ESL program models, features, and instructional techniques. A second TEA PowerPoint provides a lengthy presentation on updates regarding numerous Title III developments including statistics and profiles of ELLS in US and Texas public schools, PEIMS data collected for LEP students, performance-base monitoring and interventions, and information regarding several related TEA initiatives including the LEP Student Success Initiative (SSI) grant and the Mathematics English Language Learner Initiative (MELL).

Of all the competencies, the content in Competency 10, Family and Community Involvement, is the weakest. Although the topics (advocating for ESL students, facilitating family involvement in the education of ESL students, communicating and collaborating with parents, and accessing community) are important to know, the course does not provide opportunities for the content to be applied to real classroom situations.

Bermúdez (1994) identifies various barriers that limit family involvement, including (1) working parents, (2) lack of confidence, (3) lack of English skills, (4) lack of understanding of the home-school partnership, (5) lack of understanding of the school system, (6) negative past experiences with schools, and (7) insensitivity and hostility on part of the school personnel. The TAMUS course does not address this.

**2. Is the professional development aligned with the SBEC/TexES standards for ESL teaching and does it cover the content to pass the TexES ESL certification tests? Please describe how you reached your conclusions and identify specific standards you used to make your decision.**

It is clear that the course content is carefully aligned with the SBEC/TexES standards for ESL certification, and in that regard should be helpful in preparing participants for the exam. My concern, as stated in specific cases above, is not with course content itself so much as with how it is delivered and the degree to which this impacts the learning experience. Ideally, the course would allow participants some manner of demonstrating their understanding of the material and how there are going to use the knowledge and skills acquired. More about strengths and weaknesses, as well as some recommendations for improvement, are presented in the following section.

## Section 2. Final comments: Does the On-line ESL Professional Development meet your standards of high quality professional development?

The opportunity to address ESL educator development through an on-line course is commendable, especially given the tremendous need for teachers in this area. It is important for teachers who are preparing to take the certification test to begin to explore their own beliefs about teaching and learning, and to understand the beliefs that direct the practice of other teachers. I believe that this on-line course is a beginning. I also hope my comments are taken in a context of a *critical friend.*

My comments are organized in the context of the following three criteria:
        A.  quality of the course content, materials, resources, and assessment;
        B.  access to and interaction with course materials and resources; and
        C.  opportunities to communicate with the instructor and other participants.

A. Overall, the course content is of high quality. It recognizes that ESL instruction is demanding and covers the domains and competencies around which the SBEC/TexES standards are organized. These domains and competencies, in turn, reflect current research related to the field of ESL instruction, and the materials and readings support common understandings among various sources of research that have been referenced above.

I have concerns about the quantity of materials the participants were given to study for each domain relative to what is ultimately assessed for certification and, importantly, necessary for developing good practice. Domain II, for example, comprises 45% of the test and yet the information was not as instructive as it could be, particularly with respect to Competencies VI and VII. In the case of Domain III, there is extensive reading about the issues themselves, but less instruction on how to

overcome some of the challenges, particularly in the area of promoting families and community involvement.

August & Hakuta (1997) expresses the need for a follow-up component to any professional development to assess the knowledge gained and the subsequent implementation of that knowledge. This element of assessment is lacking, and would be helpful in helping participants assess their own learning as they progress through the material.

B. Access to and, therefore, assimilation of the course material could be improved by a course description, clearly presented objectives, and some initial orientation to the format of the course and methods for accessing material and navigating the on-line environment. Organization of the material was not always intuitive, and I would recommend a more consistent format for lessons and for assigned reading material. It would also helpful if materials were presented in the order in which they are to be accessed.

The reading material for Domain II was so extensive as to potentially overwhelm the participants. It would also be beneficial to pose questions at the beginning of each lesson to guide participants as to the key ideas and concepts they are to absorb in their reading assignments. Some of the readings were lacking the source from which they were copied.

As mentioned, most lessons are presented in the form of PowerPoint presentations and independent readings; there was limited employment of instructional methodologies to address different learning styles. An important feature of effective learning experiences is the opportunity for learners to process information in more than one context and in more than one way. Especially important is that learners connect new information and concepts to their actual experience. Ideally, participants should be explicitly encouraged to consider how to apply new knowledge, strategies, and skills within the context of familiar situations. Helpful strategies include hands-on activities, structured participant interactions, cooperative group projects, vignettes, and research projects.

C. I view interaction among colleagues as one of most important sources of learning. It is apparent that the lessons were intended to provoke on-line discussion, planning, and actions that would lead participants to learn and acquire knowledge translating into improved teacher practice. However, I found little evidence that such robust, cooperative learning actually occurred. Though the participants were passively encouraged to share their views and insights on the topics and issues by posting to the discussion board, there was only limited interaction with the instructor and fellow participants in some of the domains, particularly in the area of language.

