

# Critical Inquiry in Canadian EAP: Political economy, Curricular Breadth, & Assignment Design

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UNIVERSITY OF  
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# Diversity, Precarity, and Agency in EAP

A Mixed Methods Study of  
(De)Constructing EAP  
Practitioners in Canada

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# Rationale, Objectives, & Literature



# EAP across Canada: Programs and Practitioners

- Phase II of ongoing research that seeks to chart landscape of EAP across Canada
- This research builds on Phase I findings and attempts to better understand lived experiences of EAP practitioners, focusing on perceptions of professional satisfaction and legitimacy
- Aims to add to dearth of work focused on EAP practitioners in Canada
- Aims to recognize, validate, and improve the lives of EAP practitioners, an under-research cadre of ELT professionals

# EAP across Canada: Programs and Practitioners

- EAP Assessment (e.g., Huang, 2018)
- EAP Impact (e.g., Fox et al., 2013)
- EAP Teacher / student beliefs (e.g., Douglas & Kim, 2014; Douglas et al., 2022)
- EAP & L2 Writing Pedagogies (e.g., Bhowmik et al., 2021; Galante, 2020; Marshall & Walsh Marr, 2018; Van Viegen & Zappa-Hollman, 2020)
- **EAP Programming** (Douglas & Landry, 2021; Dyck, 2013)
- **EAP Practitioners** (Breshears, 2019; Valeo & Faez, 2013; MacDonald, 2016)

In order to better understand the social phenomena associated with EAP programs, and thus advocate for practitioners, we have adopted a **critical EAP lens** (Author, yr.; Benesch, 2001; Chun, 2019; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Pennycook, 2021) **that “considers hierarchical arrangements within the societies and institutions in which EAP takes place, examining power relations and their reciprocal relationship to the players...involved.”** (Benesch, 2009, p. 81)

# Methodology & RQs



## Research Design

- Sequential mixed methods design, employing both a survey questionnaire and individual interviews
- Statistics used as a way of supplementing our understanding of the social world of EAP

## Sampling & Participants

- EAP directors and instructors from private ESL, college and university contexts drawn from volunteers from a survey (n = 481)
- Analytically-driven, randomized invitations were generated and disseminated across groups to 30 directors and 18 instructors, resulting in 18 interviewees

## Data collection

- 60-minute semi-structured interviews conducted with 7 directors (5 University; 1 College; 1 Private) and 11 Instructors (7 University; 3 College; 1 Private)

## Data analysis

- Multi-level coding of interview data, analytically-informed by survey data (quan & qual)
- Mixing of quan & QUAL data sets

# Research Questions

## RQ #1

Where, how, and by whom is EAP programming delivered across Canadian post-secondary contexts?

## RQ #2

What is the self-perceived professional satisfaction of EAP practitioners?

# Phase I Findings: Quantitative

# Survey Participants

- $n = 481$
- Instructors = **75%**; Directors = **25%**
- Universities = **42%**; Colleges = **42%**; ELIs = **16%**
- BC = **18%**; Prairies = **18%**; Ontario = **52%**; Québec = **3%**; Atlantic = **9%**



## EAP Across Canada: Salient Findings

- Diversity of EAP program types, institution models, students & practitioners
- Experienced, well-educated cadre
- Salient areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction across director and instructor groups with significant differences between them
- Signs of job precarity as a “lightning rod” issue, particularly among instructors

## Satisfaction: Directors vs. Instructors

- Significant difference (p-value = .001) in mean satisfaction score between directors (mean = **26.4**, n = 67) and instructors (mean = **24.2**, n = 284)

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	4.771	.030	3.221	369	.001	2.23608	.69426	.87088 3.60128
	Equal variances not assumed			3.532	167.301	.001	2.23608	.63315	.98608 3.48607

## Satisfaction: FT vs. PT Instructors

- Results from T-test for equality of mean satisfaction between full-time and part-time showed that there is a significant difference between their mean satisfaction ( full-time mean= 25.24, part-time mean=23.93, confidence interval (C.I)= 0.14-2.50, P-value=0.028).

