

*Developing Targeted Technology Standards for Teachers:  
Report on a Project for the Canadian Settlement Language Sector*

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**Abstract**

We report on a project to develop technology standards specifically for English language teachers in the Canadian settlement language sector. We describe the background and the process of how the team collaborated over nine months to create and refine the standards. The seven standards each include four to eight performance indicators and are written in direct, teacher-friendly language. There are explanations and reflection questions for each performance indicator together with vignettes describing how the standards are realized in real teaching situations. We conclude by discussing progress on similar technology standards for programs and learners. The standards are being released with a CC-BY, non-commercial, share alike license so that others may use and modify them freely for their own contexts.

Keywords: Professional Development, Technology Standards, Open Access, Targeted Standards



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## Introduction

As we saw with the emergency remote teaching necessitated in spring of 2020, many language teachers were not prepared to shift their classes to an online format. This underscored the more general need for teachers to have better preparation in understanding and using technology for language teaching (Nozawa, 2019; Sun, 2022). Organizations such as TESOL and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) have had teacher technology standards in place for many years. However, those standards were designed to be comprehensive and may not be a good fit when used in their entirety for specific contexts (Hubbard, 2021). In February 2023, the non-profit organization New Language Solutions put together a team to address this problem for one such context, the Canadian settlement language sector.

The sector is made up of adult education settings across Canada, with approximately 230 service provider organizations: school boards, community colleges, and community agencies in both rural and urban settings. The sector includes several thousand language teachers (referred to as *instructors* in official sector documents) and about 40,000 learners of English as a second language. Learners are adult newcomers to Canada who may be immigrants or refugees. Individual provinces set their own standards for language instructors. Ontario, for example, mandates a Level 2 TESL Certificate. Nationally, the governing body for adult education (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) just requires Instructors to be trained to teach English as a second language. New Language Solutions hosts language classes on their Avenue platform as well as multiple courses to prepare instructors to teach and create material on Avenue. The plan is that the technology standards being developed for this sector will be integrated into teacher training courses.

The team included three members of the group that developed the TESOL Technology Standards (Healey et al., 2011; TESOL, 2008)—Phil Hubbard, Deborah Healey, and Greg Kessler—along with Canadian colleague Sharon Rajabi. Others centrally involved in the discussions were Rob McBride, John Allan, and Matthias Sturm from New Language Solutions. (See Figure 1, Zoom team meeting.)

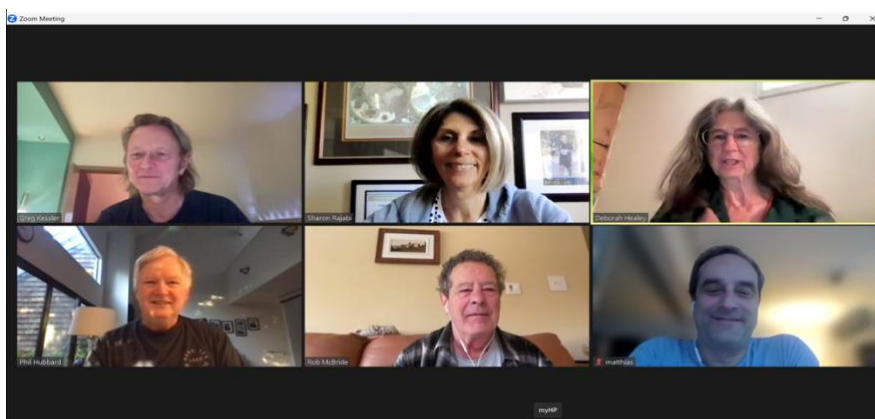


Figure 1: Technology Standards team in a Zoom meeting: (clockwise from top left) Greg Kessler, Sharon Rajabi, Deborah Healey, Matthias Sturm, Rob McBride, Phil Hubbard. Missing: John Allan

Beginning in February, the team met online every week or two, typically 90 minutes or more. By the time of the WorldCALL Conference in November, we had met more than 30 times.

