

## Chapter 12

# Remote International Student to Remote Teacher: Intercultural, Pedagogical, and Instructional Training for International Teaching Assistants

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the experience of designing teaching and learning training for international graduate student teaching assistants (ITAs) during the pandemic, which caused a move to remote teaching. This chapter is particularly important for educational researchers who have an interest in supporting international teaching assistants as well as domestic teaching assistants. The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section the authors describe their background and previous experience and their aim for designing the training itself. The authors will include the training design in the second section. The third section will lay out the challenges that the authors identified. The fourth section will contain the lessons learned from this experience and the resulting best practices. Finally, the fifth section will include the future directions.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the experience of designing teaching and learning training for international graduate student teaching assistants (ITAs) during the pandemic, which caused a move to remote teaching. This chapter is particularly important for educational researchers who have an interest in supporting international teaching assistants as well as domestic teaching assistants.

Adjusting training for international graduate students is more prevalent during these times of pandemic where mobility is limited. Interruptions to flights, delays in visa applications processing, lockdowns, and travel restrictions from certain countries made it hard for international graduate students to be present on campus. This situation also implied that many international students could be in different time zones, could have limited access to technology, could be struggling with health issues, as well as many other factors. However, even after the pandemic is over, training for international graduate students will still be of great importance since many universities around the world strive to attract international students and support their success through their internationalization strategies.

In this chapter the authors share their approach, experience, and lessons learned through the design and facilitation of an orientation program for ITAs. The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section the authors describe their background and previous experience and their aim for designing the training itself. The training design is included in the second section. The third section will lay out the challenges that the authors identified. The fourth section will contain the lessons learned from this experience and the resulting best practices. Finally, the fifth section will include the future directions.

## **BACKGROUND**

The orientation program for ITAs that is the focus of this chapter is offered through the teaching and learning centre at a large university in Canada. Over the past ten years programming for ITAs through this centre has evolved. Focusing on orientation events specifically, they have shifted in scope. Initially, there was one TA orientation day held exclusively face-to-face on campus, and specific teaching support for international graduate students consisted of at most one optional session among other concurrent sessions during this orientation. Later, there was recognition that specific and concentrated support for ITAs was needed. A research assistant was hired to investigate what was already happening at the large, generally siloed university, and what was needed as identified by the international graduate students themselves. This research resulted in the construction of an ITA handbook, and a 3-hour orientation session for ITAs, which was offered only face-to-face a few times a year, primarily in September. This 3-hour session was designed specifically for ITAs, discussing the context of the Canadian classroom and providing resources on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

A variety of factors influence shifts in programming at a teaching and learning centre, including changes in staffing and personnel, funding, legislation, and international events. The main drivers of change responsible for the orientation program for ITAs that is the subject of this chapter are a new passionate staff member with the needed experience and expertise, and the COVID-19 pandemic. When instructors were forced to deliver their classes solely online, the need for support provided by the teaching and learning centre increased 10-fold. Having the institution recognize this and increase funding to the centre to secure more fulltime support created opportunities for training to not only be adapted for remote delivery but enhance this training as well.

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