Group Statistics					
	In my primary EAP program/unit (the one in which I work most), I work...	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Satisfaction	1 full-time.	228	25.2456	5.49820	.36413
	2 part-time (anything less than full-time).	153	23.9281	6.05578	.48958

## EAP Across Canada: Open-ended Q

“Am not satisfied with the precariousness of contract teaching. After time, it does take a toll on my mental health. With no job security, **I have come to view my [EAP instructor] role as a job rather than a career...**[audible sigh] which is disappointing.” (Anonymous EAP instructor)

“Our program is cost recovery, based on enrollments. EAP student numbers are always volatile and **this makes us feel insecure and vulnerable to layoffs.**” (Anonymous EAP director)



# Findings: QUAL (Phase II)

# Satisfaction

*Directors*

## RQ #3

**What is the professional satisfaction of EAP practitioners?**

# Respect and Perceived Legitimacy within the Institution and Program

*"I think over the 16 years that I've been here there's been a growing awareness that our programs bring in serious money."*

Lucy, Director at South Central Canada University

- EAP directors have high levels of satisfaction when they feel valued and perceived as important or legitimate members of the institution
- Perceived importance and legitimacy often appear connected to EAP as a vital source of revenue for the institution, benefiting departments and programs that recruit internationally
- Within EAP programs, high levels

# Student Success

*"The most satisfying aspect of EAP is any type of learner success, achievement...I like to see the closing ceremony and I always enjoy watching their speeches."*

*Dave, Director at South Ontario University*

- EAP directors derive high professional satisfaction from seeing EAL students achieve academic goals.
- EAP programs provide vital support for students' immediate and longer-term success, including mental health and academic language development.
- EAP directors find great joy in reconnecting with students later in their academic journeys and witnessing their ongoing success.



# Facilitating Instructor Professional Development

*"I see the work that they do and their research, presenting at conferences...or they're just doing internal research on their own teaching and then reflecting on it. I find that to be very rewarding."*

*Dave, Director at South Ontario University*

- Directors expressed high levels of satisfaction with facilitating professional growth among teaching staff
- They derived joy from seeing their staff overcome challenges and grow as professionals
- Professional development opportunities were valued by directors, and staff who took advantage of them were seen as beneficial to the program by applying and sharing their new knowledge

# Dissatisfaction

*Directors*

**RQ #3**

**What is the professional satisfaction of EAP practitioners?**

# Lack of Respect from Institution and Program Precarity

*"I think for many years ESL professionals have felt that they are sometimes not respected the same way as their other colleagues in the university...It is a profession."*

*Cheryl, Director at Central Canada University*

- Low levels of professional satisfaction among directors stem from feelings of frustration due to lack of recognition or standing in the institution
- EAP professionals often feel that they are not respected in the same way as their colleagues in other faculties at the university
- The perception that "if you can speak English, you can teach it" persists, despite the complexity of teaching a language and working with international students

# Unethical Assessment Practices

*"There's one student I'm thinking of and everybody in the school knew he wasn't ready. And it didn't matter. He had to go [through to the college program this private institute had an agreement with]."*

*Amy, Director at Toronto Private Institute*

- Some directors feel low professional satisfaction when passing students who they believe are unprepared for university studies.
- Directors face pressure from various stakeholders, such as parents and agents, to pass unprepared students.
- Passing unprepared students creates ethical dilemmas for directors and can lead to feelings of professional dissatisfaction.