Overall, the lessons and activities could be modified to better encourage dialogue and collaboration among participants, as well as with the instructor or even external experts.
Asking a provocative questions is one effective strategy for getting students to participate and discuss key issues. There was a missed opportunity in the parent involvement thread, for example, when one of the students shared her beliefs and the strategies she used to encourage parent involvement in her class. Two other participants responded, but the focus of the discussion was not related to strategies and parent involvement; it was about how to make a business card magnet that had pertinent school information. The instructor could have been helpful in actively redirecting the discussion by soliciting comments related to the more important aspects of the material.

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APPENDIX E

ESL Summer Institute Participant Survey

# Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative Grants

## Cycle 1 Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will be strictly confidential and only reported in group summary form.

## Section 1: Teacher Demographic Information

1. **How many years have you taught prior to this school year?**

   ❒ 0-1 years     ❒ 2-4 years     ❒ 5-9 years     ❒ 10-20 years     ❒ 21 or more years

2. **Prior to this year, how many years have you taught limited English proficient students?**

   ❒ 0-1 years     ❒ 2-4 years     ❒ 5-9 years     ❒ 10-20 years     ❒ 21 or more years

3. **Please indicate your proficiency level in Spanish.**

   ① No Fluency   ② Some Proficiency   ③ A Fair Amount   ④ Fluent   ⑤ Very Fluent

4. **What grade level do you teach?**
   ① Early childhood/Pre-Kindergarten
   ② Elementary
   ③ Intermediate/Middle School          6. **Are you:**     ① Male
   ④ High School                                          ② Female

5. **What is your ethnicity?**

   ① Black/African American
   ② Hispanic/Latino
   ③ White
   ④ Other: _____

## Section 2: Certification Information

7. **Which level of certification do you hold?**

   ❒ Elementary     ❒ Grades 4-8     ❒ Grades 9-12     ❒ Not Certified

   **If you hold a certificate, what content area/discipline are you certified in?**

   _____

8. **Do you currently hold a teaching certificate in:**     ESL         ❒ Yes     ❒ No
                                                              **Bilingual**   ❒ Yes     ❒ No

9. **If you recently took, or plan to take, the TEXES/ExCET test for bilingual or ESL certification, please indicate the test administration date.**

| | May 21, 2005 | July 9, 2005 | Oct, 1, 2005 | Dec. 10, 2005 | Feb. 18, 2006 | April 8, 2006 | June 10, 2006 | Aug. 5, 2006 | Other (insert date) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESL | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | ⑧ | _____ |
| Bilingual | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | ⑧ | _____ |

## Section 3: ISLA ESL Certification Institutes

Questions 10-15 refer to the ESL Certification Trainings sponsored by Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA).

10. **Please indicate which ISLA Institute(s) you have participated in.**

    ❑ Corpus Christi, TX – June 6-10, 2005
    ❑ San Antonio, TX – June 9-15, 2005
    ❑ San Antonio, TX – July 5-8, 2005
    ❑ Zapata, TX – August 8-11, 2005
    ❑ Other: _____

**Did you receive a stipend for participating in the ISLA Institute?**

 ① Yes
 ② No

11. **In addition to the ISLA Institute, have you attended other teacher trainings in bilingual/ESL education?**

    ① Yes
    ② No

**If *yes*, how did the ISLA Institute compare to others?**

 ① Very Poor
 ② Below Average
 ③ Average
 ④ Above Average
 ⑤ Excellent

12. **To what extent did the following influence your decision to attend the ISLA Institute?**

| | | No Influence | | | | Strongly Influenced |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Upcoming certification exam | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| b. | Availability or provision of stipend for attending the training | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| c. | My principal or other campus/district administrator | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| d. | Content of the training | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| e. | Location of the training | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| f. | Length of training | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| g. | Time of year | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| h. | Sponsor or trainer of the Institute | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| i. | State or district professional development requirements | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| j. | Recommendation by other school staff | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

13. **Regarding the content presented in the ISLA Institute, to what extent had you already received instruction or information about the following:**

| | | None | A Little | About Half | Quite a Bit | All of it |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Second Language Learning Theory | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| b. | Methodology/Teaching Strategies | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| c. | Assessment Practices | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| d. | ESL Test Preparation for Certification | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

14. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements about the Institute(s) you attended.

| | | Strongly Disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | The ISLA Institute provided me with useful materials that helped me, or will help me, prepare for the bilingual/ESL certification exams. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| b. | The ISLA Institute provided me with useful materials that helped me improve the way I teach LEP students. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| c. | The ISLA Website will be a helpful resource for me. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| d. | My teaching has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the Institute. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| e. | My students' performance has improved (or will improve) as a result of my attending the Institute. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| f. | I have shared what I learned at the Institute with other teachers and/or school staff. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| g. | I would recommend the ISLA Institute to other teachers. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

15. How would you rate the overall usefulness/value of the ISLA Institute(s) you attended:

① Very Poor     ② Poor     ③ Satisfactory     ④ Good     ⑤ Very Good

## Section 4: Teacher Bilingual/ESL Instruction

16. Do you currently teach bilingual or ESL students?     ① Yes     ② No

If *YES,* please continue to complete the remainder of the survey. If *NO,* please stop, you have finished the survey. Please return your survey to SEDL in the self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Thank you.

