

## Transitions to Alberta Classrooms (TAC)

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Time: Mon thru Fri, 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

### The Professional Rationale:

The primary purpose of the Transitions to Alberta Classrooms (TAC) Program is to allow participants to work towards excellence in their teaching through the process of **analysis, reflection, discussion and practice**.

As new Canadians who have received their initial teacher training in foreign countries, the TAC program will assist participants to become reflective practitioners who are able to assume the many practical demands of teaching in Canada. The TAC program will allow teachers to enhance their professional competency and understanding of Canadian teaching contexts in terms of:

- Understanding responsibilities to students, parents, colleagues, the profession, and the wider community as a teaching professional;
- understanding the diverse ways in which people learn;
- understanding the legislated, moral and ethical frameworks within which Alberta teachers work;
- being able to deal with complex and sometimes conflicting demands posed by children and their diverse learning needs, evolving curriculum standards and knowledge, and needs of particular contexts of teaching and learning;
- translating the Alberta curriculum content and objectives into meaningful learning activities;
- applying a variety of teaching and learning approaches;
- planning and delivering a range of teaching and learning activities;

- creating and maintaining environments that are conducive to student learning;
- applying a variety of technologies to meet student learning needs;
- gathering and using information about students' learning needs and progress
- and developing the ability to communicate effectively with the diverse partners involved in education.

### **Program Design:**

The TAC Program consists of two essential and integrated components: professional seminars and practicum placements.

In the professional seminars, learning experiences are integrated conceptually around a series of interrelated themes. Each thematic unit has specific emphasis with a body of knowledge to be learned and professional skills to be acquired. The content of these themes will be explored through weekly readings requiring student responses, discussion periods in which participants examine, articulate and theorize their experiences and beliefs as teachers, and role-play tasks requiring participants to rehearse and experiment with the language necessary to effectively communicate in English with students, parents, fellow teachers, and administrators.

Field-oriented experiences provide a context for greater understanding of teaching found in real educational situations. The embedded practicum component provides participants an opportunity to become familiar with the rhythm of Canadian school and classroom life throughout the course of the school year, offer extended time for practice teaching and professional language development for instruction, and have greater access to communication activities specific to the Canadian teaching profession.

Fundamental to the design of the TAC program is the critical integration of both theoretical and practical understandings of teaching and learning, as well as opportunities to develop the specific language and communication skills required of teachers in Canada.

### **Texts:**

The following texts will be used regularly in the TAC program. In addition, a variety of articles will supplement these texts and be read, discussed and presented in class.

Bennett, B. & Rolheiser, C. (2001). ***Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration***. Toronto: Bookation Inc.

***Success for All learners: A Handbook for Differentiating Instruction***. (1996). Manitoba Education and Training.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). ***Understanding by Design***. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

## **Expectations:**

### **1. Cooperation and Professionalism:**

Attitudes of responsibility, cooperation and collaboration are required in all aspects of the TAC program. Since the tasks set out in the professional seminars depend upon participants working together, it is essential that participating teachers act as responsible and cooperative group members and fulfill obligations during group tasks.

During the practicum placements, participants are expected to demonstrate a professional, responsible attitude in all aspects of the field experience with their partner teachers and with the greater school community. Participants are expected to negotiate the details of their teaching involvement with partnering teachers, present themselves to their colleagues and students in a professional manner, and to demonstrate conscientious preparation for all teaching assignments.

### **2. Attendance:**

Participation in all activities related to the various thematic units of study is mandatory. Failure to fully participate in professional seminars and field based experiences will be reviewed as part of participants' narrative assessments. Participants are advised that evaluations will include their day-to-day performance.

Participants who may need to absent themselves from classes or field experiences for particular religious holidays should inform both their partner teachers and instructor in advance that they will not be present on that day.

### **3. Completion of Assigned Tasks:**

Participating teachers are required to complete all of the assigned tasks for successful completion of the TAC program. The specifics of the written assignments are outlined later in this syllabus.

Successful completion of the field experiences will include:

- Collaborating with the partner teacher on advanced planning for weekly lessons;
- Developing materials and lessons that aim at excellence;
- Sharing materials with the partner teacher;
- Debriefing with the partner teacher on the delivery and success of lessons;
- Team-teaching or assisting partner teachers during time on-site when the partner teacher is in the lead role.

## **Course Requirements:**

1. **Biography of Learning** (ongoing, collected and responded to weekly, culminated and presented to the class at the end of the first and second semesters).

Throughout the first semester of the TAC program, participants will keep a written account of significant learning from each part of the course (readings, class activities, lectures, seminars, field experiences, observations, guest speaker presentations, etc). In this reflective writing, participants are encouraged to

question and reflect upon their learning and to identify their own theories about what constitutes good learning and teaching in the Canadian context. The biography of learning should be an attempt to connect both knowledge and experience, and to extend the power of both. It will serve as an on-going dialogue between the instructor and the participants. Added collectively to the biography of learning will be weekly assignments, reading logs, field observation notes, and self-directed language learning entries.