# Summary of Director Findings

- Phase II interview data supported Phase I findings indicating higher levels of professional satisfaction for EAP program directors compared to instructors, largely due to greater job security
- Differential satisfaction and agency displayed by those working in universities versus private language institutes, supporting Phase I findings that institution type affects satisfaction levels
- University program directors have greater agency and a lesser sense of disarticulation of identity compared to instructors due to their positioning within institutions
- Job security is a key differentiator, especially for those working in university settings, but directors also express concern about the future viability of EAP programs if they become unprofitable for the institution
- EAP program directors and experienced professionals are a diverse group that have received little empirical attention in existing literature, highlighting the need for further research in this area

# Satisfaction

*Instructors*

## RQ #3

**What is the professional satisfaction of EAP practitioners?**

# Connecting with and Supporting Students

*"The most satisfactory, hands down, is just the interaction with the students. And watching them progress, I mean, that's why I'm still there."*

*Antoinette, Instructor at Quebec University*

- Instructors from all institution types derive high levels of professional satisfaction from interacting with and supporting students
- Forming bonds with students through interaction and instruction is a significant source of satisfaction for many instructors
- Facilitating academic progress and helping students understand conventions of writing also

# Collegial Relationships, Instructor Autonomy and Professional Development

*"I think my co-workers find me really valuable...I think it's a pretty good atmosphere, when we're in the school working together and helping out people."*

*Tyra, Instructor at Atlantic Canada School*

- Instructors derive satisfaction from collegial support developed among staff
- When instructors are trusted by management, it engenders feelings of professional satisfaction and legitimacy
- Professional satisfaction is derived from being "left alone in the classroom" but also given support in terms of curriculum development and free professional development



# Dissatisfaction

*Instructors*

**RQ #3**

**What is the professional satisfaction of EAP practitioners?**

# Lack of Respect and Legitimacy within the Institution and Program

*"It's been interesting to see us focusing very strongly on the recruitment of international students, yet this is not reflected in terms of how the teaching staff are being treated or how the faculty are treated in the academy."*

*Atun, Instructor at Toronto Technical College*

- Instructors' value perception comes from being recognized as important service for international students bringing substantial revenue for university
- EAP programs are seen as necessary but academically unimportant, with some instructors feeling taken for granted by other faculties
- Business-oriented approach to EAP decreases instructors' sense of being valued as professionals

# Lack of Professional Development Opportunities and Engagement with Research

*“There's very little support for the part time instructors or partial load instructors. It really does not give you a feeling like you're appreciated.”*

*Atun, Instructor at Toronto Technical College*

- EAP instructors express dissatisfaction with limited professional development opportunities and support, especially for part-time or partial-load instructors
- Some university faculty report good support for professional development, but others express discontent with their programs or departments
- EAP professionals without research duties also express

# Conflict with Management, Lack of Autonomy, Stuffed Curriculum, Grading Overload

*"There's no autonomy. You do your work and then it just gets revamped in whatever way by a single individual. They don't really trust us to do our own work."*

*Charlotte, Instructor at North Ontario University*

- Several instructors reported dissatisfaction stemming from a lack of support, attention, or communication from management
- Instructors perceive a lack of autonomy, with top-down administrative decisions and excessive assessment requirements hindering their capacity to innovate
- Instructors express frustration with stuffed curricula and grading

# Precarity and Peripheral Participation

*"I know that my bosses value me to an extent, but I've also heard my bosses, not necessarily in a threatening manner, suggest that there's more teachers than there are jobs, you know?"*

*Tyra, Instructor at Atlantic Canada School*

- Feelings of being expendable are consistent among many EAP instructors, particularly part-time instructors, contributing to professional dissatisfaction
- Part-time instructors at universities and colleges perceive unequal treatment compared to full-time staff, with differences in respect, benefits, and salaries
- Sessional university and college instructors often express a sense of being second-class employees, with no guarantee of future employment

# Summary of Instructor Findings

- Qualitative findings support the Phase I survey data regarding lower instructor satisfaction in Canadian EAP
- Instructors with less secure employment and those working at private language institutes exhibit greater dissatisfaction
- Lower levels of satisfaction stem from reasons often related to employment status and working conditions
- Instructors are positioned as second-class employees in many instances
- Despite this, there is a consistent dedication to students' learning outcomes and a sense of shared responsibility to attend to their needs
- Economic precarity and perceived lack of agency within neoliberal programs and institutions are distinguishing features of Canadian EAP
- Social agency appears constricted among instructors, creating differential power relations within the field based on job security

