14 Teaching overseas

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Teaching abroad, overseas, migration, overseas, international

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Introduction

Critical question

What would teaching in another country be like?

Have you even wondered about teaching overseas or in a different country? Is there a particular country you have considered travelling to teach in, or are you open to suggestions? This fascinating chapter shares 15 contributor voices, reflecting upon their experiences of

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teaching overseas and communicating and collaborating internationally. Covering a global span of places including Goa, Thailand and Ethiopia (and everywhere in between!), we are sure you will enjoy hearing about the educational challenges, joys and curricula curiosities that can be found in these alternate school settings.

Teaching Abroad: Goa Edition

By Sam Durrant, Online Private English Tutor, Chester, England

'If you want to seriously offer me a job, I promise I'll seriously consider it', I said.

'I want to seriously offer you a job', came the reply. And so began the most recent 7 years of my life; a brand new start, a new country, a new school and a whole new way of thinking about education.

I had been a head of year in big inner-city secondary comprehensives all my working life, a job I loved and loathed in equal measure. Loved because finally I had found something that I was really good at and was making a measurable difference to vulnerable children's lives, and loathed because I simply couldn't do it without giving every ounce of my heart and soul. And it was destroying me.

Then 'life' happened, as it is so often wont to do, and I took a sabbatical, bought a round-the-world ticket and set off to see what was out there. And 'what was out there' was a tiny community of international families with primary age children in the remote hills of South Goa, a community with whom I soon discovered I had a great deal in common!

There were no schools for international students in South Goa at the time, and education was a glorious, bare-foot affair, centred mainly on the beach and almost exclusively around 'learning through play'. Which was nice, but it wasn't really enough for many parents who had the vision to wonder what, exactly, their beautiful little hippy child might want to do, you know, post-16, as it were. So when I came along with my years of secondary experience, an actual teaching qualification, knowledge of exam boards, bank of good GCSE results and the like, 'I want to seriously offer you a job' was music to everybody's ears.

And so began an extraordinary journey. To cut a long story short, I am now the deputy headteacher and head of secondary of South Goa's only international school. We are an all-through school, from kindergarten all the way up to 16-year-olds in Year 11. We are growing year by year, and, having recently found the land that we needed, with the help of a South African architect parent, we have built our very own premises right here in the middle of our community.

You can see pictures of our beautiful school here www.riverhouseacademy.com

We have achieved one of our first ambitions, which was to have a class for every year group and a teacher for every class, and we are now massively over-subscribed. Our next step is to achieve Cambridge international accreditation so that our students can sit their IGCSEs with us as a recognised examinations centre. This is the dream; not yet achieved but we are very very close.

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Life here is amazing. Amazing India they call it and with good reason. Goa, though, is India-Lite, not quite 'the real thing'. As the most prosperous of the 29 Indian states, life here is more comfortable than most people might imagine. For those of us who live here full time who are not of Indian origin, we don't miss out on much. The local people are incredibly fun and friendly, the food is fantastic, prices are unbelievably low (as are salaries mind you, mine included) and there is wildlife galore and, of course, the beaches. The beaches! I have more sun, sea and sand than I ever thought possible.

If I had only known all those years ago that all I needed in order to stay sane was to ride to work on a Royal Enfield, to swim in the sea every day and then enjoy a curry and a pint for less than a pound hindsight is a wonderful thing.

From Zimbabwe to the Isle of Sheppey

By Kelly Austen, Teacher, Isle of Sheppey, Scotland

My name is Kelly and I was born in Zimbabwe, where I was diagnosed with dyslexia as a child. When it was time for me to go to high school, the headteacher at the time told my mother, 'Kelly is too stupid to come to school. Better save your money and put her to work'. Thankfully this was not good enough for my mom, and I was able to repeat my last year of primary school and then I attended home school until I was 15 years old. When I was 15, I was able to do an apprenticeship at a nursery school. When I was 16, the head teacher asked me to teach her class as her husband had become sick. So when I was 16 I was in charge of 30 children aged five turning six, on my own. In Zimbabwe children have to pass an entry test before being allowed to attend primary school. I rose to the challenge, and the children in my care where able to go on and pass their entry test. Some things that are included in this test are as follows:

- Children have to know their home address and phone number by heart.
- Children have to be able to throw a bean bag through a hoop.
- Children have to be able to accurately draw a house, which means having the sky at the top and green grass at the bottom. The house is not allowed to be floating in the air.

