

Report of the Review Committee  
Post-degree Certificate Program in Teaching English as a Second Language  
Woodsworth College, University of Toronto

April 2005

Committee members

DT-3970-F4

Professor Pat Currie, PhD  
Associate Professor of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies  
Supervisor for the Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language  
Carleton University

Andrew Scales, MA  
Academic Director, UBC English Language Institute  
Coordinator of the Certificate in Advanced English Language Teaching  
University of British Columbia

Background

The Woodsworth College Post-degree Certificate Program in Teaching English as a Second Language was established in 1972. It provides a balance of the theory and practice of English language teaching to adults through eight semester length courses including a practicum, which lead to 4 credits. Since 2001, an average of 131 students have been admitted each year. This is the third external review of the program, the first took place in 1987, the second in 1997.

External Reviewers' Terms of Reference

The Reviewers were asked to focus primarily on:

- 1.c Appropriateness of program structure, curriculum and length for learning objectives.
- 1.e Appropriateness of topics covered in each course – should the curriculum of the program be reorganised in all or some of the courses?
- 7. Assessment of the Unit and Program relative to the best of their kind in North America and internationally, including strengths and opportunities.

A Self-Study was also provided to the reviewers setting out detailed reflections on the above areas and requesting comment on further discrete concerns.

Process

In addition to full and thorough program documentation, the Reviewers were afforded the opportunity to meet with the Principal of Woodsworth College, the Coordinator of the TESL Program, Program Staff; the current and previous Professional & International Programs Directors, current and graduate Students in the Program, and Program Instructors and discuss the program.

## Recommendations

### 1. Program structure and course topics

Required course topics are generally agreed to be appropriate and successful. The content of TSL530H1 (Methodology of TESL), TSL533H1 (Teaching Locally and Globally), and TSL534H1 (Teaching and Testing, Written Language) has evolved organically and would now benefit from a rationalisation across the curriculum that places similar topics in the same courses. The Reviewers recommends a restructuring such as:

Term 1	Introduction to Language Methodology 1 Introduction to the language classroom Zero beginners Listening (all levels) Speaking/Listening/Pronunciation (all levels) Reading (all levels) Writing (all levels) An introduction to integrated materials Practicum I
Term 2	Theoretical issues Pedagogical grammar Methodology 2A Integrated skills (Beginners/Int – Community/General ESL) LINC Newspapers (adapting and developing authentic materials) Critiquing commercial materials Developing a unit from materials provided (Int./Adv.) EAP ESP Methodology 2B Error correction Immigrants and refugees Teaching multi-level classes Syllabus design Cross-cultural issues Social issues Teaching EFL Assessment ESL Literacy classes Technology English in the workplace Practicum 2

## 2. Methodology 1, 2A and 2B

In terms of the Methodology section of the TESL Certificate, we felt that while there was much that was good and professional in the course outlines. Methodology gave the impression of being rather piecemeal and in need of more coherence and continuity. We suggest that the teachers would benefit from a somewhat more focused and coherent package to prepare them to decide what and how to teach in their future classrooms – hence the focus on teacher education rather than on teacher training. For this reason we suggest a reorganisation of the Methodology of TESL, Teaching Locally and Globally, and Teaching and Testing, Written Language into three sections: one to be taught in the first term; two in the second. Accordingly, we have added topics to the current program, and de-emphasised others (please see Appendix A for a more detailed list that could be included in this course). We have also taken into account TESL Ontario's criteria for program certification. In Appendix B we provide a list of possible further readings for both instructors and student teachers.

We are also recommending more emphasis in several areas, all of which overlap:

### A. The Integration of Skills

For our discussion, "skills" includes listening, speaking/talking, reading, writing, vocabulary development, and pronunciation. Our reorganization involves beginning with a theoretical foundation of what each skill involves, and the learning and teaching of each one.

Next would come samples of sample activities to promote these skills, first individually and at a beginning level, gradually moving to higher levels and the integration of skills, and, finally, in different types of classes; e.g., LINC/ general ESL, EAP, EFL, ESP, EWP.