While we worked individually offline some as well, the online collaborative meetings represented a large part of the total development time on the project.

### **Notes on the Development Process**

An important goal of sharing our work at WorldCALL was to demonstrate *how* we went about creating targeted standards rather than focusing exclusively on the standards themselves. In this section, we highlight some examples to illustrate that process.

In the first few meetings, we agreed that our target should be a set of reasonable, achievable standards relevant to the sector. As the Canadian insider, Sharon was especially helpful here. We first revisited the ISTE and TESOL standards as well as other relevant sources and each generated and shared an initial list of principles. We wanted to come up with a more compact list that teachers would hopefully find manageable. We discussed these, reconciled differences, and used the results to draft an initial set of eight standards. Utilizing a “divide-and-conquer” approach, we each took two standards and expanded them with a set of provisional performance indicators (PIs). As with the TESOL technology standards, the PIs break the standard down into more detail. In following meetings, we collaboratively pared the list of standards down to seven and refined and re-refined the PIs.

To give the standards more shelf-life and reduce bias, we avoided mentioning specific technologies and apps within the standards themselves (iPad, PowerPoint, WhatsApp, etc.). The one exception is a couple of references to Avenue (<https://avenue.ca>) as it is the course management platform of New Language Solutions and is increasingly dominant in this sector. We also worked at making the language as direct and accessible as possible without distorting its meaning. For example, the initial Standard 2 was “Teachers are able to use technology to identify and meet current and future needs of learners and to reflect critically on this practice.” This was later rewritten directly and precisely: “Understand and use a basic set of relevant technology resources and tools for language teaching and continue to update and expand this set regularly.” Note, however, that we deliberately use terms such as *basic* and *relevant* without fully defining them, although we provide examples in the accompanying material. This is because even within the settlement language sector, there are a variety of contexts for which the interpretation of *basic* and *relevant* may differ.

Performance indicators went through similar shifts. For instance the general indicator, “Supporting learners’ plurilinguistic and pluricultural selves,” was originally under Standard 2, which is about using tools and digital resources. It was ultimately reconceptualized into the more actionable “Model equitable practices by incorporating learners’ wealth of linguistic and cultural resources in technology use” and moved under Standard 4, which is about digital literacy and digital citizenship.

Another example of the development process began with the mutually agreed upon need for an overall standard, which we first labeled “Standard 0”, as seen below.

**Standard 0:** *This is the overarching approach to the other technology standards, the fundamental standard that sets the tone for the rest.*

Implement the Technology Standards by engaging constantly in thoughtful consideration, healthy skepticism, and reflective practice, balanced by a willingness to suspend judgment and persist in the face of initial frustration.

- Be curious.
- Think about what might work; think about why it might not be a good choice.
- Try it and think about what did and didn't work.
- Give it more than one chance.

Some feedback from external sources suggested that this could be more effective if presented not as a standard but as a guiding philosophy. Eventually, it was integrated into the standards as the graphic in Figure 1.

