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Comprehensive Center

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Framework for High-Quality English Language Proficiency Standards and Assessments: Brief

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, LEP Partnership
by the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

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>> This brief is an introduction to a *Framework for High-Quality English Language Proficiency Standards and Assessments* (Framework).

It presents the intended purpose, uses, and organization of the Framework, as well as key background information and assumptions.

The complete Framework document is available at www.aacompcenter.org.

NoChild
LeftBehind 



Purpose of the Framework

The Framework was conceived as a critical tool in states' efforts to ensure that their English learner (EL) students achieve English language proficiency (ELP) and, also, achieve at high levels academically. It provides criteria for high-quality ELP standards and aligned assessments that can be used to either 1) engage in an evaluation of a state's existing ELP standards and assessments, and their implementation, or 2) oversee the development and implementation of new ELP standards and assessments. The Framework is intended to be a resource to state departments of education, state policymakers, test developers, technical assistance providers, and the research community.

Why a Framework for English language proficiency standards and assessments?

EL students^{1,2} make up one of the fastest-growing student groups in the country,³ now numbering over 5 million and representing approximately 10 percent of K–12 students. Although the amount of resources dedicated to supporting this group is also growing,⁴ a significant performance gap persists between EL students and their non-EL peers.⁵

Addressing the needs of these students is central to the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Act or NCLB). Under Title III of the Act, states and districts are held accountable for ensuring that EL students make progress and develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending English; under Title I of the Act, schools are held accountable for ensuring that EL students master the same academic content in reading, mathematics, and science as non-EL students. NCLB required states for the first time to establish ELP standards that reflect the language necessary for proficiency in English and for academic achievement, as well as to create assessments aligned with those standards. Addressing the language needs of this group is critical because research suggests that language competencies, including knowledge of academic language, lead to academic success,^{6,7} which means raising students' English proficiency could help close the pervasive achievement gap. Additionally, research suggests that English language proficiency is related to successful employment, including careers in managerial, professional, technical, sales, or administrative fields.⁸

An effective standards-based accountability system that supports high levels of student achievement for *all* students requires the development, alignment, and proper use of high-quality standards and assessments.⁹ For students who are learning English, we need, in particular, to be able to differentiate between what they know and do not know, in terms of both English language skills and academic content. This knowledge enables teachers to plan classroom instruction aimed at improving both English proficiency and academic achievement.

Researchers have written extensively about criteria relevant to the development and evaluation of standards and assessments¹⁰ — criteria that have been widely used to ensure high-quality and technically sound standards and assessments for various populations. As states develop their ELP standards and assessments, the robustness of methods typically used to validate general academic content standards and assessments needs to be examined when these methods are applied to ELP standards and assessments.¹¹ This Framework builds on research related to how English language acquisition occurs and how language proficiency for EL students is defined.¹² It also reflects the range of perspectives and theoretical frameworks on issues related to, for example, language register (e.g., language appropriate for social versus academic contexts) and language skill (e.g., general linguistic skills versus specific academic language functions).¹³ These types of issues affect the definition of the ELP domain (i.e., the ELP construct and its related content), defining the domain in terms of state ELP standards (i.e., statements of expectations for student knowledge, skills, abilities), and “operationalizing” this domain in state ELP assessments (i.e., including items and tasks that validly measure student performance against expectations for student knowledge, skills, and abilities related to English language proficiency).

