

## OELA Podcast: EL Teacher Preparation: Zooming in on Maryland's Eastern Shore

### **Part II**

#### **Introduction:**

Host:

Welcome to part II of the podcast on teacher preparation hosted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). We are here with Jessica Swan, an Education Program Specialist at OELA. Joining Jessica for the second part of this discussion is Dr. Anjali Pandey, the principal investigator of the National Professional Development Grant: TARGET Training and Retraining Grades K–12 Eastern Shore Teachers.

In the first part of this podcast, Jessica spoke with Dr. Pandey about the TARGET Program's background, objectives, and organization. We encourage you to listen to the first part of this podcast. It can be found at [www.ncelea.ed.gov](http://www.ncelea.ed.gov) under Resources tab.

During our conversation today, we will discuss program outcomes as well as successes and challenges that Grow Your Own programs sometimes encounter. Let's get the conversation started!

Jessica:

Welcome back Anjali and thank you for the description of the programs, the teacher candidates you support, and insight into the planning process during the first part of this podcast. Our listeners would also love to learn more about what you are learning through your research on TARGET. Can you share some outcomes of the program?

Anjali:

We have a range of outcomes that we are proud of and that resulted from our approach to professional development. To highlight a few, one is the scope of the project. We have learned that it is possible to offer PD that is locally useful, and which entails both a focus on educators as well as other stakeholders, such as decision-makers and parents. To date, we have provided credential-bearing training to a total of 200 educators and school-stakeholders and 225 parents.

Another outcome we want to highlight is evidence-based outcome monitoring. We require all participants in our three course-based programs to engage in an extensive post-program tracking of multiple indicators of program efficacy. For example, our trainees to date report serving approximately 7,742 ELs from about 27 different linguistic backgrounds per project year.

With regards to teacher performance, we have consistently witnessed a 100% retention rate in all three cohort programs, 100% pass rate on courses, evidenced by an overall GPA of B or higher, and 100% post-program completion of evidence-based tracking outcomes based on the indicators of student-derived action study data, supervisor/mentored monitoring data, neutral audience-analysis-elicited data, and self-reflective accounts of teacher transformations.

To date, 39 out of 40, or 97.5%, participants in our spring ACCESS cohort report successfully passing the PRAXIS II examination. In Year 3, 100% of trainees in our ACCESS program passed the normed PRAXIS II Examination for EL endorsement with some of our trainees attaining the highest possible cutoff scores.

Most impressively, all passed this rigorous exam in their first attempt earning some of the highest scores ever recorded. Our program participants credit their participation in our program to their success in passing and attaining such high scores on the PRAXIS examinations. One hundred percent of teacher candidates received Maryland State endorsed/post-baccalaureate certificates as a consequence of participation in our credential-bearing program.

Jessica:

That is great. I know our listeners are heartened to hear these positive outcomes. You mentioned that your previous NPD grant had more teacher interest in the programs than seats available. With TARGET, what are you noticing with regards to teacher recruitment on the Eastern Shore? Are you meeting recruitment targets for example?

Anjali:

Competition for entry into our program has been stiff each project year. Our acceptance rates have been as competitive as 26% in some cohort programs., Acceptance rates for all project years combined to date average at 48%. We have recorded waiting lists for entry into every one of our cohort programs every project year. Stated differently, we have been more than able to meet our recruitment targets. With the pandemic, we saw an impact on our applications which we can certainly talk more about.

Jessica:

We will definitely want to hear about the impact of COVID-19 related school closures on your program. But before we discuss those challenges, what are you noticing with regards to teacher readiness to work with ELs qualitatively and/or quantitatively?

Anjali:

One hundred percent of our completers in all three programs have to send qualitative and quantitative data on participant learning outcomes pertinent to program-specific measures. These include providing detailed evidence-based data on professional outcome measures, such as Action Studies, completed audience analyses of post-training dissemination projects, retrospective reports of changes in praxis evidenced in the form of case-study narratives, and pre-/post-program supervisor feedback/protocol checklists. All of these data demonstrate a real eagerness on the part of trainees to effectuate positive change in their respective school districts. To date, reports demonstrate that we met and even exceeded our targets in this area in all project years. Data demonstrate that in 2019, for example, we saw above-benchmark scores on all 10 measured areas in all three programs — ACCESS, ENCORE, and COMPASS.