This is just a snapshot of what children in Zimbabwe are expected to do. I think it is important to say that in Zimbabwean schools we do not have teaching assistants. This on-entry test is so that the children in the same cohort are of the same ability. Children with special educational needs went to a school that was locked away from society.

I left Zimbabwe when I was 17 due to the political situation and came to England with my family. When I arrived, I had no higher education and had to go to college, and I did a level 1 in childcare. I did this and was able to achieve a foundation degree in early childhood studies.

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I started work in a one-form entry school. I was the nursery lead. The school became an apple school, which means every child has an iPad of their own; this included the two-year-olds. This was a major debate in our Early Years team.

I embraced the iPads as for me it meant a new way of engaging with the children, using different hooks for learning, which are so valuable. One of the best experiences I had was when I showed a child {3 year olds} how to use a drawing app. After I showed the child how to use the app, he then had his friends sitting around him as he taught his peers how to use the app. I also found that the iPads allowed me to share the children's learning in different ways. For example, I always had to take photos of the children as they are learning for evidence. So I would often display the pictures on the board and talk to the children about their learning. I role modelled the language, so I would ask, 'can you tell me what you were learning in this picture?' At first the children would say, 'I don't know'. I would then ask, what were you doing? And then I would say so you were learning; for example, if a child said, 'I was playing hide and seek', I would say, 'That is great way to learn how to count to ten'. Slowly the children were able to say 'I am learning to…'

I then moved to a bigger school, three-form entry, again in a very deprived area with a lot of difficulties, social difficulties and a lot more special educational need. Before I go any further I want you to know how much I love this school. They put the children at the heart of everything they do. When I first arrived at the school, it was like stepping back into time. The Early Years was bright and colourful with loads of hanging thing work. The environment was busy. I was at this time the reception teaching assistant. I was in charge of an area, and so I stripped it back and calmed it down using natural materials and calmed everything down. The children gravitated to the area which made the Early Years lead look at what I did, and she then implemented it in the setting. The difference was amazing, and the difference to the children was almost immediate; they came into the school a lot calmer. I explained to the Early Years lead that the hygge approach is something to look into. Two years later I was given the nursery lead position.

Teaching Overseas: Reflections

By Sally Burns, The Values and Visions Foundation, London, England

We stepped off the plane into a hairdryer on full blast. It was 33°C at 3.00 a.m. I didn't know that was possible. One of our group refused to leave the airport and asked to be put on the next plane back. It was 1982, and we had just landed in Khartoum, capital of Sudan.

The cockroaches in the shower of the dowdy hotel bathroom were the next shock. I am not sure I had ever encountered a cockroach before, and there I met many.

Two weeks of bureaucracy ensued in daytime temperatures of over 35°C, tramping around the mud-encrusted city or avoiding the torrential monsoon downpours. It

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was tedious and wearing, but new and fascinating. It was during this process that we learned we were not going to the Red Sea province we had selected but were being posted up north to the desert. There was no arguing. They needed couples in the more remote villages.

We were eventually released to fly – yes fly! – up to Dongola, the capital of Shamaliya, Northern Province. It was there that the inevitable tummy bug hit, and we struggled for over a week in a tiny room with no air conditioning in temperatures of 42°C.

To get to our village, we had to take the overnight ferry up the Nile. This was not the Nile steamer of Agatha Christie's novels but an ancient boat trailing two side boats which took around twelve hours to do the eighty-kilometre trip. A man met us at the riverside where we docked, loaded our backpacks and trunk on to a camel and invited us to follow him through the date palm fringed village, across a stretch of desert to our new home: a shabby rectangular building with one room, a fair bit of verandah, a tiny 'bathroom' for washing (if you took in water, a cup and a bowl for the purpose), a mud-brick kitchen and a well; there was no running water and no electricity.