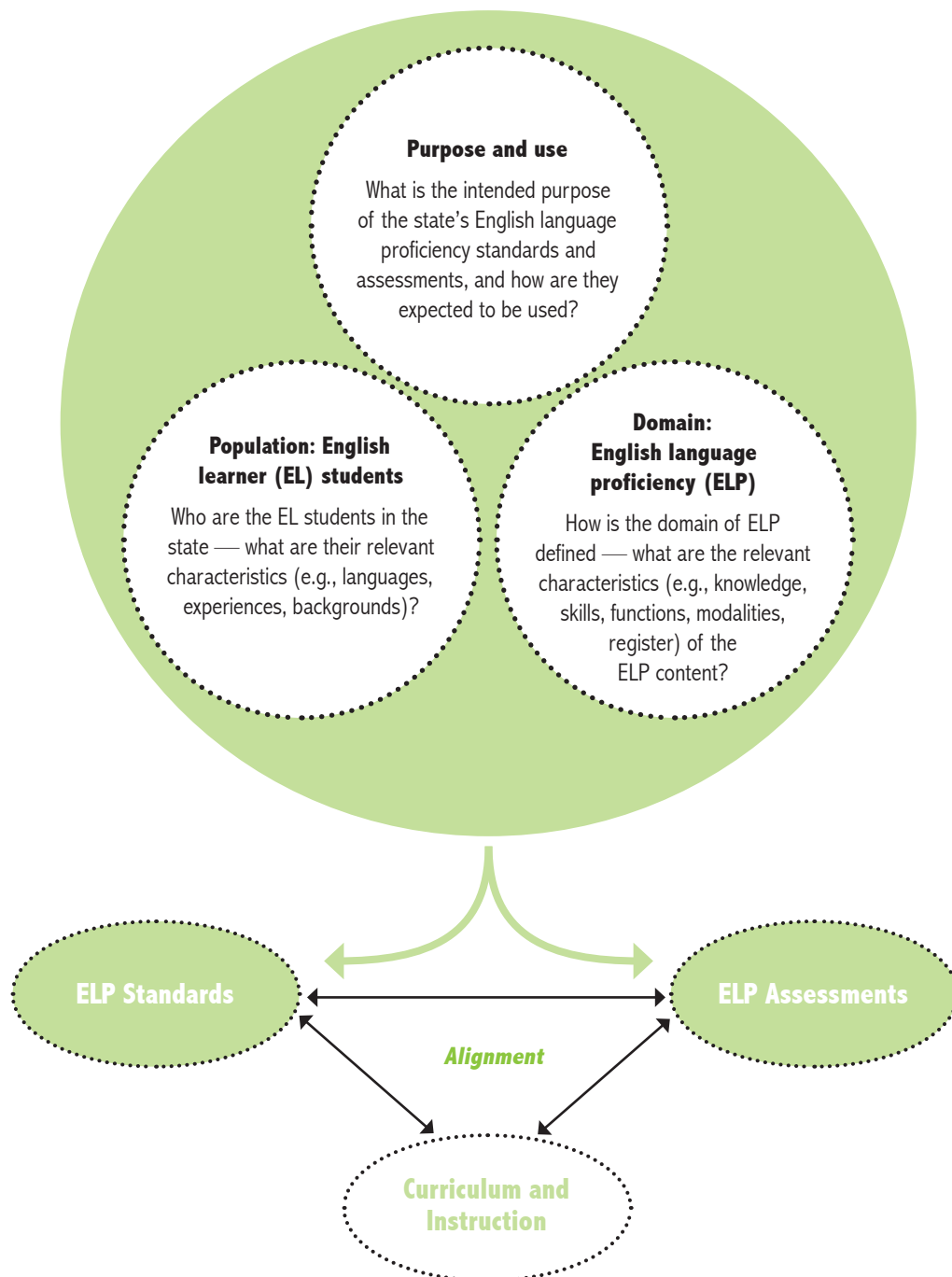
Although consensus may be lacking on how best to develop standards and assessments that fully address the particular needs of all EL students and that support their attainment of English language proficiency and their academic achievement, research and understanding continues to advance in these areas, with evidence of promising practices emerging from state experiences. The Framework extends the strong knowledge base and research that exists on quality standards and assessments, as well as the body of research and practice related to English language acquisition.

