

ECUR 291: An Introduction to the Teaching of English as a Second Language

Abstract

Canada welcomes an average of 235,000 landed immigrants each year and the current Liberal government reminds us that it is the diversity of those who come here that is at the heart of Canada's strength.

“Canadians understand that diversity is our strength. We know that Canada has succeeded—culturally, politically, economically—because of our diversity, not in spite of it.”

– Justin Trudeau, 2015¹

Language learning clearly has a major place within such a diverse cultural quilt. From k-12 integration in the classroom to adult language needs within the workplace, the needs of our newcomers are as diverse as our nation itself. *ECUR 291: An Introduction to the Teaching of English as a Second Language* acts as the jumping off point for two separate Certificate Programs and serves as a B.Ed. elective within the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Having undergone a full redevelopment in 2016 this course has moved online to a more flexible, social and interactive delivery model. A diverse array of students compliments the diversity of those these teachers will serve with students focused on their B.Ed.'s, in-service teachers looking for a post-degree opportunity to specialize in language teaching, and those looking for a nationally recognized certificate accreditation to work with adult learners who arrive in Canada looking for new opportunities of their own.

Value

This course is designed to introduce the field of English Language Teaching to professionals interested in working with learners of any proficiency and age in either English or non-English speaking environments. *ECUR 291* provides an introduction to a wide variety of approaches to language teaching including learner variables, second language acquisition, the teaching process, and classroom management, as well as an introduction to teaching the skill areas, types of curricula, and communicative language teaching. By the end of this class, students will have collected a wide range of resources, have relative confidence in working with language learners, and know how to network with the professional community.

As mentioned above, this course plays a cornerstone role in two Certificate Programs and also provides an introduction to language teaching to those currently working on their B.Ed. degrees as an optional elective within their program. The value and service this course provides to each of these three programs, however, is clear to see.

¹ <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength>

ECUR 291 within the Bachelor's of Education - Program Elective

As an elective to a standard 4-year Bachelor's of Education Degree, ECUR 291 provides not only a comprehensive introduction to teaching and assessment approaches for English Language Teaching, but provides perhaps a slightly different angle of view to lesson planning, classroom management and curriculum development that students will already be familiar with. This variant of language acquisition allows students to look at these familiar concepts in teaching strategies and asks them to see them in a new and context specific light, thus reinforcing the concepts through differentiation and contrast.

Beyond this strengthening of common concepts students will also have the opportunity to use the strategies specific to language learning as they move into their teaching professions. Saskatchewan has seen a steady increase in immigration numbers since 2008 and continues to grow its immigrant student population each year. It is very likely that our B.Ed. graduates will face the task of assessing and teaching a student for whom EAL strategies will make a major difference to their comprehension and ability to meet outcomes.

ECUR 291 within the Post-degree Certificate in English as an Additional Language (PGCEAL)

Increased immigration to Saskatchewan has resulted in an influx of newcomer students with English language needs. In addition, we have a significant population of local students who require EAL support. The provincial government has responded with more funding and professional support to school divisions. However, the provision of teacher training and certification in the area of EAL is the responsibility of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan.

School division administrators are actively seeking to hire teachers with EAL training to meet current needs. Due to an existing gap in training in Saskatchewan, teachers were searching out other options, including certification outside the province. The College of Education is committed to filling this gap through this Additional Qualifications Certificate (AQC) which fulfills the AQC requirements for the *Saskatchewan Professional Teachers' Regulatory Board*.

The availability of certified EAL specialists can make a tremendous difference in the classroom, within a school and at the division level. Knowledgeable EAL specialists can assist with planning and decision-making for language support at various grade levels. They can also work with professional learning communities, foster mentorships, participate in classroom co-teaching and provide guidance for resource selection to meet EAL needs. At this time, over eight per cent of the total Saskatchewan k-12 student population receives support for EAL. From all indications, this percentage will continue to increase.

Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language (CERTESL)

The CERTESL Program takes teacher-training for EAL beyond the borders of the province ensuring that our students can receive accreditation across the country and beyond. This program ensures that English Language Educators have access to appropriate training and to

ensure that Canadians will be able to earn credentials that will enable them to teach English language across Canada and overseas.

Complexity

Obviously the complexity of stakeholders in this course development was enormous. First, to simply fulfill the requirements of an introductory course for such a diverse set of programs (B.Ed., PGCEAL, CERTESL) meant that the course needed to set up information in such a way that allowed for the specialized study that was to come in post-requisite courses in each of the separate programs of study. Understanding the post-requisite courses in each program was essential. Negotiations on curriculum needed to take place between the Subject Matter Expert who had been hired to write the course and would be contracted to teach it as well, the Instructional Designer from the Distance Education Unit responsible for ultimately delivering the course, who also acted as the Project Manager, the EAL Program Specialist in the Dept. of Curriculum Studies in charge of the PGCEAL, as well as the Academic Coordinator for the CERTESL Program. Each of these stakeholders had their own specific interests in the course development and design of curriculum outcomes as a pre-requisite for their particular programs.

Beyond the in-house diversity of needs among the different programs we also needed to consider the requirements of stakeholders outside of the University who gave our students their accreditations. TESL Ontario, TESL Canada, TESL SK, AQC requirements for the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers' Regulatory Board and the Ministry of Education all have requirements that must be met in order for our programs to be considered adequate for their accreditations. Therefore, each of these stakeholders' needs were to be addressed in the outcomes and content we would develop.

