



Title of Report: Masters in Teaching English to Young Learners at the University of York

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Date of Publication: February 2013

1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).

This case report describes the Masters in Teaching English to Young Learners (MA in TEYL) delivered by the Department of Education, University of York, UK. The MA in TEYL is a part-time, two-year master's degree program delivered by distance. Some cohorts elect to have a seven-day, face-to-face intensive introductory module before the beginning of each year of study, while others follow all modules online. The majority of the program, over the two years, is delivered online.

The program focuses specifically on professional development of those educators involved in some aspect of teaching English as a foreign or additional language to young learners up to 16 years of age worldwide. The MA in TEYL was created specifically for distance delivery between 1996 and 1997, with the first delivery of the program starting in 1997. At present, there are four instructors, including the Program Leader (director), and one program specific administrator supporting the program, students, and tutors.

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

This PDO is offered to qualified professionals working in the field of TEYL, which includes materials developers, teacher trainers, university lecturers and tutors, heads of school, teachers, and publishers. All nationalities are welcome on the program, although the University of York expects an IELTS score of 6.5, or above, for students for whom English is not their first language. Students can join the program from any base in the world.

Students who enroll for this program are usually well experienced in TEYL, have senior responsibility in the field and within their institutions, and are ambitious to develop their own understanding and expertise in TEYL. Students on the program have ranged in age from mid-20s to the 60s, with most being within the middle of this age range.

So far, the students on the MA in TEYL have been based in around 60 different countries, which include countries in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, the Middle East, and North, Central, and South America. Annually we have between 45-55 students on the program within four different cohorts and start dates each year. Two of these cohorts are in-country cohorts based in Singapore and Switzerland.

Students have often heard about this program from colleagues or alumni. Additionally, students appreciate not having to attend a full-time face to face course in the

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UK to study on such a master's program because this would both disrupt their working and family life, and cost a good deal of money to relocate to the UK for a year.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

We market the program through word-of-mouth (both alumni and those in the field who know about the program), advertisements in professional journals, in-country newspapers, websites, and conference presentations made by the tutorial team members. The focus of the marketing is on professional development opportunities that the program gives to graduates in the field of TEYL. The budget for marketing the program is not large, and so we value the high profile the program gains through word-of-mouth, successes, and the high profiles of many of our graduates in TEYL after the program, as well as the active links with our partners in-country.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

The curriculum and syllabus were developed by Dr. Annie Hughes, the Program founder and current leader, and the program tutorial team. Dr Hughes has many years of global experience in TEYL teacher development and training and has a deep understanding of the needs of those involved in TEYL. Online delivery was chosen specifically for this program because it would allow access for TEYL professionals to study without having to leave their full-time employment and/or family commitments.

Curriculum and delivery decisions were based on several international surveys that were conducted among those professionals working in the TEYL field to ascertain the expected needs of likely students. Distance delivery was the only option that was considered for the program because these surveys found that those involved in TEYL who wanted a PDO program at the masters level would not normally be able to visit the UK for a full year of study, nor would they be able to gain funding for such a program.

Additionally, independent TEYL specialists reviewed and gave feedback on the program before, during, and after it had been written. During the first year of the program, detailed records were kept of the supervisor/student interaction and the time required for this interaction was calculated as an average amount of hours contact time. Based on this data, a maximum supervisor to student ratio was established of 1:20.

The Program Leader and program tutors continue to develop the curriculum and materials for the program on an annual basis. Decisions about the curriculum are based on many years experience of working with the target audience and an understanding of their professional needs, desires, wants, and ambitions in TEYL.

5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The MA in TEYL provides a distance learning program for teachers and other professionals involved in the teaching of English as a foreign or additional language to young learners. It includes theoretical background to improve and extend their understanding of this field of study combined with observation and research in TEYL classrooms, a Principles and Practice approach.



The specific objectives of the program are to enable students to gain a professional understanding of:

- (1) how foreign languages are acquired by young learners;
- (2) the history of EFL and foreign language teaching for young learners;
- (3) how to create the most suitable classroom environment for young learner acquisition of foreign languages;
- (4) how best to approach assessment and evaluation of TEYL;
- (5) how best to approach curriculum and syllabus design for young learners;
- (6) how to design and create materials for the young learner classroom;
- (7) how to manage professional development in the field of TEYL;
- (8) how to design, carry out, and interpret outcomes of action research;
- (9) how to study effectively as a distance student; and
- (10) how to combine long-term study and everyday work in the TEYL field.

These objectives and goals link directly to the cumulative and developmental structure of the program and its modules.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

The program aims to use a wide range of learning activities to cater for different learner types and to ensure variety, especially because learners may be studying in the evening after a hard day in the TEYL classroom!

Learning activities within the MA in TEYL include online discussions; sharing of student research and classroom investigations; detailed instruction on how to write assignments at masters level; and how to be critical of academic readings and research. Learning activities in this PDO also include study notes; direct links to published materials; recordings of classroom lessons carried out in a variety of countries; video-recorded lectures; video and audio-recorded interviews with a range of professional involved in TEYL and EFL; self-access student tasks; cohort tasks; and student country profiles.