The Framework makes use of this knowledge and research and provides criteria to states for establishing the basic premises necessary for the development and implementation of state standards and assessments, as well as a method for evaluating their quality and the validity of their outcomes (e.g., impact on student learning, interpretation and consequences of test scores).¹⁴ The basic premises include explicit descriptions of the purpose and use of a state's standards and assessments, the scope of the content addressed, and the population of students affected by the standards and assessments, as well

as descriptions of their expected relationships and intended impact on student achievement.

Three elements are fundamental to the development and implementation of high-quality ELP standards and assessments: the intended purpose and use of state ELP standards and assessments, the definition of a state's EL population, and the definition of the ELP domain. The graphic below emphasizes the significance of these three foundational elements.

(continues on page 6 >>)



Overview of Criteria

It is essential that state standards and assessments continue to be updated and that these systems undergo regular review and, if needed, refinement.

Section 1: STANDARDS (Development Phase; Implementation Phase)	
DEVELOPMENT PHASE	<p>1.1 Organization or structure of the standards</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The structure of the state's ELP standards (e.g., format, organization/hierarchy, levels of detail) is appropriate for the standards' instruction- and assessment-related (including reporting) purposes and uses. <p>1.2 Number of standards</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The number of standards is appropriate for the depth and breadth of the ELP domain, as it is defined by the state. The number of standards allows for appropriate coherence and consistency of skills and knowledge across modalities (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing), as defined by the state. <p>1.3 Level of specificity or "granularity" of the standards</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state's ELP standards are described with sufficient clarity and definition to guide curriculum, development, instructional planning, and assessment development for the EL population. <p>1.4 Alignment¹⁶</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state's ELP standards are articulated horizontally. The state's ELP standards are articulated vertically. The state's ELP standards are linked with the state's academic content standards.¹⁷
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE¹⁸	<p>1.5 Training</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state provides guidance and training to local education agencies — for example, to teachers of English as a Second Language, bilingual teachers, content area teachers, special education teachers, school and district administrators — on the ELP standards, their purpose and use, and implementation strategies. <p>1.6 Monitoring and evaluating</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state has systems and structures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of its ELP standards in local education agencies, schools, and classrooms.

Section 2: ASSESSMENT (Development Phase; Implementation Phase)	
Research suggests that during development and implementation, the Assessment Framework presents critical criteria in a phase-by-phase approach required by Title III of NCLB to measure the progress and English language proficiency of students.	
DEVELOPMENT PHASE	<p>2.1 Specifications</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Specifications (i.e., item, graphic/stimulus, passage, test form) are appropriate for the state's intended purposes and uses. Item specifications accurately represent the state's intended purposes and uses for development (e.g., teachers, test developers, review committees). <p>2.2 Test blueprint</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The test blueprint communicates the structure and content of the assessment. <p>2.3 Alignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state's ELP assessments are aligned with the state's academic content standards. The language skills and knowledge included in the state's ELP assessments are aligned with the state's academic content standards. The state's ELP assessments are aligned with the state's academic content standards. <p>2.4 Bias and sensitivity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state's ELP assessments are fair and accessible to all students. Bias and sensitivity issues have been examined through appropriate methods.
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	<p>2.5 Administration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state provides guidance and training to test administrators. The state has systems and structures for ensuring standard administration. <p>2.6 Scoring</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state provides guidance and training to scorers. The state has systems and structures for ensuring quality scoring. <p>2.7 Reporting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state's ELP assessments yield coherent and valid information. The state's reporting system facilitates appropriate, credible, and timely reporting to the state, local education, federal government). The state reports participation and assessment results for all students, including identifiable information about individual students. The state produces interpretive guidance following each assessment. <p>2.8 Standard setting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state uses a validated standard-setting process resulting in the identification of language skills and knowledge in each language modality and the state's English language proficiency, as the state has defined it. <p>2.9 Equating</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state uses a defensible equating methodology that ensures the comparability of scores across different assessment forms. <p>2.10 Monitoring and evaluating</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The state has systems and structures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of its ELP assessments and ELP standards.

