



**MA Public Adult Education  
Professional Development System**  
A PUBLIC ADULT EDUCATION OF MA PROGRAM

## Transcript: Part 2: Introduction to the Massachusetts Professional Standards for Teachers of Adult ESOL

Welcome back to the introduction to the Massachusetts Professional Standards for teachers of adult ESOL. In Part One, we talked about the development of the standards and the recent revisions, and we took a brief look at the organization of the document and the Standards at a Glance. In Part Two, we will take a closer look at each one of these standards. Our goals for this session are that by the end you will know enough about the standards to be able to summarize them as well as the key revisions made to each one.

Here are the seven standard topics again, shown somewhat randomly. However, the standards are organized quite deliberately. Standards 1 and 2, on the principles of second language acquisition and the components of language, respectively, lay the foundational knowledge on which the other standards are based. In the center, you'll see Standard 6, Instructional Delivery. It is in the center and comes after the other standards because it is in the classroom where all of the other standards come into play. As noted in the previous video, the standards are all interconnected, and you'll see some ideas repeated. This is by design to reinforce key concepts and practices and to present them through a different lens. Now let's take a closer look at each standard.

Standard 1, Second Language Development, covers how second languages are learned and, by extension, how they are best taught. It states that ESL teachers understand current theories and principles of second language acquisition and apply this knowledge to promote adult learners' English language development. This standard was revised quite a bit to emphasize teacher knowledge of these principles as well as their application in the classroom. Note that "understands current theories and principles" as well as "applies this knowledge." Teachers who meet the standard are able to explain the principles behind effective practices and understand why some practices are more effective than others. It helps teachers to answer the question, "What research-based practices inform my teaching?" This standard identifies nine key SLA principles and provides a brief supporting explanation for each one, as well as sample applications of what each principle looks like in the ESOL classroom. The standard also includes recent research on the brain and learning, specifically how this research informs language learning and instruction. For example, learner recall, repetition, productive struggle, and creative original language production have all been shown to play an important role in language acquisition and have informed the field of SLA.

The SLA principles included in Standard 1 are: the importance of authentic, meaningful communication for language acquisition; the difference between learning about a language and

acquiring it; the role of comprehensible input, that is, speaking and providing text appropriate to the proficiency level of the learner; and comprehensible output, the central role that students' language production plays in their acquisition of the language. Also included is knowing what to expect of learners at different proficiency levels, and the process of acquiring a language, which includes something called interlanguage. The role that emotions play, called the affective filter, as well as all other factors that come into play—the variables and learners' experiences, temperaments, and attitudes—all inform language acquisition. Finally, the principles of BICS and CALP, that is, the difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, are important for ESL teachers to know and apply in their planning and instruction. You can read more about these principles in the supporting explanation of the document and see some sample applications in the Know and Do chart.

Standard 2, Linguistic Features, states that the ESL teacher understands the components of language and the structure and conventions of English and uses this knowledge to inform instruction. Standard 2 covers the linguistic features of the language, like its grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, all of which English teachers should obviously know. Again, the expectation is that teachers will both understand and use this knowledge in their instruction. A summary of the components is provided, showing linguistic terms in both technical and informal terminology. The document provides a more complete description of each one, as well as examples of how to teach pronunciation, vocabulary, basic literacy, contextualized grammar, and appropriate forms using evidence-based approaches. It also includes examples of how to teach more rigorous and complex language to help English learners meet their academic and professional language needs.

Standard 3, Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching (CRST), states that the ESOL teacher understands the importance of culture in language learning and creates a culturally responsive and sustaining classroom where students' diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are valued and incorporated into an inclusive learning environment. This standard underwent perhaps the most significant revisions of all. You may recall that in the previous version, Standard 3 was simply intercultural awareness. The bar was raised because it has become apparent that adult ESOL students need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge not only to navigate systems and overcome barriers but also to become empowered to advocate for themselves and change the systems if needed. We want them to develop agency, capability, skills, and confidence that go beyond awareness and towards civic engagement in action. CRST is an approach that fosters this development.