The learning activities are delivered by way of both the University of York Learning Management System (using the Blackboard platform) in synchronous and asynchronous form and/or short intensive face-to-face interaction. Students can access their program 24/7 using any operating systems, and can study at their own pace, around their other professional commitments. The program actively encourages students to reflect on input during modules, and the classes they are interacting with, on a regular basis.

Participants receive feedback and interaction on their learning activities from their course supervisor, cohort peers, and the University.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local context in which they are studying so that they can work together with other students in the global context of your online PDO.

The MA in TEYL is a program that is aimed at TEYL in different locations and contexts. As such, the program materials, input, readings, and activities offer opportunities for participants to consider TEYL in both the developed and developing world. Additionally,



within the program itself, students observe, measure, and carry out research in their local contexts (both developed and developing contexts) and then share their findings with cohort colleagues and other cohorts. These are often carried out during discussion fora using the LMS. Furthermore, graduates also share their research findings with students and other graduates of the program, alongside specialists in TEYL, through presentations given at the International TEYL Research Seminar.

8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.

As outlined in item seven above, the input on the program includes examples of TEYL in both developed and developing world contexts. In addition, research and dissemination of developed/ developing world context research findings in TEYL is shared across continents, between graduates and students, tutors and students, and the wider TEYL community of practice. Tutors on the program are also based in different continents and have a wide range of international experience in TEYL.

All students have access to online training sessions in order to use the LMS. Students start the program by being instructed on how to upload a “Student Profile” of themselves using a wiki. In this wiki, participants introduce themselves, their professional work environment, and discuss the “joys and challenges” of the work they are currently involved in. Similarly, the tutorial team also introduce themselves to all cohort members by way of a wiki.

Throughout the program students are encouraged to interact with and take part in many discussions with their cohort colleagues, in which they also consider the challenges and successes of their cohort colleagues. Ongoing professional links between students have been established through the program in and across many countries. During and post-program study many student links and collaborations have been developed resulting in numerous examples of joint materials writing, teaching, seminars, and teacher networks being developed through these links.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

The Program Leader has an MA in Linguistics and English Language Teaching and a PhD in the scholarship of teaching and learning in TEYL. She is a TEYL specialist and has been a teacher, head of school, teacher trainer, and TEYL consultant for forty years, working with teachers in many countries. She has also published extensively on TEYL.

All of the tutorial groups and supervisors working on the MA in TEYL are TEYL specialists themselves, and all are educated to master’s level in the field of TEYL. All are teacher trainers, TEYL materials writers, and teacher developers working in different geographical areas of the world with a wealth of international TEYL experience.

The entire MA in TEYL team has been trained intensively to use the University of York’s LMS, using the Blackboard platform, and all members of the team write materials for this site.

10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.



As the program is delivered by the University of York, students and graduates of the program have access to all University of York resources, such as an online library, Graduate Students Association support and guidance, representation at the Board of Studies, and technical support staff (including the LMS Team).

In addition, a dedicated MA in TEYL Administrator for the program interacts continuously with the students and graduates.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

There are a variety of learning assessments used in the MA in TEYL. Successful completion of the course is by way of full participation and interaction in two intensive short modules at the beginning of each year of study (10 credits each), seven written assignments in various modes (between 3,500 and 5,500 words) at pass level or above (20 credits each), and one written action research project report (4,500 to 5,500 words) at pass level or above (20 credits). All assessment on this program adheres to the University of York guidelines on assessment of students at the graduate level.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

The MA in TEYL is evaluated internally and externally. The PDO follows, and is evaluated by, the University of York's Quality Assurance standards and guidelines. The program has also been evaluated by three external and independent evaluators. Additionally, an external examiner is employed by the University to oversee the program and its quality and this examiner evaluates the work of the students and the program on an annual basis and reports the findings to the Vice Chancellor of the University.

13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

When the program was first created, the distance learning materials had to be printed and created individually for students in hard copy files. Students then had to carry these back to their countries of residence. As technology advanced, materials were delivered using DVD/CD until the adoption of the University's LMS, when they could be uploaded and available for interaction and/or download. This latter delivery mode is by far the most accessible to all learner types and those with learner challenges, and is also extremely flexible. For example, video recordings can easily be streamed and available for all PC access. Additionally, materials can be changed at a moment's notice and without a huge cost to the environment because everything is available electronically.

The program has been created to take account of different time zones, and tutors arrange mutually suitable times for interaction with their students by Skype, email, telephone, or sometimes face-to-face, if they are both in the same geographical area at the same time, e.g., if both are attending the same conference. Students on the program have full online access to the University's online library resources and many other global online library resources via the University of York's LMS.

14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.

Annually the University gathers student feedback on the MA in TEYL once students have completed the program. To date, this feedback has rated the program as either good or excellent. During a survey conducted in a globally published EFL journal, the MA in TEYL



was the most highly rated distance graduate program in ELT across Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US.

All members of the MA in TEYL tutorial and administrative team were awarded the University of York Vice Chancellor's Teaching Award Certificate in 2009. This prestigious internal award is made to those individuals or teams that show excellence in teaching and learning. Students play a part in nominations for this award.

Our graduates become extremely successful, with many promoted to senior positions of responsibility in TEYL, such as Ministry of Education Directors/Advisors on TEYL, TEYL trainer trainers, materials writers, course writers, or successful teachers around the world.