* For the related considerations and examples of evidence and documentation, see the related sections in the Assessment Framework.

to accurately reflect a state's values, priorities, and needs, which may change and evolve over time.¹⁵ Thus it is important
development. Below are criteria* to help states establish and maintain high-quality ELP standards and assessments.

ion Phase)
ion of an assessment, different types of information are needed (i.e., evidence of validity, reliability, freedom from bias).¹⁹ The Assessment section of the
roach in order to best support the goal of valid and fair measurement for EL students. The following criteria are for assessments aligned with ELP standards, as
ish proficiency of EL students.

form) accurately translate the state's intent of the standards with sufficient detail to guide the development of items and tests that assess the standards.
t for the standards with sufficient detail to ensure consistent understanding of the standards across key groups of participants involved in the test's
committee members).

ent of the test (e.g., breadth, depth, range of complexity, emphasis, item formats) in a manner consistent with the intent of the state.

ELP standards.
s ELP assessments are relevant to English language acquisition and English language proficiency and necessary for students' achievement of challenging state
s language proficiency level descriptors.

tudents, regardless of, for example, their gender, culture, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and primary language.
both qualitative (e.g., expert judgment, cognitive interviews) and quantitative analyses (e.g., Differential Item Functioning).

trators and coordinators.
ardization and fidelity of administration.

y and accuracy of scoring.

ormation for its EL population, grade ranges, and language proficiency levels.
ible, and defensible interpretation of its ELP assessment data that is meaningful and usable for a range of users (e.g., teachers, parents, state boards of
or all EL students in its reports at the school, local education agency, and state levels, and the reports for any group or subgroup do not reveal personally
administration of its ELP assessment.

lting in language proficiency levels, descriptions of language competencies for each level, and cut scores that appropriately differentiate among English
y and in each grade range. These language proficiency levels and associated descriptions of language competencies reflect a progression toward students'
in its ELP standards and as is consistent with the theory and research on which the standards are based.

ensures results are comparable across administrations and forms of the assessments.

improving the quality of its assessment, including a plan for ongoing procedures to maintain and improve alignment over time between the state's

While these elements are relevant to the development of standards and assessments for *all* student populations, there are aspects of these elements that are unique to the EL population (e.g., experiences) and the ELP domain (e.g., register) and, thus, have implications for the quality (e.g., validity, utility) of ELP standards and assessments for this student population. Therefore, these elements should be addressed prior to the development and implementation of state ELP standards and assessments. As noted in the graphic on page 3, the authors of this Framework recognize the importance of curriculum and instruction, as well as their alignment with ELP standards and assessments, in supporting the success of English learners in our schools. However, discussion of curriculum and instruction is beyond the scope of this Framework, which focuses, instead, on ELP standards and assessments. This Framework does not suggest or assume any particular instructional approach or program for English language acquisition.

The purpose and use of a state's ELP standards and assessments should be clearly articulated. This Framework limits its discussion of assessment purpose and use to large-scale assessments that are aligned with ELP standards, as required by Title III to measure progress and proficiency of EL students. A more inclusive discussion of assessment development and implementation (e.g., diagnostic assessments, formative assessments) is beyond the scope of this Framework.

States also should be clear about whom they are teaching and testing. That is, the EL population for which a state's ELP standards are intended should be clearly described, including relevant demographic, sociocultural, and language characteristics of the population. It is important to note that determining who the students are does *not* mean that different standards or achievement expectations should be developed for different students; only one set of ELP standards and assessments should be developed for all EL students in a state.

The definition of the ELP domain reflected in a state's standards and assessments should have sound theoretical and research bases relevant to English language acquisition and English language proficiency. States should have a clear description of the content breadth, depth, and range of complexity of language skills and knowledge in the four recognized language modalities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing necessary for students' achievement of challenging state academic content. States also should determine how development in each of the modalities inter-relates and what this development and the inter-relationships mean in terms of the level of proficiency students need to achieve challenging state academic content. Having a clear definition of the purpose and use of a state's standards and assessments, the target population, and the domain has significant consequences for the quality of a state's ELP standards and assessments.



