

Reflective Practitioners – The Certificate Program in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at Centennial College

Opportunity

Since the 1990s, Centennial College in Toronto has been offering a certificate program, Teacher Trainer of Adults, for full and part-time faculty, whether at Centennial or in other institutions, focused on teaching practices and adult learning processes. This program recently underwent a comprehensive program review, revealing the need for re-thinking its structure and contents for 21st century teaching and learning.

The review determined that 21st century learners need enhanced global, social, and technological awareness, and that faculty need support and training to bring these perspectives into their teaching and student learning. Starting from this framework, a new certificate program, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (TLHE), was designed and developed over an 18-month period to provide the necessary critical thinking skills, knowledge base, and learning management processes for those interested in teaching in higher education. The Centre for Organizational Learning and Teaching researched, developed, and is offering the program.



Innovation

The core concept of TLHE program is explained by Zafar Syed, Dean of Organizational Learning and Academic Development, as based on the knowledge that, “teachers teach the way they were taught – not the way they were taught to teach.” The TLHE program is conceptualized and designed to model approaches and strategies that participants can replicate in the classroom, or in online and hybrid learning environments. The program draws on collaborative (Vygotsky), experiential (Dewey), and critical (Freire) frameworks.

Three essential principles build on this framework for the program:

- Learner-centred learning, including peer-to-peer interaction and other strategies to enhance student retention, engagement, and success;
- Global citizenship and equity, including how these perspectives influence education and the issues of perspective, power and privilege in the classroom;
- Technology enhanced delivery, presented as essential and relevant to every subject field and integrated throughout the program rather than treated as a separate topic.

Teaching and learning strategies and theories grounded in experiential learning, critical pedagogy, and collaborative learning complement and extend the design and delivery of the curriculum. As described by Benjamin Laskar, Professor of Teaching and Learning, the TLHE program demonstrates “how to teach diverse learners in a respectful, positive manner that honours multiple perspectives.”

Working from this conceptual basis, the one-year certificate program is structured with four mandatory courses and two electives, supported by the development of an e-portfolio in which each participant documents progress, accomplishments, and reflections. The mandatory courses are:

- Foundations – the focus is on theories and strategies related to the three guiding principles above, and their roles in education;
- Facilitation – with an emphasis on practical aspects including learning styles, effective use of technologies, and classroom management, for both in-class and online environments;
- Assessment – consideration of all forms of assessment of learners, programs, and courses, both formative and summative, as well as self-assessment of educational practice;
- Action Research Practicum – the goal of developing reflective practitioners who observe, reflect on, and improve their own practice. Each participant designs a practicum which reflects individual questions and interests. For example, it may involve the integration of a new technological tool, with its introduction and application structured using research principles and strategies and a clear articulation of the teaching and learning goals. Students are surveyed concerning the usefulness of the tool, and the instructor analyzes their responses, reflects on the practice, and outlines improvements and enhancements.

The first three courses are 45 hours each and the Practicum, which is completed after all the course work is done, comprises 60 hours. In addition, participants choose two electives, of 24 to 36 hours each, from among such courses as:

- Adult with Learning Disabilities
- Alternative Pedagogies: Faith and Spiritually Based Perspectives
- Indigenous Approaches to Learning
- Social Media in Education
- New Program Development: From Concept to Approval

The TLHE program is structured so that the learning, practice, and reflection are intertwined throughout the in-class and online portions of each course and between all the courses in the program. For example, participants discuss appropriate technology use for specific purposes such as synchronous teaching. They then practice by using the tool to learn online, as well as using it to teach their colleagues. Reflection on its strengths, limitations, and ways to enhance its effectiveness is part of the learning throughout the process.

The courses combine face-to-face instruction, with online learning, experience, and practice, as best suits the content being offered. The Centre for Organizational Learning and Teaching offers the certificate in a day-time program, while evening courses are provided through Continuing Education.

Outcomes and Benefits

The TLHE program is based on 21st century educational realities and understanding of student demographics and needs; the program seeks to develop practical teaching, research, and reflection skills for faculty. The program launched in the Fall of 2012 and will be carefully researched and evaluated. Anecdotal response so far has been positive. The program objectives outline what each participant should be able to achieve upon completion:

- Create curriculum that is outcomes-based, learner-centred, and connected to global perspectives and influences;
- Create learning experiences that are collaborative, experiential, inquiry-based, and accommodate differences in learners;
- Facilitate learning by engaging learners as partners through participatory guidance, consultation, and addressing specific learner needs;
- Assess adult learners' performance using a variety of evaluation tools and techniques;
- Evaluate pedagogical practices through student and self assessment, research, and critical reflection;
- Integrate online learning principles and competencies in curriculum and practice;

- Integrate diversity, environmental justice, social justice, and human rights principles in curriculum and practice.

Challenges and Enhancements

The previous program was in place for almost 20 years and so the introduction of the TLHE program required a careful transition for students and faculty from the old program. The previous program is still running so that current registrants can complete it; some of graduates have enquired about the new program as they recognize the value of the new content and approaches.

The faculty and staff involved in the design and development of the new program had to continually monitor that they were staying consistent with the guiding principles and values of the program. Considerable time and expertise was dedicated to the development of the TLHE program, and more time will be spent on research and evaluation.

Support initiatives such as “Appy Hour” – one hour drop-in sessions focused on specific topics such as Twitter and Facebook for learning – help to develop skills and comfort.

Although the idea of learner-centred learning has been around for decades, there is still resistance to the issue of shifting or sharing of control in the classroom and, to a lesser degree, the use of technology. These are points of careful exploration and reflection in the program, with participant support provided with attention to practice, comfort, and developing familiarity.

Potential

To make the TLHE program much more widely available to faculty outside of Centennial College, it will be developed to be offered completely online. Interest in the program has already been expressed by educators in China, Panama, and Mexico. The program is structured so that it would benefit anyone who works with adult learners – whether at the college or university level.

Publications and presentations are planned on the development and implementation of the program, as well as its impact.

For Further Information

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Web site for the certificate program: [Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#)