# Discussion

## EAP Orientations: Service vs. Field

EAP as a Service (Neoliberal)	EAP as a Field (Critical-Pragmatic)
Market-driven	Research, theory, and practice-driven
Profit-generating or bust	Disinterested in finance
English as commodity	English as meaning-making, discursive set of tools
English as "problem" that can be fixed, often in short amounts of time	English as a language to be wielded in increasingly complex ways over time = discursive competence
Support for the disciplines	A sub-discipline (subsumed under Educational Linguistics OR English for Specific Purposes)
Practitioners as disposable labour, separate from academy	Practitioners as permanent, integrated members of academy
Practitioners as language teachers	Practitioners as researcher-teachers



# Discussion

- Evidence of conflicting perceptions of EAP instruction (“butler stance” service vs. invaluable support) (Charles & Pecorari, 2016)
- Evidence of differential lived experiences and sense of legitimacy/satisfaction between those with and without job stability (Breshears, 2018)
- Evidence of contested and constricted practitioner sense of agency within the market of EAP (Bourdieu, 2012; Ding & Bruce, 2017)
- Evidence of dedication by EAP practitioners to improving EAL student learning outcomes / lives

- Overwhelming evidence of widespread employment precarity as main factor in practitioners' sense of dissatisfaction and illegitimacy, adding to body of research from the broader areas of ELT (Breshears, 2018; MacDonald, 2016; Rockwell, 2021; Valeo & Faez, 2013)
- In the modern "knowledge economy", where English language teaching is a form of (real or perceived) abundant, disposable labour for neoliberal institutions of higher education, there is a need for systemic reform that better recognizes and rewards this cadre of workers (Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hadley, 2015)
- Findings raise questions as to how we might better equip EAP practitioners for the realities of the "field of battle" (Bourdieu, 2012)
- **What is to be done?** Precarity as a way of life in EAP should be explicitly addressed at a number of levels

## Questions for Consideration

- What is EAP?
- How can EAP programs improve the lives of their practitioners given varied institutional constraints?
- How might institutions and programs increase a bi-directional flow of knowledge between EAP and other academic programs?
- What is the responsibility of language teacher educators in explicitly addressing employment precarity as reality in EAP (and ELT in general)?
- How can EAP practitioners advocate for better employment conditions?
- How might researchers amplify the voices of ELT practitioners and assist with elevating their status/employment conditions?

# Limitations

- Self-reporting
- Construct validity: operationalization of concepts such as “legitimacy” and “satisfaction”
- Limited overall participation from EAP programs and practitioners in Quebec
- Limited interviews with those working in the occluded world of private EAP
- SARS-2

## Conclusions and Future Avenues

- Need for greater qualitative (ethnographic) research into lived experiences of EAP practitioners, including highlighting of cases (programs; individuals) where EAP directors and instructors are challenging the potentially coercive relations of power between management and labour
- Need for greater research into diverse landscape of EAP programs and practitioners in order to identify ideal (or not) models, pedagogies, etc.
- Need for action at several levels in order to provide conditions for greater EAP practitioner agency (Ding, 2019)

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# The EAP Intellectual Landscape, and its Implications for Instruction in a Prominent Canadian Pathway Program

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BALEAP, 2023



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ifp

International  
Foundation  
Program

# Context: International Foundation Program (IFP) at the University of Toronto



UofT ranked #1 in Canada and among top 20 globally.

IFP is an EAP pathway program; accepts students with lower IELTS/TOEFL scores

IFP student population ~ 200, most from China

Established in 2009



# The University of Toronto study context

New College Vision: to “intentionally promote and foster social responsibility, diversity, equity and global awareness”(2020)

## Our concerns

- Lack of current review of the EAP field's theoretical literature.
- Such issues may not be well represented in the curriculum.
- The university's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion vision may not be properly met.
- Our students may not be fully prepared to enter full-time undergraduate study in the Canadian context.