I cried when I arrived, and I cried when I left. That year was one of the best of my life. I learned to survive in the desert in temperatures of up to 50°C, to cook on a charcoal-burning converted biscuit tin and to speak Arabic thanks to the amazing women who taught me so much about their culture and their lives. I could write a book about it (I will one day).

What I learned from this experience stood me in good stead for other postings overseas. There are the challenges. These include the inevitable bureaucracy of visas, work permits, accommodation, furnishings and equipment. In addition to the usual stress of starting a new job, you face all the administrative process of moving to a new home in a new country. You may not get what you signed up for: a remote desert village in lieu of a seaside town. Your school may not have what you have been trained to expect as standard, especially in terms of technology: a blackboard, limited chalk, not enough desks, chairs or books and no way of sticking things to the walls; not a whiteboard or projector in sight. However, approached with an open mind and armed with my personal credo, the four Ps: Pleasantness, Politeness, Patience and Perseverance, the lessons learned are invaluable.

Then there are the benefits. You are in the privileged position of living in another environment, immersing yourself in a culture very different from (yet often surprisingly similar to) your own, and you have the chance to learn the language of the country. Your colleagues become your family, and, if you move around, you may find you meet up a few thousand miles away on another continent one day. From a professional point of view, you may be teaching an educational system you know in a new context or you may need to work with an unfamiliar curriculum. All this broadens your experience and, in a competitive job market, is proof of your initiative and resilience.

Still thinking about it! Take the plunge. You will not regret it.

Teaching Overseas – Sandford International School, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

By Suzie Dick, Lecturer in Education at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Scotland

There are many stories from Ethiopia, some 'African', some 'Ethiopian' and some just about pupils, as pupils are, wherever you are in the world. I have chosen three that will hopefully give you a flavour of some of the more interesting aspects of life abroad.

The day the locusts came

We knew they were coming – believe it or not, there is a Locust Watch, a 'weather' forecast if you like for locusts. It is run by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation. Think of it as a wet play situation where instead of going out for playtime the pupils stay in. Unfortunately, no one told the locusts that, and to be fair to them, the school is open plan with courtyards and many different buildings. Think, 2- to 3-inch-long flying guzzling things whose sole purpose is to munch their way through any and every vegetation. Add to that a plague so thick you can't see your way through them from one building to another; hold your hand up and five locusts will be there; touch your hair and locusts will be entangled in it. They also like long hair, and little boys aged about ten, like locusts. Think the chaos when one measly wasp flies into your classroom. Imagine that? Now add in lots of children catching, hiding and then releasing locusts as a novel way to disrupt the lesson. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

Camping anyone? Hyenas welcome too

It can be quite important to ensure that third culture children, those who are from one place but live in another and moving on every few years, have the opportunity to experience what could be considered normal school activities. This can be important in later life, when back home for school, work and university, that they have a language or experiences in common. So we had a school camp and hike for the older girls one weekend. Complete with tents, Trangias, bonfire and campfire songs and games. It was really lovely and brought back a sense of home and memories to many, including those just moved to begin to form new friendships in another new place. The hyenas on the hill behind us particularly enjoyed the singing and joined in with their laughs.

English as an additional language x 52

In my day-to-day job as a lecturer, and previously as a teacher, I am always intrigued by teachers that worry about the 4–5 English as an additional language (EAL) children in their class, differentiation and attainment. In some of the international schools

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the majority are non-English speaking with various degrees of understanding and fluency. It certainly had its challenges, but less concern or, dare I say it, the overthinking went into it. There was a curriculum to teach, and that was that. Lots of words, signs and pictures were used, but the expectation was full immersion and getting on with it regardless of what age they started. No extraction, but every class had a classroom assistant to help out. No one had time, or ability, to translate into 52 languages, but as almost everyone was learning in that second (or third or fourth) language, the children helped each other to learn and make progress. There were occasional issues, but in the secondary school there was a 100% pass rate at the International Baccalaureate, read and written in English. It changed my mindset from 'it's a problem, what shall we do' to a very much ok let's do this together.

