

Learning to teach English to adults

More jobs in career that opens doors at home and abroad

JANICE BRADBEER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Mariola O'Brien, 28, jumped at the chance to teach English in Sweden, but even she was surprised at how well it's turned out for her.

She was getting frustrated by her job search last year after graduating from Humber College's certificate program in Teaching English as a Second Language.

Then she found an international job posting online, applied and was accepted the next day. Last August, she began teaching 10- to 12-year olds at the bilingual International English School of Eskilstuna, a 350-year-old town that's a 50-minute train ride from Stockholm.

O'Brien's airfare to Sweden was paid for by the school and she earns the Canadian equivalent of \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month, plus 10 hours of paid "trust-time" to spend at home or wherever she wants.

But she later discovered that many of the job's benefits weren't even mentioned in the initial posting: including free lunch at the school, funds for fitness-related activities, a free cellphone and 12 weeks of paid vacation. The school even arranged for good, cheap housing nearby.

"The apartment is elegant and of high standards. I even have a fireplace and a dishwasher in the apartment," says O'Brien, who travels to Stockholm every month and plans to visit Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Poland.

Not surprisingly, she intends to renew her one-year contract.

Vera Beletzan, manager of Humber's English language centre, says teaching overseas appeals mostly to young graduates like O'Brien, or those who are retired or semi-retired.

And although new graduates sometimes have to be flexible when getting started, she says this seems to be a good time to enter the field.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is funding occupation-specific language programs for professionals who have immigrated here. And there is a growing need for teachers qualified to teach English for Academic Purposes (EAP), especially business and science-related courses.

Some of Beletzan's students in the two-semester program, which runs Tuesdays through Thursdays, have been in the business sector for years.

Nancy Mascio spent 25 years building her career in banking, climbing the corporate ladder from bank teller to branch manager to operation centre manager.

But instead of working with numbers, figures and spreadsheets, she loved training, teaching people face-to-face and hiring new employees.

Her best friend was teaching English in Italy, so Mascio did her own research. The year she turned 50, she found herself back in the classroom learning a new skill: teaching English.

The Hamilton woman enrolled in the TESL program at Kitchener's Conestoga College in September 2008, and was surprised to discover she wasn't the oldest student in the room.

"From the moment I started, I realized that this is where I needed to be. There was a passion that the TESL teachers had," says Mascio.

She graduated in 2009 and found summer employment with the Hamilton-Wentworth school board.

The following September, she began working for her true love: Circle of Friends for Newcomers, a non-profit agency in Hamilton originally founded to aid the Vietnamese boat people.

The program offers free basic language instruction to adult immigrants who are permanent residents. Instructors can earn up to \$30 per hour, plus benefits.

Mascio finds her work very fulfilling. She helps newcomers, mostly from Southeast Asia, learn language skills to cope in their daily lives.

"My first week in, I knew that I had made the right decision and wished that I had done it years ago," says Mascio, who takes the summers off.

"I love the interaction with students because they are so warm and welcoming and appreciative, and I feel like I'm making a difference."

Suad Alselwadi, 37, is taking EAP classes at Humber to improve her English. She's now in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARIOLA O'BRIEN

Mariola O'Brien graduated from the Teaching ESL program at Humber College and is now working in Sweden at the International English School of Eskilstuna, about a 50-minute train ride from Stockholm. The old town was founded in 1659. She had fun with students who dressed up for Halloween.



level four, but when she completes level eight, she can apply to take one of Humber's academic programs.

Alselwadi, whose family emigrated from Saudi Arabia three years ago, talks shyly outside the classroom about how learning English has changed her life.

"The first time I came here (to Canada), I felt confused when I went shopping and to the doctor," says Alselwadi, whose native tongue is Arabic. Her husband's English was better than hers and he would do the banking for her.

Now that has changed.

"I am excited that I can go anywhere and understand what people say," says Alselwadi, who lives in Mississauga with her husband Wael Ahmad, 43, and their four children, ages 2 to 16. "I can go with my children to an English movie and feel happy when I understand what they are saying."

Alselwadi's goal is to enroll in Humber's Early Childhood Education program.

Jagrati Chauhan, 33, teaches one day a week at Humber. She arrived from India with her husband in October 2009 with a PhD and Masters in English.

She received her TESL diploma and a certificate in adult education from the Canadian College of Educators, a private college in Mississauga.

Although she found employment right away — she teaches ESL at the Mississauga college and recently accepted a two-month contract teaching at York University — she says the process hasn't been a cakewalk.

"There was a lot of hard work and networking involved. I also feel this is just a small beginning. I still have a long way to go," says Chauhan, whose goal is to land a full-time permanent teaching job in a university or college while making a home in Canada.

Chauhan, who makes \$25 to \$35 per hour, says she wasn't motivated by money and likes the variety in her new career.

"The best part of teaching ESL is that it is not monotonous. Every class is unique."



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WHERE TO START

Although not all schools require a university degree for admission to a TESL program, a minimum three-year bachelor degree is needed for TESL Ontario or TESL Canada accreditation. Accreditation makes graduates eligible to teach in government-sponsored programs for adult immigrants, notably LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), which is funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

GTA schools accredited by TESL Ontario include George Brown, Centennial, Seneca and Humber colleges, York University, the University of Toronto's Woodsworth College, the Toronto District School Board and the privately run Canadian College of Educators.

TESL certificate or diploma programs range from about \$3,500 for private colleges to \$5,000 for some universities. Books and materials are extra.

Course options vary. Some are delivered full time for a total of 15 weeks, while others are offered part-time, evenings and weekends or three days a week over two semesters.

The University of Saskatchewan offers an online program, although students are responsible for arranging their own practicum observation and supervised practice teaching hours.

TESL graduates can find jobs in government-sponsored LINC centres, colleges and universities, private language schools, continuing education centres, community centres, school boards and training programs. Some start a home tutoring business.

For those hoping to work overseas, the United Arab Emirates and Asia are known to pay well. Eastern Europe is a popular spot, although pay there is considerably less, according to Carmen Valero, dean of the Canadian College of Educators.

In Ontario, pay averages \$25 to \$35 an hour. Some universities and private companies may pay \$50 or more.

Online teaching is becoming popular, says Valero, and averages about \$15 an hour.

For more information, check out these websites: teslontario.org, tesl.ca or eslafe.com.

Janice Bradbeer

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