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Unique U of L project brings education and international students together for friendship and learning

Students in Greg Ogilvie's Teaching ESL class will get the opportunity to practice their teaching skills while helping a group of international students adapt to life in Canada.

In partnership with University of Lethbridge International, Ogilvie's students recently met with 26 students from Gakushuin Women's College in Tokyo, Japan. They are participating in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at the U of L for the next six months.

"This project provides a perfect opportunity for our EAP students to practice their English and interact with Canadians in a small and safe setting," says Karen Smith, U of L Language Services manager.

Ogilvie designed a class project to give his students some real-world experience and help the international students learn English. Ogilvie has taught English in Ukraine and Ethiopia and, as a graduate student, worked in the University of Alberta's English for Academic Purposes program. Through those experiences, he found that many international students experience a sense of isolation.

"When I had the chance to teach this ESL class, I thought it would be ideal to create connections between my education students and learners studying English on campus," says Ogilvie. "It provides an opportunity for my students to be able to put theory into practice. Instead of developing lessons for hypothetical students, they can actually work with a group of students."

Geoff Waugh didn't hesitate to sign up for the course, based on the positive experience he had completing a professional inquiry project with two ESL learners who came to Lethbridge to play hockey. Whether he eventually teaches English in a foreign country or works with ESL students in Canada, he wanted to learn all he could about teaching ESL learners.

“I really enjoyed that project and I wanted to know more,” he says. “Teaching a lesson to the students from Japan will be really beneficial because it can help us critically think about a way we can reach the students at a level that will not only benefit them, but also ourselves.”

For their class projects, the student teachers will be assessing the cultural needs of the Japanese students and then planning and delivering a lesson to address the identified need. A second project begins on Feb. 24 with a social gathering with high-level ESL international students who are studying at the U of L.

“It will be a similar idea except that this time the focus is going to be on teaching a grammar point,” he says. “My student teachers will have to take a written sample and engage in dialogue and diagnose a grammatical issue and then develop a lesson, which they’ll teach to the international students.”

Another aspect of the course will see Ogilvie’s students working with teachers at Winston Churchill High School to adapt their unit plans to ESL students.

“When they go into the schools as full-fledged teachers themselves, they’ll have experience adapting units so they’ll be able to apply that skill to their own classroom setting,” says Ogilvie.

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