Becoming a Headteacher in Saudi Arabia

By Sven Carrington, Head Teacher at BISR Tabuk Campus, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia

I began my teaching career in a beautiful and well-run inner London school. The experience of teaching in a challenging UK school gave me a superb base and model for my practice. When recruiting in my current role as head of school, I am always on the lookout for candidates who have worked in the UK within diverse communities.

I decided to move to Saudi Arabia to broaden my horizons and gain valuable cultural experiences. Teaching at a British international school on a small compound in Tabuk (northwest Saudi Arabia) has been wonderful. The community are supportive and caring, and the staff have been inspirational. Their dedication and understanding that we, as a school, are the centre of the community is of great importance. Again, when recruiting, I am looking for those candidates who have gone above and beyond to engage their wider communities and parent bodies.

Continuing professional development (CPD) has been second to none, with many links to schools across Saudi, Dubai and Bahrain. One of the core principles of the school I work at is a strong emphasis on evidence-based teaching and learning. Weekly CPD sessions on a Thursday afternoon have seen big names from the world of education give talks and workshops for all staff development.

As a head, my life/work balance is something I am always conscious of. International school teaching is certainly not for the workshy, and there are high expectations put upon teachers as parents demand standards for their fees. However, the pay-off for me has been incredible travel opportunities, immersion in different cultures and experiences such as diving and desert camps.

Big Fish: The Amazing World of International Teaching

By Jess Gosling, International Early Years Teacher, Warsaw, Poland

Jess Gosling can be reached via Twitter @JessGosling2 or via her website, jessgosling-earlyyearsteacher.com.

> 'Big Fish' is an early 90s film, whereby the lead actor would go to a different world at different times of his life, then return to his own. Others were unsure if this world was true, or a figment of the lead's imagination.

Leaving the UK and becoming an international teacher led me to feel that when I returned home, my life abroad was that of 'Big Fish'. The fact that I was living in a foreign place, where I was happy and thriving, amazed me. I lived life to the full, enjoying every opportunity with the increased work/life balance, as well as the long school breaks. Every summer I would return to the UK and tell my stories of safaris, dune hiking and snorkelling in the red sea, to notice the eyes of the listener glaze over. I soon realised that people didn't want to hear about this alternative lifestyle, but preferred to talk about their norm. So, I kept my stories to myself.

After graduating from the UK, I set out to teach abroad. The thrill of seeking a new school, new country and new adventures still spurs me on, even after more than 13 years abroad. There is something so exciting about the unknown, and I find comfort that these moves need not be permanent, as each placement begins as a temporary two-year contract.

I left to teach in Cairo for my first placement, and in hindsight, I realise I was incredibly naÔve. Living in Egypt was challenging, as the culture didn't suit my own. One memory that sticks in my mind was approaching the driveway of a majestic-looking building, my new school. It took my breath away. The facilities included a dedicated Early Years Unit and an Olympic-sized pool. I loved the children I taught; they were respectful, articulate and bright. However, the decision of whether to renew our contract was easily made due to the Revolution in 2011. It was a frightening time to witness, and upon return to school, it was obvious that our safety was compromised. I recognised the place was changing fast.

We decided to move next to Vietnam. Asia had always been a place we loved, we had taught as English teachers in Japan and I had spent my teens backpacking in SE Asia. Vietnam was beautiful and liberal and the people warm. I spent two years teaching and another five raising my daughter in a lovely suburb outside of Ho Chi Minh City. I thrived as a mum in the small community and contributed to its growth. Soon I was organising playdates and gatherings for parents. In the evenings I would study for a Masters and later I set up my own Early Years business. Having the opportunity to have a go at being a boss was liberating.