In addition, as part of the biography, students should make realistic assessments of their own needs, and identity and carry out courses of action to help them become stronger teachers. Questions such as the following should be examined:

- What are my strengths as a teacher?
- What do I need to improve?
- What course of action will I take?
- How will I know if what I have done has strengthened me professionally?

At the end of the each semester, each student will present a culminating representation of their Biography of Learning to the group. The student will decide the format for this presentation. It may take the form of a written synthesis of all of the elements of the Biography of Learning, a visual or metaphoric representation, or collected body of work. The presentation of each individual's Biography of Learning will last no more than thirty minutes in length.

The following criteria should speak to the question of what constitutes a good biography of learning:

- Is there a clear articulation of significant learning? Have the participants demonstrated what difference their learning has made to their understanding of pedagogy?
- Does the work demonstrate the ability to glean understanding from the whole of their experience, that is, from what they remember, from what they encounter in the field, from what they work through, read and discuss in the professional seminars? Is there continuity to their learning?
- Does their work demonstrate a growing awareness of the limitations and possibilities inherent in their own and others' practice? Are they able to go beyond describing what is, to formulating what might be?

## 2. **Reading Logs** (weekly, added to the Biography of Learning)

Students will be required to complete a reading log for many of the scholarly journal articles read as part of the course. These completed reading logs will be used as a way of both synthesizing the salient points from each reading, as well as serve as a forum for developing academic vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.

## 3. **Self-directed Language Learning Plan** (created at the beginning of the course and reviewed monthly, added to the Biography of Learning).

As the development of language and communication skills specific to teaching is an integral part of the TAC program, each student will be responsible for identifying what they feel to be their primary needs in developing their English language skills for teaching. This plan will be identified at the beginning of the course and students will review their progress and re-assess their language learning goals throughout the course. The self-directed language learning plan may address any of the areas of language production (speaking, listening, reading or writing) or some combination of all. Written reflections of their progress towards language learning goals will be added to each student's Biography of Learning. The instructor will conference and consult each student on a monthly basis regarding language learning goals, development and progress.

#### **4. Case Study Seminar Leader (1time)**

Weekly themes will be presented initially through the study of cases which present real-life learning and teaching scenarios and issues to be analyzed, debated, and perhaps resolved. Case work offers a series of complex topics which may arise in a Canadian educational milieu. Examination of these may require participants to explore alternative perspectives from their previous paradigms of overseas teaching.

Participants will be required each week to generate weekly written responses to the cases, as well as participate in the discussions surrounding these cases. During these discussions, participants should draw upon their past experience, previous reading and ongoing reading of the literature, and their pedagogical intuition to guide them. Good seminars occur when the participants study the text closely, listen actively, share ideas and questions in response to the questions as ideas of others, and search for evidence to support their ideas. Through careful preparation, participants share the responsibility with the leader for the quality of the case discussions.

In addition, each student will be responsible one time a semester to be the case study leader for the week. In this role, the participant will lead the discussion during the seminar by way of raising questions about reasoning, evidence, connections, examples, important issues, and new ideas. In order to prepare for the case discussion, a case leader in their initial reading of the case may ask:

- What problems, issues, situations, conflicts or tensions are evident in the preamble, and narrative?
- What is being asked by the positioning statement?
- What are the underlying assumptions in the case?
- What do I already know about the topic? What information is missing? What do we need to know?
- What other sources of information can be brought to bear on this situation?

The role of the case leader is to lead the group through a thoughtful discussion of the main themes arising from the case text. At the end of the case discussion, the participants leading the seminar should summarize the discussion, paying close attention to the possibilities for action suggested. Peer feedback of the seminar will be given to each leader. This feedback should serve to assist the seminar leader in reflecting upon the quality of their preparation and ability to generate rigorous critical thought through questioning.

**5. Field Seminar Leader (1 time)**

At the end of each week, a seminar will be held to examine, through careful systematic inquiry, what is occurring in the field, and from that to create a deeper understanding of learning, teaching, curriculum and life in schools. Each teacher will be given specific questions or ideas to focus on related to weekly topics before the field experiences each week. Written reflections by each teacher on these questions or ideas will be added to the Biography of Learning. They may also be used as a forum for discussion in the field seminars held each Friday. One student will be assigned to lead this discussion in a manner similar to the Case Study Seminars.

**6. Group presentations of weekly readings (2 times each semester)**

The TAC program is focused around pedagogical themes. Each student will be required to complete weekly readings, prepare initial reactions to case studies in written form in their Biographies of Learning, and participate in role-plays and discussions focused around the weekly topics.

At the end of each week, a group of two or three participants will work together to present a summary of the week's readings. The purpose of these presentations is to reiterate the important ideas or issues that have emerged from the suggested weekly readings and connect them to related ideas explored in the case work, field work, and through guest speakers' presentations and class discussions. The format to this presentation is completely open. Presentations may incorporate multimedia, technology, other visuals such as graphs, illustrations or pictures, may be interactive or lecture style, or may be structured as a group discussion or role play, or simply a summary of texts. This exercise will provide an opportunity for participants to creatively synthesize outside reading in a way which provides clarity for themselves and for the other participants. Although the participants will work together in teams for these presentations, they will be evaluated for their individual contributions to the whole.