Teachers are also better prepared to implement family focused initiatives. In 2019, for example, in a 10-question survey administered to COMPASS trainees, 100% indicated improvements in their abilities to utilize strategies to improve family involvement, 93% noted improvements in their ability to foster a school climate of inclusivity, 93% noted improved abilities in preserving EL cultures and languages, 97% noted improvements in their students' behavioral outcomes, and 100% noted improvements in their ability to more effectively serve EL 1 in their respective school districts.

In general, it has been a joy to see the effects of this program in area-schools. Behavioral shifts in educator praxis, while quantitatively gauged, are also qualitatively manifested in the copious comments that our trainees offer regarding the preliminary impact of our training on their teaching. Trainees also send unsolicited comments and updates to us from time to time. Last spring one of our minority trainees was able to obtain her M.A in TESOL as a consequence of our program, and she was immediately hired as an EL teacher only weeks after graduation. She wrote to us that she has become the go-to person for EL support in her schools and that a third of her EL tested out of EL services and a few others are very close to exiting.

Jessica:

I think our listeners can really hear the many benefits of the program. What are you most proud of with regards to implementation of TARGET and why?

Anjali:

Trainees have reported several grassroots initiatives they have embarked upon in their schools linked to training outcomes. One of the most obvious has been making changes to the visible, linguistic landscape of schools. This has been achieved in the form of school-wide, trainee-instigated murals featuring the language resources of EL s, or through a plethora of advocacy efforts which have resulted in the building of bilingual libraries, innovative parental voices projects, and improved access to resources on the part of ELsin our rural districts.

All of these exciting ventures have only increased the self-efficacy and linguistic pride of ELs in respective schools in small and big ways! Each year, at least one of our completers has been a “Teacher of the Year” contender at the district level.

Additionally, two trainees in our 2018 cohort were top contenders for highly competitive *Maryland Teacher of the Year* title—the highest teaching honor in the state

One of our proudest accomplishments was having one cohort of trainees which was 60% from non-dominant ethnic backgrounds. Close to two-thirds of our courses are delivered by faculty from diverse multilingual backgrounds—an asset of special pertinence to teachers in rural school districts where the teacher workforce remains predominantly female and Caucasian in spite of school demographics trending towards minority-majority student populations.

To cite another accomplishment we are especially proud of, 82% of 211 surveyed completers reported going on to complete their Masters in TESOL. This credentialing was a direct consequence of training received in our NPD program. High credentials translate to high-quality education for all students. In the current era, where it is emerging ever clearer that what is excluded may in fact be just as important as what *is* included, trained teachers might perhaps be at the forefront of ensuring in future generations of students equity, parity, and justice for *all*.

Jessica:

That is wonderful to hear about the different accolades earned by the teachers in your program, and to know that these educators are going on to seek further training on how to work with English learners. For those faculty in your program, what do they say about their experience?

Anjali:

Our faculty are especially proud to be selected to deliver training in the program where they have access to some of the top-performing educators recruited from surrounding school districts. Like I mentioned before, our trainees are selected via a highly competitive recruiting process and they *want* to be in the program. A consistent comment we hear from faculty is “It is a joy collaborating with them.”

Jessica:

Wonderful! And what do local schools say about the program?

Anjali:

We have developed quite a reputation in approximately the 125-mile radius we serve. We have had several district supervisors report to us that they will only hire graduates of the TARGET program—that is how impressed they are!

Jessica:

That’s great to hear. You all have a lot to be proud of. You mentioned the recent emergency school closures a bit earlier in our discussion. In light of COVID-19, how have school closures impacted your program, and how has the program evolved to respond to these closures?

Anjali:

In spite of an academic year marred by the interruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have managed to ensure a seamless continuity of project activities. Since the onset of school closures in mid-March, we have continued to deliver all of our credentialed PD through remote and online means. However, we expect to see some impacts of COVID on program outcome measures in the long-term. Our entire summer program, ENCORE, was delivered via remote online conduits—an academic feat that required hundreds of hours of effort. All of our participants have elected to remain and complete the program online. We launched this program on June 22, 2020.

There have, however, been some negative effects of COVID-19 on our project. It has been extremely challenging to deliver training that is premised on “job-embedded” learning. Having trainees self-reflect on taped teaching encounters has been extremely difficult as most teachers have been unable to record such encounters with fidelity.

