

# Chapter 3

## Professional Support Networks in TESOL: Sociolinguistic Approaches to Professional Development in ESOL Teacher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter investigates professional development for ESOL teachers and shows the importance of building systems of support for teachers through professional support networks and sociolinguistic perspectives. It aims to raise awareness about existing professional networks for the education of bilingual educators and ESOL teachers in NY. It introduces some initiatives at a NY college that address such challenges and make NYS's various professional networks accessible to candidates. The chapter suggests that it is important for college educators and teacher trainers to get the teacher-in-training more involved in working with professionals. Growing the professional network in multimodal ways would help create a sense of community and belonging in the profession of teaching ESOL students.*

### **PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do teachers or education professionals ever feel in need of collaboration with or support from other colleagues? Explain the circumstances they may feel this way when teaching English language learners or when educating English teachers.
2. What are professional support networks? Discuss what they may entail with a partner.

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on a year-long program study that investigates professional development for bilingual education and TESOL (Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages) teachers and shows the importance of building systems of support for teachers during and after their training. A conceptual framework combining educational approaches to professional development with a sociolinguistic field study method of *nexus analysis* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) was employed. Data collection and analysis were done through ethnographic means as put forth by nexus analysis. Participant observations, written documents and artifacts, field notes, focus groups, informal interviews, and survey questionnaires were the main data sources. The research question that governed the present study was: What are key local entities governing professional development of English teachers to speakers of other languages (ESOL), and in what ways do they render professional growth in connection with the graduate program of study?

The chapter aims to raise awareness about existing professional networks for ESOL teachers' education by introducing two initiatives at a New York (N.Y.) college that address challenges and make New York State's (NYS) various professional networks accessible to teacher candidates. The first initiative, a one-year grant program leading to advanced certification in teaching ESOL, is introduced in detail with its course work span throughout the year, and evaluations of the entire program with an open-ended questionnaire are discussed. The second initiative, another smaller-scale grant, is also introduced, and an open-ended survey questionnaire about the program was administered to the participants at the end of the program. The chapter suggests that growing the professional support networks, or *nexus*, in multimodal ways will help create a sense of community and belonging in the profession of teaching English language learners, hence rendering continuous professional growth throughout their profession.

## BACKGROUND

Researchers in education have long-established the need for continuous professional development for teachers. It has been agreed today that "high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers improve instructional effectiveness and increase student learning" (Vangrieken et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wei et al., 2009). Richards and Farrell (2005) have noted the significance of professional development where teachers could be continuously reinventing themselves and expanding their knowledge base. The need for quality professional development exists not only for teacher candidates or novice teachers but also for experienced teachers who need to make instructional shifts required in implementing college and career-readiness standards (Brown & Kappes, 2012). This could be exemplified by general or special education teachers who need to shift to another focus area, such as TESOL, for various reasons. Roy-Campbell (2013) points out that "the actual preparation general education teachers receive for teaching ELL students varies widely across teacher-education programs in the U. S." (p. 260). The author indicates that this variation is despite the standards put forth by National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which are basically: candidates' acquiring pedagogical content knowledge to address English language learners (ELLs); candidates' understanding the range in diversity among ELLs; and providing qualified faculty and sufficient resources supporting teachers' learning about ELLs (Roy-Campbell, 2013).

Regarding an effective professional development for teachers teaching culturally diverse students, Eun (2011) emphasizes providing teachers continuously with culturally relevant resources in appropri-

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