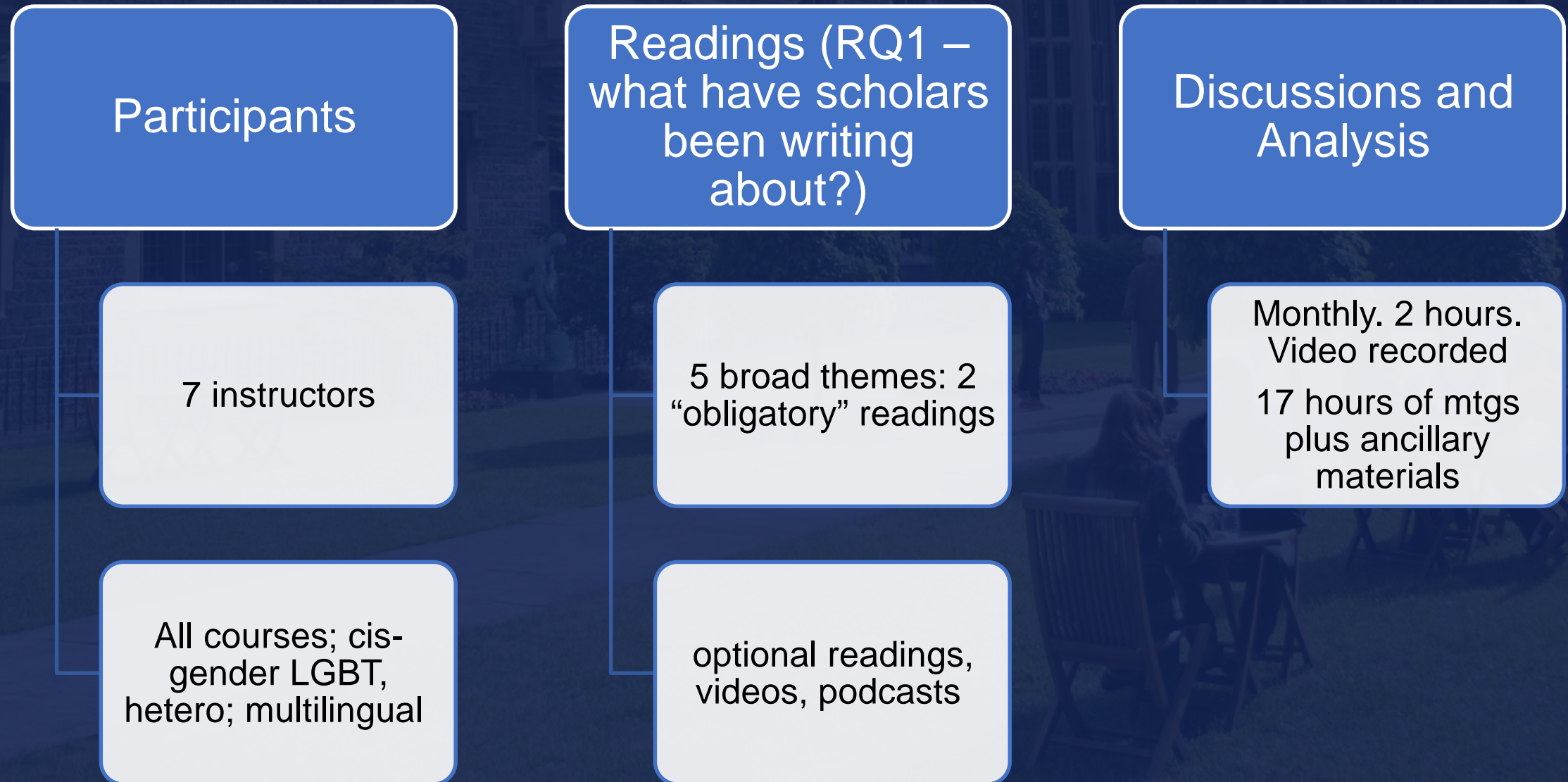
# Three research questions

What have scholars of EAP been writing about in the past 5-(ish) years?

What are the opportunities / challenges that contemporary scholars are posing to the field?

Should, and if so, How can contemporary scholarly insights be transferred to our pathway program?