### B. Approach

In terms of approach, adopting a more Content - Based approach to pedagogy would facilitate the integration of the skills, thereby increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching and learning. This approach has a number of other advantages:

- Increasing learner and student teacher motivation
- Promoting vocabulary development and fluency
- Building and transferring schemata
- Reflecting language as a social practice
- Allowing for grammar teaching in context
- Encouraging teacher-developed theme-based materials

### C. Social/Sociocultural/Sociopolitical Aspects

We believe the program would benefit from a greater focus on the social, sociocultural, and sociopolitical aspects of language learning and teaching. This would include a critical look at existing programs for learners and classroom materials (e.g., LINC and its *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*; textbooks).

This would afford the pre-service teachers an opportunity to examine the realities of the contexts in which their learners will be living and working.

D. Materials:

We would encourage a critical examination of classroom materials, one that would probe the underlying assumptions of commercial materials and activities. Teachers could be encouraged to adapt available commercial textbooks or materials and to create their own, thereby focusing on the needs and interests of ESL students. This examination would include the appropriateness of materials for EFL classrooms, making teachers aware of links between a country's social and cultural values and how they are often reflected in teaching pedagogies and materials; as well as a need to develop criteria for good materials (e.g., authenticity, level, motivation, scaffolding; language focus, exploitation of language in text, matching expectations to need).

E. ESL Literacy (Reading/Writing/Language in General)

In terms of literacy, we recommend a more transparent recognition of the social nature of language; i.e., that language and literacy are inherently social in nature, situated in the social contexts in which it is used. Such recognition would necessarily involve helping students use materials from the students' lives outside the classroom, including the technologies available today. According to Barton (1991), "we need to see literacy practices as *social practices* involving the roles people take, the networks they are part of, and the values and attitudes they hold" (p. 1). Currently, in many programs, "the dominant school-based definitions of literacy and work-based definition of literacy often are at odds with what people do in their everyday lives" (Barton, 1991, p. 13; see also Ivani\_ & Moss, 1991). In ESL teacher education classrooms, we have the opportunity to improve this situation.

F. Pre-Production: Dealing with Zero Beginners

All too often in our ESL classes, teachers are at a loss as to what to do with rank beginners. Even ESL students with no exposure to a language can, in a fairly short period, learn to follow instructions and feel comfortable dealing with a totally unfamiliar language. We suggest that the College consider investigating the possibility of teaching about a pre-speaking period as a means of strengthening initial comprehension skills and later pronunciation. We have included a reading (Terrell, 1981) that can provide guidance in this area.

### 3. TSL545H TESL Practicum

The TESL Practicum became a mandatory component of the program following the recommendations of the 1997 Review. It provides an essential opportunity to relate theoretical and methodological input to classroom practice and does much to meet the program objective of balancing theory and practice. The recent introduction of CCNET as a forum for the discussion of practica experience is an excellent innovation and could be further exploited.

The Review Committee recommends developing a closer and more specific relationship between the input sessions and teaching practice. To achieve this, the practicum component should also be extended to two sessions and greater use should be made of distance education technology.

Because of the relatively large class size, different practicum settings and different student-teacher interests, it is recommended that they be assigned to different, monitored peer groups within CCNET. Each peer group should meet in its own section of an electronic bulletin board. Within each group, each student should post, for example, their draft lesson plan, research into or reflections on the application of a particular methodology for their peers comment. The final version would be submitted to the course instructor for assessment.

The increase in the instructors' on-line time would likely be off-set by a reduction in the face-to-face sessions.

It is also recommended that the 50% exemption for current teaching, or for a minimum of one year's teaching experience, be discontinued in order that all student-teachers gain the maximum benefit from the closer relationship between the Methodology and Practicum sections.

### 4. Language Proficiency

The issue of exempting students from proof of English proficiency on the grounds of their having completed a minimum of four years' study in an English medium school system, and then finding they do not have an adequate level for all teaching situations, has become increasingly common. The Reviewers recognise the political challenges around an attempt to change this exemption. However an employer who hires someone with an English language teaching qualification, particularly from an institution like the University of Toronto, should reasonably expect that teacher to be competent with students at all levels of language. Students are also entitled to expect teachers who have a proficient command of the language they are teaching.

The Reviewers recommend that the possibility of removing the alternative of 4 year's study in an English medium school as an alternative to the other measures of proficiency, be further explored.