Organization of the Framework

The *Framework for High-Quality English Language Proficiency Standards and Assessments* is divided into two main sections: Section 1 focuses on ELP standards and Section 2 on ELP assessments.* Each section outlines critical *criteria* for developing and implementing state ELP standards and assessments, respectively. By criteria we mean specific conditions that states ought to satisfy as they develop and implement their ELP standards and assessments. Key *considerations* are presented for each criterion. Considerations are factors or information that states ought to account for when making decisions about how to address a criterion or whether a criterion has been met. Information related to the importance or relevance of each criterion to quality (i.e., validity, reliability, bias and sensitivity, utility) also is presented in the Framework, as are examples of evidence and documentation (e.g., technical reports, state administrative code or law, committee meeting minutes) for supporting the quality of a state’s ELP standards and assessments.

Using the Framework

Recognizing that states are at different stages in developing and implementing ELP standards and assessments, the Framework provides “multiple points of entry” — that is, depending on the work states have already done or feedback they have already received, states might focus evaluation or oversight efforts on both standards and assessments, on just one or the other, or, even, on one particular aspect of quality, such as validity.

Users of the Framework are strongly encouraged to convene cross-department, interdisciplinary teams when using this tool. Because there are characteristics particular to the EL population and the ELP domain that impact the quality of ELP standards and assessments,²⁰ it is critical to have input from a range of experts (e.g., researchers, consultants, technical assistance providers, state department staff, classroom teachers) knowledgeable of Title III and Title I accountability requirements, English language acquisition and applied linguistics, language testing, standards, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and the state’s EL population.

* See the complete Framework document for more details. The complete Framework document is available on the following website:
<http://www.aacompcenter.org>.

Some cautions in using the Framework

The Framework provides criteria intended to systematically guide the evaluation or oversight of the development and implementation of state ELP standards and assessments. Several cautions are warranted to prevent misinterpretation and misapplication of the Framework:

- The Framework reflects an evolving area of knowledge; therefore, the information presented in the Framework may need to be refined over time, according to new research and emerging practices.
- The Framework’s criteria are important to consider, but are not necessarily sufficient for ensuring the quality of state ELP standards, the technical adequacy of state ELP assessments, and full compliance with federal legislation.
- The Framework is not intended to prescribe specific methodologies for developing standards and assessments; rather, the information it generates and the criteria it provides are intended to inform decisions and activities relevant to the assurance of high-quality ELP standards and assessments.
- The Framework focuses on ELP standards and assessments; while both of these have implications for instruction, instruction is not a focus of this Framework, nor does the Framework suggest or assume any particular instructional approach or program for English language acquisition.
- The Framework was not developed and is not intended for use as a monitoring tool for compliance purposes.

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Endnotes

1 The language of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) refers to the Framework's target student population as "limited English proficient" (LEP). The authors recognize that many researchers and practitioners prefer the term "English language learner" or "English learner (EL) student." Consistent with the more general, common usages, this document and the Framework will use the latter terms.

2 English language learners are (a) 3 to 21 years of age, (b) enrolled or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary school, (c) either not born in the United States or have a native language other than English, and (d) owing to difficulty in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English, not able to meet the state's proficient level of achievement to successfully achieve in English-only classrooms or not able to participate fully in society (Title IX, Section 9101).

3 Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2006; Kindler, 2002; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006.

4 For example, from 2002–2007, for Title III English language acquisition state grants, funding to states increased from \$664 million to \$669 million, with projected funding for 2009 set at \$730 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). And, state funding (not including federal grants) of ESL/ELL programs for FY 2005–2006 include: California at \$57.7 million; Colorado at \$4 million; Maryland at \$67.8 million; Michigan at \$2.8 million; New Jersey at \$65.6 million; and New York at least at \$109.7 million (Griffith and Hancock, 2006).