# Method – Collaborative discussion & analysis





# RQ1 Literature Inquiry

**Translanguaging, plurilingualism**

**Identity and agency**

**Anti-racism, anti-Asian, anti-Black, Whiteness**

**Gender, sexuality, LGBT2SQ**

**Settlerism and criticality**

# RQ2: Opportunities and challenges to the field— data emphasized in instructor meetings

<b>The neoliberal agenda underlying EAP and pathways</b>	<b>How English vs plurilingualism is presented</b>	<b>Criticality (EDI, race, queerness, indigenous ways of knowing) within EAP</b>
EAP students perceived or positioned as revenue streams to publicly funded institutions	How to value L1 in pedagogy and assessment while building L2	Providing varied voices and peoples in materials, content, curriculum
Students must adopt Western academic skills and epistemologies	Valuing experiences, identities and intersectionalities of students and instructors	Tension between “critical” academic skills and “critical” social justice understanding



# RQ3: Should, and if so, How to transfer insights to our pathway program?

## **How should we promote EDI:**

- Provide multiple voices/faces/perspectives in our “academic skills” content
- Move the content from EDI as a “topic” to being “usualized”
- Provide students with strategies to recognize and respond to (micro)aggressions
- Train instructors to manage “difficult” conversations, e.g. students’ experiences of anti-Asian racism.
- Provide instructors with a forum to explore and discuss their own positionality re: race, sexuality, class, religion in relation to classroom openness.

## **What are the obstacles:**

- Some instructors feel “unable” to discuss EDI because they don’t identify with a marginalized group.
- Program purpose is to promote students’ academic success, not social issues.
- International students will return to home country; why learn Canadian social issues?

# Resulting programmatic changes as IFP leadership response

Under-represented voices/perspectives	Learning together programs (instructors)	Learning together programs (students)
1. 50% of all materials (readings, videos, podcasts) from under-represented voices mandated in all courses	3. Required training: “Micro-aggression”: Tools, Strategies and Discussions	5. Training: Overcoming the Messaging that Your English “Isn’t Good Enough”
2. Attempt to “usualize” these voices	4. Required training: Disrupting settler colonial discourses through English language teaching	6. Training: How Identity Impacts Learning

# Implications and Impact

## **To be determined!**

Currently collecting data from each course on EDI content used, plus an anonymized questionnaire to instructors.  
Planned qualitative study for 2023-24 with students.

**Research project reading list and References available**

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# Decolonizing EAP: Raising learners' awareness of equity and social justice through a research-based writing project on equity and inclusion

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# Course: Critical Reading and Writing

Fall Term: Reading and research	Winter term: Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diverse textual genres of increasing difficulty</li><li>• Develop in-depth reading skills via Academic Reading Circles and note taking</li><li>• Assessed via 3 quizzes</li><li>• Begin early stage of independent research</li></ul>	<p>Diverse written genres for undergraduate programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Descriptive essay, annotated bibliography/literature review; proposal and outline; argumentative essay</li><li>• Assessed through multisteped research paper</li></ul>

# Research paper: EDI statement and research question

## Context

Is the University of Toronto's approach to including your equity-seeking/human rights seeking group representative of other Ontario and international universities?

*At the University of Toronto, we strive to be an equitable and inclusive community, rich with diversity, protecting the human rights of all persons, and based upon understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of every person. We seek to ensure to the greatest extent possible that all students and employees enjoy the opportunity to participate as they see fit in the full range of activities that the University offers, and to achieve their full potential as members of the University community... In striving to become an equitable community, we will also work to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the adverse effects of any barriers to full participation in University life that we find, including physical, environmental, attitudinal, communication or technological.*

(Adapted from University of Toronto Statement of Equity, Diversity and Excellence)

# Support

## Here's what Canada's international students wish they'd known before they got here

There's a lot to learn, beyond schoolwork, when trying to convert studying in Canada into a career here.

