
The *Least* One Should Expect of TESL/TEFL Programs

David Watt and John Taplin

The ideas outlined in this article are an attempt to answer the question *What should we expect of a TESL program that is professionally recognized?* The discussion proceeds from some comments on entry criteria to the role of final certification. We have kept our comments about the actual content of the program brief, offering only a framework that we believe can be useful in developing the content and instruction.

Background

Recently there have been several cases of private groups offering one-week courses in becoming an ESL teacher. Partly as a result of these unregulated programs and partly as an extension of our interest in the delineation of general standards for the field of ESL, we outline those elements that we think are required in a TESL/TEFL program. Our first reaction was to attempt to describe in great detail the content of TESL/TEFL programs. Although we still believe that this approach is a worthwhile endeavor, it is probably best saved for a different audience and purpose. Our purpose is to provide general guidelines that can be readily revised for an audience that is unfamiliar with the ESL profession and TESL/TEFL in particular. Therefore, we outline some elements that we feel are essential in an initial assessment of TESL/TEFL programs. We believe that it is crucial that TESL/TEFL programs are judged by standards that are acceptable to the professional field. Also, we believe that it is unacceptable to have lower professional standards for teachers who plan to teach abroad. It is for this reason that we include both the terms TESL and TEFL as interchangeable in status.

Application and Screening

For TESL programs to be part of the professionalization of the field they need to have academic and professional standards for application and entry that go beyond merely being able to pay the tuition. No other profession would tolerate indiscriminate entry; nor would its clients. As TESOL's brief document *Guidelines for the Certification and Preparation of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages* (1975) suggests, teachers of ESL "should have the same general (level of) academic preparation as teachers of other subjects at comparable levels." This comparability should also extend to criteria for entry. It is our belief that acceptable ESL diploma programs must specify entry conditions. We would argue that applicants should be judged by both

academic and professional criteria. Here are the screening criteria that we subscribe to.

Academic. Applicants must have an undergraduate university degree and evidence of some introductory linguistics courses or equivalents. They must have a minimally acceptable grade point average.

Again, no other profession would willingly tolerate a non-credit status for any formative professional development. This rather ticklish issue in TESL is an administrative legacy that requires more thought than we are prepared to give it here.

Outcome Criteria

Programs must be able to demonstrate that students in the program are evaluated on their learning. In short, it must be possible to fail for reasons of inability. The list of items under the heading Content needs to be evaluated. If no evaluation of outcome criteria exists, then the program is probably not acceptable to any educational profession.

Certification

Programs must offer certificates/diplomas of educational achievement. These certificate/diplomas are not the same as certificates of attendance or completion. In order for a program to claim that it offers a certificate/diploma of educational achievement, the program must be deemed acceptable by some larger body. Typically, these bodies might include academic organizations, such as universities and colleges; governmental bodies such as intergovernmental agencies and ministries; and professional associations of ESL/EFL educators such as the teachers organizations, TESL Canada provincial affiliates, or TESOL. Certification should be viewed as commensurate with accreditation by one of these bodies. If it is not, then the TESL/TEFL program is not acceptable.

Conclusion

The goal of teacher education programs in general and TESL/TEFL programs in particular is to develop the professional expertise of their participants in a manner that reflects preferred practice, rather than minimally meeting the visible signs of prevalent practice. Given this goal and the above criteria, there can be little place for tolerating TESL/TEFL programs that are motivated entirely by financial opportunism with no regard for the standards of a profession.

We would welcome the opportunity and the challenge of working with others to describe in greater detail the components and evaluative standards for the development of TESL/TEFL education, either in the province or interprovincially.

The Authors

David Watt is an Associate Professor in Curriculum Studies at the University of Calgary. He is in charge of the TESL programs and is concerned with quality of teaching.

John Taplin is the Director of Studies of the Global Village Rocky Mountain English Center in Calgary. He also teaches in the TESL program at the University of Calgary. Both authors have made significant contributions to ATESL.