The complexity of the development also came from the diversity of our students and their locations. As a distance delivered course which serves the needs of three separate programs at the University of Saskatchewan these courses may be taken by fresh undergraduates, in-service teachers within the k-12 system, or a whole host of various educators looking to specialize in Language learning. Rural broadband speeds would be a consideration as would time zones and due dates as we began to develop an interactive course where students were expected to participate and not just passively "absorb knowledge".

Ingenuity and Innovation

As mentioned in the Abstract this course was completely redesigned and developed from an existing course that had been delivered as a paper-based independent studies course. In the past this course had been mailed out as a Course Guide and Readings Package and served the CERTESL and B.Ed. programs. With the addition of the new PGCEAL program and several changes to standardized documents such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and the Common Framework of Reference (CFR) this course was in need of major revisions and redevelopment. As we got into the existing material it became clear that nearly everything in the content could be updated and rewritten and so after redeveloping the learning objectives

to serve the needs of our array of stakeholders we began to curate and create new content. As well as the content changes we were also changing the delivery mode to an online model that would allow us to increase the social learning approaches used in the course and get professionals meeting each other and discussing current topics and experiences in the context of the learning material. More on this in the next section. The online platform allowed us to be creative with the type of content we could provide and how we would form the weekly modules for learning. We developed a template that allowed for a balance of reading, watching, reflecting, writing, and sharing. Taking advantage of the online tools available in our institution's LMS, Blackboard Learn, we broke up the standard written learning materials with embedded videos, reflective journaling exercises and embedded, interactive study games where students could test their knowledge and review concepts in a variety of ways. The Quizlet study questions allowed students to choose their method of study from flashcards, to timed matching definitions, to a variety of other study methods.

Another important outcome of this introductory course was an awareness and engagement in the English Language Teaching community as a whole. The English Language Teaching community is a well-established group of professionals sharing knowledge, practices, innovations, and standards across North America and beyond. It is important that students are not only made aware of the community of practice that exists around English Language teaching, but that they are encouraged to engage in the community at a very early stage of their programs. Because of this very social and collaborative nature of this profession, the course was designed with a healthy dose of peer-to-peer interactions including synchronous events where students could discuss class concepts as well as opportunities to share posts and reflections with one another. We also designed activities for students to seek out existing English Language Teaching communities either online or in their home communities and engage in activities there.

[Innovation in Delivery](#)

As mentioned above this course moved a paper-based independent studies course into the 21st century by taking it online and integrating modern modalities for distance delivery. The key focus was to redesign the teaching strategies to make use of modern and social ways of knowing. The last thing we wanted was to simply put the course guide into an LMS and have students use the electronic drop box instead of mailing in assignments. This is not innovative not is it good online pedagogy. ECUR 291 sought out to look at the introductory course as an opportunity to connect the diverse range of students in a social and interactive learning space. One where experienced in-service teachers could share their challenges in the classroom, where English teachers working in foreign lands could describe the cultural contexts of language acquisition and where eager pre-service B.Ed. students could spark conversations with enthusiasm and curiosity.

The online platform of an LMS is not always the best environment for social learning. Tools are often locked down and student privacy policies often trump social learning opportunities. Therefore, we did our best to make use of the tools we had to make a social and interactive place of learning. First, the synchronous web-conferencing tools were used to give the

instructor an opportunity to be presented as a real person and to see her students the same way. These synchronous sessions continued throughout the term at various points where live discussion and debate could take place. Second we utilized the journaling tool to allow students to record their learning in a reflective way. Weekly modules posed questions throughout the material and gave students the opportunity to respond should they feel motivated to do so. A minimum number of these posts were required, but the choice of which posts would be submitted was up to the student. These posts were also often shared in the discussion forums as kindling for discussions and debates. Other opportunities to contribute to the course material included students seeking out current information, videos or articles and summarizing them for their peers. These sharing opportunities often yielded high quality literature related to the course outcomes or weekly topics.

Overall, the opportunities for students across programs to share their unique identities and perspectives in a secure learning environment that was closely facilitated and mentored by the instructor.

Profile of Continuing Education

As described throughout this submission ECUR 291 is the cornerstone course to two Certificate level programs of continuing education. The PGCEAL in particular is enhancing the profile of continuing education across the province of Saskatchewan. This much anticipated certificate has captured the attention of government stakeholders and teaching professionals alike as it attempts to fill the gap of skilled EAL instructors within our provincial school systems. Letters of support from the Associate Deputy Minister of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan TEAL, Saskatoon Public Schools, Prairie West School Division, the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools as well as from the EAL & Languages, Ministry of Education were all collected and submitted as part of this program's formal proposal process at the University of Saskatchewan.

ECUR 291: An Introduction to the Teaching of English as a Second Language is the first redevelopment in the PGCEAL program's suite of courses. This course was designed as the template for which the rest of the developments will now follow in terms of innovation, delivery modes, tools and design. As such it paves the way for this program to fulfill the needs of the k-12 system in Language Teaching professionals. It also serves the same template roll for the CERTESL Program as these courses are redeveloped and designed alongside those in the PGCEAL.

The CERTESL Program is already Canada's most-recognized non-Master's distance delivered English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher-training program. It is an award-winning program that is accepted by all three of the TESL accrediting bodies in Canada: TESL Canada, TESL Ontario, and TESL Saskatchewan. CERTESL courses address the largest possible range of second/additional language learning needs: immigrants, refugees, international students, overseas students, Indigenous Canadians, and K to 12. The redevelopment of *ECUR 291: An Introduction to the Teaching of English as a Second Language* means that this program is only getting better as we strive to increase the social learning opportunities and flexibility of

delivery for our continuing education students and help flood the community of English Language Teaching professionals with engaged and knowledgeable recruits.