Numerous key projects in courses based on field-based ethnographic studies such as tutoring projects, family-partnership projects, linguistic landscape projects and others have all had to be innovatively re-designed to ensure that trainees can accomplish project outcomes.

One of the most positive effects of face-to-face training is the social networking that it engenders among educators—what I have likened often to an “intellectual spa” of sorts. While we have used Learning Management System platforms which permit some social contact, our trainees report that they “miss” being together. Learning has shifted from a predominantly communal, community of practice orientation to more of a “solitary” autonomous learning format.

All of our family-focused initiatives in the program have been placed on hold as access to families in the era of social-distancing has been extremely difficult to implement.

Jessica:

The challenges and consequences that you describe are certainly serious. How did the program's participants deal with them? Did they find ways to adjust to this new reality?

Anjali:

Despite these challenges, the program is able to foster teacher innovation. Just this past spring, trainees had a productive discussion on Freirean-inspired methodologies to instigate social justice reform in and through acts of "schooling." One of our primary-grade teachers shared numerous ways in which her curriculum manages to effectively teach her students linguistic skills while impelling in them a desire to positively change the world around them—with agency and intentionality. What was so memorable about the strategies she cited was that it was through acts of experiential learning, student-choice, inductive-thinking and inferencing that she was able to impel in her students a desire for social action—in this instance, a desire to "clean-up" neighborhood-woods and streams. That she was able to inspire such curiosity and action in the very youngest of our learners is a feat in itself. Most remarkable: this teacher had only a week to put this lesson together. Even more incredible: She successfully delivered this lesson in the age of COVID-19—remotely.

These examples reiterate that our trainees seek advanced education not for self-serving reasons, but rather, invest in the desire for specialized knowledge in a bid to effectuate real change. These are the types of educators that I wish we could clone!

Jessica:

Looking to the future, what do you foresee for your program in the Fall of 2020?

Anjali:

In our fall 2020 program set to launch in September, we have already had a number of selectees elected to withdraw their applications (more than we have ever experienced in any prior project year). With so much uncertainty looming ahead (our institution has not taken a definitive stance on how classes will be delivered in the fall), some trainees have told us they would only prefer face-to-face sessions in the fall, while some have indicated that they want the training to be safely delivered via online/remote means. This conundrum is understandable, as safety in the face of a highly contagious virus is a top priority for all. We have an extensive waiting list, but if attrition continues at the current rate, we might not be able to prioritize training to schools/districts most in need of EL trained professionals which will be most unfortunate.

Jessica:

I am sure many of our listeners can relate to this theme of uncertainty with regards to the fall. Thinking of lessons learned from past years, what recommendations do you have for others to use to grow their own teacher preparation programs?

Anjali:

Increasingly, all teachers and EL teachers specifically are in dire need of technicalization of expert knowledge—whether this pertains to how language works within particular genres and disciplines, or how this expertise inevitably translates into workable pedagogical outcomes for learners.

Particularly in the current age of academic language enhancements and nuanced understanding of the workings of language in multiple content-areas, we need visionary top-down enacted PD intervention. PD-models, which are in-built with credential and career-ladder incentives, not only stand poised to guarantee 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge gains in complex and sophisticated EL-pertinent expertise, but also are guaranteed to engender an empowered workforce likely to advocate for high-quality education for all—but ELs especially. More crucially, credentialed training enhances the professional capital of educators, and inevitably the nation.

Programs have to be developed based on localized needs. Additionally, for teachers especially, PD has to have buy-in. PD has to be conjunctive, expansive—even elastic—trainees should be able to pay the outcomes of their training forward and make immediate, transformative improvements at the local level. Such an approach ensures sustainability and long-term school buy-in on the part of all learners.

Jessica:

Thank you for summarizing your lessons learned for our audience. This is certainly food for thought! Before we wrap up our podcast, do you have any final words for our listeners?

Anjali:

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## **Closing**

Host:

And thank you Anjali for joining us today to discuss the challenges and successes of a grow your own teacher preparation program. The ideas shared will certainly help institutes of higher education, teacher preparation programs, and state and district educational leaders think through sustainable, quality teacher preparation programs.

You have given us illuminating examples from your research and practice and lots to think about as we continue to ensure that English learners have access to highly prepared teachers. As this podcast comes to a close, I encourage all of you to visit the NCELA website at

[www.ncele.ed.gov](http://www.ncele.ed.gov) to check out the many other resources available there to the EL educational community.