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Vander Tavares  

Received 26 May 2021, Accepted 25 Oct 2021, Published online: 09 Dec 2021

 Download citation

 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.2008536>



Check for updates

# Multi-stepped Research Paper

Step	Purpose	Assignment	Due	Value
RP1	Learning about an equity-seeking/human rights seeking group	Descriptive Essay	December 9, 2022	15%
RP2	Demonstrate institutional understanding and propose answer to research question	Institutional Analysis (Source Matrix) + Proposal	January 27, 2023	5%
RP3	Gain feedback on writing and outline essay	Introduction + body section + outline	February 17, 2023	10%
RP4	Show full understanding of academic writing	Final paper + outline	March 31, 2023	15%



# RP1: Descriptive Essay

- Students learned and wrote about the challenges facing one of 5 equity-seeking groups in higher education
  - Indigenous students
  - Black students
  - Asian students
  - LGBTQ students
  - Refugee students
- Findings served as the basis to research how University of Toronto and other universities included their group

	University of Toronto	University of Waterloo	Western University
<p><b>Challenge #1</b> <b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tuition fees, which have increased significantly since the 1990s, appear to have a negative effect on university entrance for low-income families (Ferede, 2010, p. 83).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">University of Toronto Students' Union (2020-a) Student refugee program</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UTSU-New College Local Committee sponsors one refugee student each year -&gt; home, helps with course selection, job in the registrar's office.</li> <li>The UTSU assists with living expenses, settlement, cultural and social integration, and campus navigation.</li> </ul> </li> <li><a href="#">University of Toronto (2023) International fee exemption</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Fee Exemption -&gt; Domestic</li> <li>International students -&gt; refugee eligible to pay domestic fees</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">University of Waterloo (n.d.-a) David Johnston Waterloo awards for refugee students</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding is available each year for undergraduate and graduate refugee students</li> <li>Candidates can be enrolled in any Faculty at the University of Waterloo</li> <li>The funds are intended to assist students -&gt; no longer receiving sponsorship and who have a demonstrated financial need.</li> </ul> </li> <li><a href="#">University of Waterloo (n.d.-b) Student refugee program</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All University of Waterloo students pay for this program through a voluntary of \$4.95.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Western University (2023-a) Scholarship for globally displaced students</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholarships for Globally Displaced Students</li> <li>Western has committed \$600,000 in financial support to students and scholars facing disruption</li> <li>Western offers six scholarships at \$25,000 each year continuing for up to 4 years.</li> </ul> </li> <li><a href="#">Western University (2023-b) Afghan student refugee scholarship</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Afghan Student Refugee Scholarship</li> <li>cover the cost of tuition, fees, and living expenses for five students up to a</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# RP3/4: Answering the research question through argumentative essay

RQ: Is the University of Toronto's (UT's) approach to including your equity-seeking/human rights seeking group representative of other Ontario and international universities?

RP2: UT's approach to the inclusion of refugee students is better than UW and UWO when dealing with financial problems, language barriers, and racism.

RP4: By providing financial resources and Academic English programs, UT is closer to the approach of the inclusion of refugee students than the UW and WU.

# RP3/4: Answering the research Q in argumentative essay

RP2: Although UT does not provide as much help as UW, and UBC in dealing with mental health problems faced by LGBTQ2+ students, UT's approach to supporting LGBTQ2+ students is better than UW UBC when dealing with financial insecurity and discrimination.

RP4: UT is more inclusive by offering more financial aid and anti-discrimination resources for LGBTQ2S+ students compared to UW and UBC



# Limitations

## Limitations

- In-depth independent research study that could not be done at the last minute
  - Lack of research on other institutions
  - Subject to confirmation bias
- Papers often biased toward UT
  - Over-reliance on financial resources
- Difficulty transitioning from problem centered (RP1) to solution centred (RP2-4)

# Discussion - Affordances

- Gained awareness of equity in higher education
- Developing ability to critique university EDI statement
- Learned where groups minimally supported
  - e.g., Indigenous and refugee students
- Gained awareness of resources that may benefit themselves
  - Anti-racism resources
  - Mental health resources
  - LGBTQIA2S+ resources

# Q & A

Thank you for listening!

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to email me at

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