**7. Self-assessments of teaching and language use from video recordings (1 per semester)**

One of the primary aims of the TAC program is to provide participants a context in which to develop not only their teaching skills but also their specific language ability for teaching. Participants will be videotaped once a semester in their practicum teaching placements. In order to encourage self-directed language learning, participating teachers will use these videos as an opportunity to analyze

their use of language to communicate and teach, as well as their teaching behaviors. Through systematic analysis, these videotapes will give participants an opportunity to identify areas of strength and need in terms of their own English language proficiency, communication and instructional skills.

#### **8. Individual Inquiry Project – Personal Investigations into Teaching and Learning (1<sup>st</sup> semester)**

A culminating project for the first semester will be an inquiry project designed by each individual participant. This inquiry should relate to some aspect of teaching or learning that the participants would like research further. This project is not designed as a typical research paper, rather it is an inquiry in which the participants design, research, and document in a qualitative study about a self-determined question related to teaching. Participants must discuss and negotiate the specifics of their independent inquiries with the instructor.

Proposals for intended independent inquiries are required (see attached Independent Inquiry Proposal Form). This proposal should include a statement of intent and/or purpose, a list of questions driving the inquiry, and a description of the inquiry activity to be pursued. Proposals will be evaluated by according to the integration of theory and practice, and its significance and benefit to the participant. Each project will be individually designed and may take the form of a written research paper, multimedia presentation or poster presentation.

Individual inquiry projects will be presented by the participants to the group at the end of the first semester.

#### **9. Individual Curriculum Project (2<sup>nd</sup> semester)**

An expectation for the second semester is that participants become fully knowledgeable about, and conversant with, the Alberta Program of Studies (kindergarten to grade six generalist) or specific subjects in the grades 7-12 program. Developing an understanding of curriculum includes the ability to critically analyze programs of study, and to creatively construct meaningful learning experiences based on required learning expectations.

The culminating project for the second semester will be the development of a thematic unit of study in the participant's curricular area of expertise. Through this project, participants will develop and design a unit of study from a topic or theme outlined in the Alberta Program of Studies.

The components of this curriculum project will be designed by each participant and may include a unit overview, purposes and desired outcomes for the unit, sample lessons, suggested resources and possible use of technology into the inquiry, learning tasks and assessment tools, suggested teaching strategies and accommodations for diverse learners. The completed unit should demonstrate that the participant has a growing ability to think about curriculum in multiple ways and can plan for meaningful and relevant learning experiences in their field.

## 10. **Professional Portfolio** (presented at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester)

Throughout the TAC program, participating teachers will be assisted in the development of a professional teaching portfolio. The contents of this portfolio are not limited to but may contain the following:

- Professional resume
- Teaching certification from Canada and home country
- Letters of recommendation or evaluations from former employers, partner teachers and TAC instructor
- Personal philosophy of teaching
- Photographs from teaching experiences both overseas and in Canada
- DVD's of practice teaching

All of these artifacts will be either accessed or created during the two semesters, and time will be allotted for participants to work on their professional portfolios during the professional seminars. The professional portfolio may be created in a DVD format, or as a compilation of actual documents. The final format of the professional portfolio will be determined by each participant to best reflect their individual personality and style. These portfolios will be presented to the group at the end of the second semester.

### **Guidelines for Assessment:**

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning practices. As such, assessment is based on three questions:

- ✓ Where is the work strong?
- ✓ How can the work be improved?
- ✓ What can I/you do next to strengthen my/your work and that of others?

Participants in the TAC program must complete all of the course activities and assignments, as well as successfully complete the practicum component to receive a certificate of completion and/or credit for the course. Evaluation and feedback by the instructor will occur in an ongoing basis.

The forms of assessment and feedback to the participants from the instructor will be given in the following ways:

- Verbal feedback on daily classroom activities and videotaped teaching sequences and role-play scenarios;
- Written response to participants' written entries in their Biographies of Learning);
- Written responses to the Individual Inquiry Project and Curriculum Projects;
- A narrative written assessment of participants' teaching in field placements and the quality of work in the professional seminars.

The forms of self-assessment that the student will be required to submit:

- Assessment of their language proficiency needs and of progress towards the goals they identify in their self-directed language learning plans
- Assessment of their strengths and areas of need as professional teachers outlined in their Biography of Learning

- Assessment of their progress towards identified language and professional goals

Successful completion of the practicum by participating teachers is made by the TAC Instructor in consultation with the partnering teachers. A written narrative assessment will also be completed by partnering teachers in the participants' field placements. Comments given by partner teachers can include, but are not limited to comments relating to the following areas:

- The development of professional relationships between the partner teacher, students, co-workers and school administration
- Proficiency and use of the curriculum
- The cultivation of an effective learning environment
- The quality and preparation for teaching
- The professional value of the materials used in practice teaching
- The level of professionalism in the working environment
- The ability to reflect critically on teaching-learning transactions
- The progress towards professional aims
- Proficiency in using English and sociolinguistic skills to effectively communicate to students, co-workers, parents, and school administrator

### **TAC References & Resources**

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