5 Abedi, 2006; Abedi, Leon, and Mirocha, 2003; GAO, 2006; Solano-Flores and Trumbull, 2003.

6 Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, and Scarcella, 2007; Snow, Cancini, Gonzalez, and Shriberg, 1989.

7 Generally, language competencies include lexical, grammatical, and discourse features relevant to particular contexts, and academic language includes the language students need to meaningfully engage with academic content within the academic context, such as the words, grammatical structures, and discourse markers needed in describing, summarizing, and evaluating. Although there may not be just one accepted definition of academic language, there are a good number of resources available that address the issue of academic language. For example: Aguirre-Munoz, Parks, Benner, Amabisca, and Boscardin, 2006; Bailey, 2007; Bailey, Butler, and Sato, 2007; Butler, Bailey, Stevens, Huang, and Lord, 2004; Cummins, 1980; Cummins, 2005; Halliday, 1994; Sato, 2007; Scarcella and Zimmerman, 1998; Schleppegrell, 2001.

8 Klein, Bugarin, Beltranena, and McArthur, 2004.

9 Gong, 2002; Linn, 2006; Pellegrino, Chudowsky, and Glaser, 2001; Rabinowitz, Roeber, Schroeder, and Sheinker, 2006.

10 American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999; Green, 1998; Messick, 1993; Webb, Horton, and O'Neal, 2002.

11 Kopriva, 2008; Rabinowitz and Sato, 2005, 2006; Sato and Rabinowitz, forthcoming; Solano-Flores and Trumbull, 2003; Solorzano, 2008.

12 e.g., Crawford, 2004; Del Vecchio and Guerrero, 1995; Menken, 2000; Walqui, 2000.

13 e.g., Cummins, 1980, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2001, 2006.

14 Kane, 1992; Messick, 1993; Marion and Pellegrino, 2006; Chapelle, Enright, and Jamieson, 2007.

15 Rabinowitz, Roeber, Schroeder, and Sheinker, 2006; WestEd, 2007.

16 Alignment of ELP standards to ELP assessments and to language proficiency levels will be addressed in Section 2, the Assessment section.

17 According to NCLB Title III, Section 3113, the state ELP standards are to be "aligned" with the achievement of challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. As commonly used, **alignment** refers to relationships that tend to be *direct*; alignment models typically examine correspondence between standards and assessments for a single student population (e.g., general education or English language learners or students with disabilities) or for a single content area (e.g., English language arts or mathematics). **Linkage** refers to relationships that tend to be *developmental, foundational, or proximal*; thus, "linkage" is seen as the more appropriate term to use to describe the intent of NCLB Title III, Section 3113. The term "linkage" not only allows for correspondence of content area topics (e.g., figurative language, measurement, scientific inquiry), but also for the range of language knowledge and skills that students need to meaningfully engage with and achieve academic content (e.g., the words, grammatical structures, and discourse markers needed in describing, summarizing, inquiring, and analyzing). Models examining linkage often lend themselves to correspondence between standards and/or assessments developed for different student populations or different content areas (WestEd, 2004; Cook, 2005; Sato, Lagunoff, Worth, Bailey, and Butler, 2005; Bailey, Butler, and Sato, 2007; Flowers, Wakeman, Browder, & Karvonen, 2007).

18 The discussion of standards implementation is limited to training and monitoring and evaluation. A fuller treatment of implementation in terms of implications for curriculum and instruction (e.g., criteria for high-quality standards-based curriculum and instruction, instructional programs and strategies) is beyond the scope of this framework.

19 Rabinowitz and Sato, 2005, 2006.

20 Rabinowitz and Sato, 2005, 2006; Solorzano, 2008.

For a complete reference list for this brief, visit www.aacompcenter.org.

Questions and information about the Framework

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