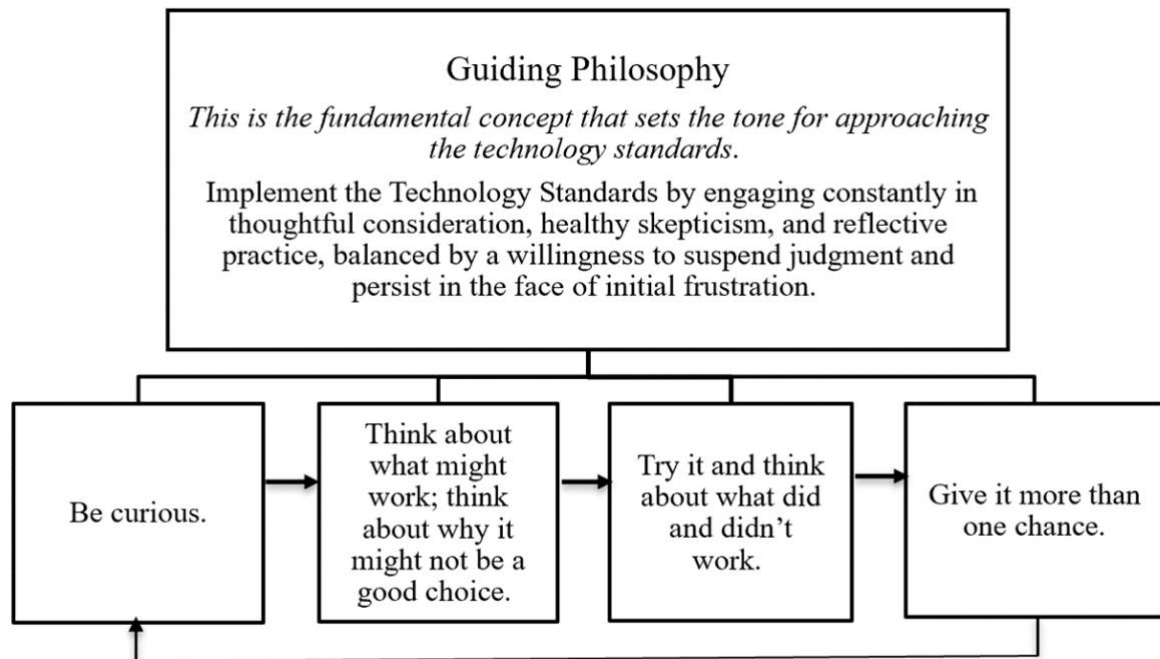


Figure 2: The guiding philosophy of the technology standards

This is just a small sample of the organic and collaborative process we used to get to the standards and performance indicators to where they are now. All of this was accomplished through shared online documents, and the majority happened in real time during our many online meetings. For those interested in developing targeted standards for their own contexts, we can tell you that a small group working collaboratively without some heavy top-down mandate is a model we would recommend from our experience.

## The Product

We have discussed the process, but what about the product? The standards and the performance indicators mentioned so far are the core of that product, but there are other parts to complement them. For instance, before a brief introduction to the instructors about the standards, there are two “notes” for other stakeholders. Based on feedback from colleagues at Canadian universities involved in teacher education and from discussions with those associated with settlement sector language program administration, it became clear that we needed to explain what the standards were—and were not—intended to accomplish before we introduced them to teacher educators and administrators.

Following these introductory pieces, we have the guiding philosophy graphic and then the standards themselves. Each standard begins with a brief description of its topic followed by the standard itself. The performance indicators appear with each standard—four to eight for

each)—and there is an explanatory paragraph explaining and expanding on each performance indicator in teacher-friendly terms. This is followed by a prompt for reflection, leading instructors to make an initial connection of the standard to their own experiences.

A major challenge lies in connecting the standards to the instructors' online or blended classroom experiences. Following the model from the TESOL technology standards, we include vignettes for that purpose. A vignette is a classroom account from a teacher that demonstrates how they met specific standards and performance indicators. It personalizes the standards and makes them feel more do-able, less of a mandate from above than a recognition of what teachers already do. The vignettes cover a range of contexts: different learner proficiency levels, online and blended classes, rural and urban settings, and general, academic purposes, and specific purposes topics. To develop the vignettes, teachers first submitted brief proposals that allowed the team to make sure there was breadth in vignettes. Then, an interviewer talked with the teacher and wrote up the vignette with precis, context, goals, story, standards, and performance indicators addressed. The interviewer's draft went for initial review by the teacher and the team, then back for final review by the teacher after any edits. Having one single, experienced interviewer who collected the teacher data and then wrote up the vignette reduced teacher time and ensured consistency. We would recommend this as a process where feasible.

## **Overview of the Standards**

In this section, we briefly present an overview of the standards. A link to the full set of standards and accompanying material is provided in the conclusion.