CRST classrooms are inclusive and equitable because research shows that this fosters student engagement and motivation. This kind of environment also fosters language acquisition, in line with SLA principles and the affective filter. Teachers take the time to learn about students' individual cultures, countries of origin, backgrounds, identities, and present circumstances, and acknowledge these as assets and strengths to be appreciated and explored in the classroom. For example, being bicultural, bilingual, or multilingual is an asset. Learners benefit from being able to draw on their additional cultures and languages in class, not having to speak only English. Evidence shows that learners benefit from using their skills to think and process information, from having their skills affirmed as assets, and from learning about the cultures of their classmates and diverse perspectives. CRST also includes having sometimes difficult class

discussions about social justice and civic engagement. Understanding and communicating complex ideas often requires complex language in the form of complex texts, syntax, nuanced vocabulary, and appropriate discourse. CRST in the ESOL classroom necessitates rigorous instruction that enhances language development. Finally, teachers need to reflect on their own beliefs and culturally informed values and on how these influence instructional decisions and student learning. This reflection is central to the CRST model and is ongoing. CRST is intentional, centering instruction on learners' cultural identities and sustaining all elements of the approach across curriculum, lesson planning, classroom environment, relationships, and professional and program development. Standard 3 has significantly raised the bar for what is expected of ESL teachers in terms of culture.

Standard 4, Curriculum and Instructional Planning, states that the ESOL teacher designs coherent, rigorous instructional units and lessons that include measurable learning outcomes, optimize student interaction, support the needs of all learners, and are guided by SLA principles and aligned to their Mass ALPs. The standard was revised with a focus on four areas. The first is instructional planning using the backward design approach, which starts with determining learner outcomes, followed by identifying how students will demonstrate their learning, and then creating a learning plan. This process leads to an instructional plan in which all parts are aligned and provided with a cohesive and coherent structure. The second area is that all parts of curriculum and instruction should connect internally. Objectives, assessments, standards, and activities of unit and lesson plans are aligned, and curriculum scope, sequence, and plans connect within and across levels to create a coherent program. The third area identifies elements of an effective instructional plan, such as contextualizing language objectives, meaningful and engaging content including culturally diverse material, and providing sufficient rigor and critical thinking to support learners' college and career readiness. The fourth area adds planning for remote instruction.

Standard 5, Assessment, states that the ESOL teacher uses a variety of formative and summative assessments to inform and evaluate instruction, develop differentiated learning experiences, measure student learning, and promote learner metacognition. This includes needs assessments, student self-assessments, and formative and summative assessments. Teachers conduct assessments to understand students' needs, goals, and levels, inform instruction, and measure learning. A key revision emphasizes the importance of assessment for learners. Research shows that learners who see and understand their own progress and areas of need become more strategic about their own learning, build self-efficacy, and develop metacognitive skills. The standard includes references to sharing assessment results with learners, making progress visible, providing feedback, and including student activities such as recall and reflection.

Standard 6, Instructional Delivery, is where all previous standards come into play. It states that the ESL teacher facilitates language learning by using a variety of rigorous instructional methods and relevant materials that optimize student engagement, encourage productive struggle, foster critical thinking, and address diverse needs, interests, and readiness levels. Key elements of effective ESOL instruction are organized into three categories: relevance, rigor, and relationship. Relevant and inclusive instruction is culturally diverse, contextualized, and meaningful. Rigorous instruction promotes critical thinking, is accessible to all learners, and materials are scaffolded. Gradual release of responsibility to learners occurs, assessments are regularly

conducted, and results clearly communicated. Effective instruction is engaging and interactive; students are involved in collaborative and communicative learning, teacher talk is limited and modified, and corrective feedback is provided judiciously.

Standard 7, Professional Growth, states that the ESOL teacher engages in a continuous improvement process that includes ongoing reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, and high-quality professional development in order to gain greater teaching expertise, develop new instructional practices, increase learner engagement, and improve student outcomes. This standard underwent significant revisions, raising the bar for teachers to actively engage in their own professional development and share responsibility for student learning. It highlights strategies to improve effectiveness, including cultivating reflective practice, reviewing student and program data, collaborating with colleagues and program directors, and participating in high-quality professional development. This professional development model is formalized by ACLS in their Educator Growth and Effectiveness (EGE) cycle, where teachers and program directors work together using the professional standards as a starting point.

And that's it for our closer look at the ESOL Professional Standards. If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to take the self-assessment found on the ACLS and SABES websites, peruse the full standards document, or choose one standard in particular, and then watch the final video in the series. In the final video, we discuss what you can do to make good use of the standards. We'll see you there, and thank you so much for joining us.