#### 5. LIN200H Introduction to Language

LIN200H Introduction to Language, is one of the core courses that contribute to the sound theoretical basis that is admired in Woodsworth TESL graduates. As a non-applied course, no topic is specifically related to the practice of English language teaching. This is a missed opportunity which is also a source of frustration to students. Since the course has a regular tutorial element complimenting the lectures, it is recommended that Woodsworth TESL students take a tutorial stream that specifically relates theory to practice. To be effective it will be important to find TAs with substantial English language teaching experience (e.g. qualified at TESL Canada Level 4 or equivalent).

#### 6. TSL532H1 Pedagogical grammar

Pedagogical Grammar explores how to teach grammar and unintentionally but often necessarily, includes learning grammar per se. Since some participants have limited grammatical knowledge, this can detract from the focus of the course and reduce its effectiveness. To maximise the time available for pedagogical grammar, the Reviewers recommend that teachers who do not have a sound grasp of English grammar first take the grammar course LIN204.

To maintain and develop the qualities of TSL532H1, it is also recommended that the grammar of spoken as well as written English be more clearly included.

#### 7. TSL531H1 Theoretical issues in Second Language Teaching and Learning

TSL531H1 is another course that contributes to Woodsworth graduates sound grasp of ELT theory in addition to practice. Because research and classroom materials develop at a fast pace in English language teaching, the Review Committee recommends that the texts for this course be updated and include more readings from current articles in for example, the TESL Canada journal, TESOL quarterly and the ELTJ.

#### 8. Guest speakers

As mentioned in Methodology above, exceptional teachers from the Community could be more involved as guest speakers. Individual course instructors would select, coordinate and monitor the guests. Example topics might include:

- Teaching overseas (panel of returnees)
- Anti-racist education in ELT
- Literacy learners and strategies to deal with them

#### 9. Transfer credit

The Woodsworth College TESL Certificate is granted on completion of 4 credits. At present, student-teachers can receive up to 2 transfer credits, plus a 0.5 credit by taking only part of the practicum. This makes it possible to receive a University of Toronto credential by completing only 1.5 credits.

The UBC TESL Certificate offered through the Department of Language and Literacy Education requires a minimum of 12 credits. Carleton requires 5.0 credits, with all core courses to be taken there. The University of Alberta TESL program, albeit a Diploma course, required 24 credits (and can be completed in 8 month full-time). The York University TESOL Certificate requires 30 credits with a maximum exemption of 12.

To align the Woodsworth Certificate more closely to the practice of similar programs, the Review Committee recommends reducing the number of possible transfer credits to 1 or none, and discontinuing the 0.5 allowed for current or past teaching.

#### 10. Program name

The very substantial amount of work required from student-teachers is clearly appreciated. The level of this work is recognised in the title "Post-degree " title recommended in the previous review. University based programs in TESL Canada's list of Recognised Teacher Training Programs, and in the provided program comparison chart, are mostly called Certificate. For these reasons, the Reviewers recommend no change to the "Post-degree Certificate" part of the program name.

The distinction between ESL and EFL is rarely understood by prospective students or the general public, and the acronyms are better reserved for academic and professional purposes. In recent years, the acronyms TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) has become more of an international standard. It is noteworthy that the new University of York certificate is in TESOL and that further afield, the University of Cambridge Examination Syndicate changed its name in 2004 to Cambridge ESOL.

From a marketing perspective it is important that the program remain as inclusive as possible and cater to teachers who may work in the ESL or EFL fields or both. If Woodsworth contemplate a change to the program name, the Reviewers would recommend "Post-degree Certificate in TESOL".

#### 11. Competition

There is little standardisation among English language teacher education programs beyond the basic content. In terms of content, the University of Toronto Woodsworth College program is very strong. The balance of theory and practice is frequently mentioned as a particular strength, as is the University of Toronto aegis. It is these two features that the Reviewers see as the focus of further promotional efforts. The ability to state that graduates from this program get jobs, and examples of what and where would also help.

With the greatest respect for the name and reputation of Woodsworth College, on promotional grounds alone, the title "University of Toronto TESOL Certificate", would be easier to work with. Further promotional opportunities include a contemporary look to the brochure, bringing it more into line with the style of the website, and expressing the objectives of the program in succinct point form.

## Conclusion

The University of Toronto Woodsworth College Post-degree Certificate in TESL has a long-established and excellent reputation nationally and internationally. With the restructuring of the methodology sections, the addition of a second practicum component and the relatively minor developments to other existing components, the Reviewers expect the program to remain a model of best practice.