As noted above, there are seven standards (as opposed to 14 for the TESOL standards). This fits our goal of targeting the specific needs of the settlement language sector in Canada rather than providing expectations for ESL/EFL teachers relevant to any context worldwide. Each standard is introduced with a short description as follows:

- **Standard 1** is about using devices and systems skillfully.
- **Standard 2** is about tools and digital resources.
- **Standard 3** is about technology-enhanced pedagogy.
- **Standard 4** is about digital literacy and digital citizenship for yourself and your learners.
- **Standard 5** is about using technology to help all learners thrive.
- **Standard 6** is about communicating with learners and observing their progress.
- **Standard 7** is about establishing and maintaining professional connections online.

As an example, here is the actual Standard 3 with its six performance indicators (PIs). For the first two, we have included the explanatory text and reflection questions to show how the expanded PIs appear.

**Standard 3:** *This is about technology-enhanced pedagogy.*

**Thoughtfully integrate technology in your teaching, informed by exemplary practice and relevant theory and research.**

PI 3.1. Seek out and make use of sources of exemplary practice.

Videos that demonstrate exemplary practice with technology are available online. Think about reviewing these periodically to reinforce or gain ideas, especially in relation to introducing technology to learners, sequencing steps, and modeling technology use, and helping learners consolidate ideas. Models can also demonstrate creating an environment in an online class that is as warm and welcoming as face-to-face. Peer observation can be another source of exemplary practice, especially when you share ideas and comments with your colleague afterward. Be curious; reflect; try.

*Reflection: Where have you found useful videos about technology-enhanced pedagogy for online or blended environments?*

PI 3.2. Stay abreast of current theory and research related to technology use.

Artificial intelligence (AI), especially related to ChatGPT, has new articles emerging now on research and classroom use. AI technology and its uses are evolving rapidly and will change teaching. Given these developments, AI is a good area to monitor carefully. Otherwise, research on technology use goes back decades, so someone has probably written about what you are trying to do. For example, computer games have been used and researched for a long time, and there are valuable and practical insights from that research. It is always a good idea to check the publication date and source for accuracy and relevance. Avenue.ca includes an annotated bibliography at <https://bib.learnit2teach.ca/> with links to directly relevant theory-informed research that supports practice for the settlement sector. With resources of all kinds, be curious, read with an open mind and a critical eye, and consider just how applicable they can be in your context.

*Reflection: Where do you get your information about technology for language teaching and how does it inform your practice? What are some example sources you could share with a colleague?*

PI 3.3. Create technology-enhanced learning environments that provide multiple types of media and modes for learning.

PI 3.4. Use technology-enhanced active learning and task-based approaches that incorporate authentic learner experiences.

PI 3.5. Use technology tasks to build creativity, reflection, and community.

PI 3.6. Identify, adapt, and create effective prompts for generative AI.

## **Conclusion**

This article has focused on the process we followed in creating the standards, from background material to different forms of collaboration that created the current standards document. The goal is to encourage others to use the Technology Standards for Settlement Sector Instructors as a basis and the team's process as a reference when creating their own targeted technology standards. As noted above, these standards are smaller in scale than those

from ISTE or TESOL. They represent a foundation for building exemplary practice in online and blended English language teaching, and we hope that many teachers will not only meet but exceed them, becoming models for their colleagues.

Project development has continued since the talk at WorldCALL. The team has most recently been working on a set of two to three “can-do” statements for each PI to help teachers more clearly determine whether they are meeting a given PI. Also, in conjunction with the Instructor Standards, the team has been developing Program Standards and Learner Standards for the settlement language sector. The Program Standards address collaboration, infrastructure, instructor preparation, learner support, and digital literacy for administration and staff. The Learner Standards cover knowledge and skills in using technology, appropriate use of technology, recognizing the value of technology for learning, and using technology for integration into Canadian society. The current plan is to roll out the Instructor Standards first and then to follow with the other two.

The Technology Standards for Settlement Sector Instructors are a work in progress. They are being distributed as CC BY-NC-SA: free to use and adapt non-commercially with attribution and similarly to be openly shared. We have made a recent draft available in that form at <https://tinyurl.com/worldcallstds>.

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