17. Please circle the grade level that you currently teach:

| Pre-K | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

If you teach middle or high school, in what subject-area classes do you teach English Language Learners (ELLs)?

_____

_____

_____

18. What percentage of your students are ELLs?

❒ 0%     ❒ 1-20%     ❒ 21-50%     ❒ 51-70%     ❒ 71-90%     ❒ 91-100%

**19. Please indicate the type of structure of your bilingual/ESL program for your students.**

| Program Name | Program Description |
|---|---|
| ① English As A Second Language | Instruction only provided in English. Some native language support may be provided (e.g., limited translation in an otherwise all-English environment on an as needed basis from an aide) or special English support programs (e.g., additional instructional time devoted to English as a Second Language in order to support the development of English oral skills). |
| ② Transitional | Instruction is provided in the students' native language with a transition to all English instruction once a particular English proficiency level is reached. This program supports the development of LEP students' native language literacy (and, in some cases, content knowledge) until they become proficient enough in English to fully participate in English-only instruction. |
| ③ Dual language | Literacy instruction is provided in both the native language and English from the outset, where instruction is provided at different times of the day or on alternating days. Students may subsequently be moved into all English instruction. The goal of these programs is English literacy mastery, where work at strengthening native language skills is thought to transfer to the development of English language literacy skill. |

**20. In your current class(es) with bilingual/ESL students, how often do you:**

| | | Never | Rarely (e.g., a few times a month) | Sometimes (e.g., once or twice a week) | Often (e.g., several times a week) | In all or almost all of the lessons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Allow LEP students to express themselves in their primary language during teacher and group interactions. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| b. | Assess English language development. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| c. | Assess primary language development. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| d. | Display student work in English. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| e. | Display student work in students' primary language. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| f. | Embed cultural activities in instruction. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| g. | Group LEP students for English language instruction according to language proficiency | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| h. | Group LEP students for primary language (i.e., Spanish) instruction according to language proficiency | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| i. | Have meaningful and supportive parental involvement in my classroom. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| j. | Limit the use of primary language use during instruction. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| k. | Provide instruction in language arts in English which includes understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| l. | Provide instruction in language arts in the LEP students' primary language which includes understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| m. | Provide instruction in math, science, and social studies in English. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| n. | Provide instruction in math, science, and social studies in the LEP students' primary language. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| o. | Use learning centers with LEP students. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| p. | Use technology in lessons. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

## Section 5: Open-Ended Questions

21. What components of the ISLA Institute *most enabled* you to assist LEP students?

22. What component(s) of the ISLA Institute were *least useful* to you for assisting LEP students?

23. What factors at your school do you feel *supported* your efforts to implement what you learned at the ISLA Institute?

24. What factors at your school do you feel *hindered* your efforts to implement what you learned at the ISLA Institute?

Survey Cover Letter

<TEA Letterhead>

November 21, 2005

Dear [INSERT TEACHER NAME]:

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has contracted the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to conduct a study of teacher training activities provided under the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Student Success Initiative Grants. The Texas A&M University System provides the LEP Student Success Initiative grant recipients access to training and program design resources through their Institute for Second Language Achievement (ISLA) at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. As part of the LEP Student Success Initiative, ISLA offers Summer Institutes in ESL Certification.

SEDL is conducting a survey of teachers across the state who participated in the ISLA Summer Institutes to gather their perceptions of the training and of teaching practices in bilingual and ESL instruction. You have been selected to complete SEDL's LEP Teacher Survey because, according to ISLA records, you participated in one of the ISLA ESL Certification Institutes. The information you provide will help ISLA improve future institutes and provide TEA with valuable information about the grant initiative.

The entire survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Please read each item carefully and answer all of the questions. Your identity and responses to this survey are confidential and we appreciate your candid response.

If you prefer, you may access and complete the survey on-line by going to the following Website: **http://www.sedl.org/es/lep**  The on-line survey will require a survey ID #.

---

**Please use the following code to enter the Online Survey:**
**[INSERT ID# HERE cag51m1234]**

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If you choose to complete the paper survey, please return it to the address listed below in the pre-paid return envelope by **December 7, 2005**. We ask that online surveys be completed by **December 7, 2005**. as well. For more information or clarification regarding this survey please contact Melissa Dodson, SEDL Evaluation Associate, mdodson@sedl.org, (800) 476-6861 or Sonia Castaneda, TEA, Sonia.Castaneda@tea.state.tx.us, (512) 936-2282.

Thank you for your time and insight.

Sincerely,

Nora Hancock

Nora Ibáñez Hancock, Ed.D.
Associate Commissioner
Office for Planning, Grants and Evaluation


**Return Surveys to: SEDL Evaluation Services, 211 East 7th Street, Austin, TX 78701**
**DUE: DECEMBER 7, 2005**