Yet, as my daughter grew up, I understood that both the school and country no longer fit us as a family. The weather was incredibly hot, and playgrounds didn't exist

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as grass was viewed as ornamental. The pollution was high, and our daughter forever suffered from a chesty cough.

Taking this into consideration, we decided to relocate to Taiwan. Friends had highly recommended this little-known country. First, we visited the country, which appeared to offer so much more than Vietnam: mountains and beaches all within an hour of the school. Our move was a successful one. We enjoyed travel once again; however, in 2020, we received news that COVID had begun to spread around the world. We were protected from the intense pressure as Taiwan maintained very low infection rates for more than two years.

Even in this time, Taiwan has offered further opportunities, although perhaps initially hidden. Travel restrictions were strict, but instead of travel planning, I wrote. I authored a book, articles and blogs and created a website, Twitter following and Facebook group for international teachers. Then I began to reach out to my community, by establishing WomenEd Taiwan. I was surrounded by highly skilled professionals and was offered high-quality professional development. My research and writing were noticed by a consultant, and now I contract for her consultancy, training and advising on EAL in Early Years.

As I face my next move this year, I am again excited for a scene change. I wonder what the change will entail. I have already had discussions with my new school about leading staff development and helping support the expansion of Early Years. This new chapter I am sure will be one in which I am challenged and grow.

Independent or International Schools?

By Chris Barnes, Prep school teacher, Manchester, England

I read my undergraduate degree and then went straight into a PGCE at the end of the last century/millennium. It almost frightens me to write that because it really doesn't seem like yesterday (and amazingly, my university top still fits me!). In terms of careers advice, our admissions tutor gave us an excellent maxim that is still relevant 22 years later: don't just take the first job that's offered to you. Be sure that you are right for the school. Better to be sure than sorry. It remains great advice; although with the changes to university funding and pressure to secure a teaching position, a more circumspect approach is understandable.

In the year that I qualified, the statutory induction year was introduced, and everyone was being ushered in the direction of maintained schools 'to ensure that we were properly qualified'. Little, if any, mention was given to other options. As I have been given the opportunity to do so, I remind the reader of the importance of looking to both independent and international schools as further possibilities.

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UK independent schools

Around 7–8% of pupils are educated at independent/private schools in the UK. 'Preparatory' (prep) schools were to get children ready to join the larger senior schools, traditionally at 13 but increasingly now at 11. Disregard the stereotyped photographs of top hats and tails: uniforms are smart, but most are much more prosaic. Some prep schools are run by charitable trusts; others by large educational groups. The age ranges vary but all finish at either 11 or 13, at which point the children take entrance exams for senior school: a mixture of 11+ (English, maths, science and reasoning), ISEB Common Entrance at 13+ or the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate. The focus is not solely on academia: arts, music, drama, sport, debating and residential activities are all seen as important and forming part of the experience of being at prep school.

If not independent, how about going international?

There are few jobs in the world where you can combine a love of travel and an opportunity to work. Teaching is one of them. The world is reopening post-pandemic and with QTS – even if you have not yet undertaken induction, which is only required to teach within the UK itself – you have options to gain experience elsewhere.

If the idea of going overseas appeals to you, a few questions to consider:

1. **How would I feel being away from my family/friends?** Could I deal with 'not being there' if there was an emergency, or being parted from those whom I know best? Similarly, how easy would it be for others to come and visit me?
2. (If travelling overseas by yourself) **How comfortable would I feel about going alone?** Could I get a friend to apply with me? Even though the international schools community is very welcoming, having someone with whom to take that initial step helps it seem less daunting.
3. **Where in the world would best suit me?** As a couple of examples: the Middle East has no taxes but high living costs. In Southeast Asia, salaries are less but there is a lower cost of living. Most international schools do not contribute towards pension arrangements, so you may wish to set up a savings scheme to put money away.
4. **What are my tax liabilities?** In some countries you are taxed at a higher rate for the first part of your first year – usually 183 days – until you can be classed as a 'resident', at which point you pay the local rate of tax. Look up the country's taxation relationship with your own country to see if you are liable to pay any kind of tax whilst overseas (in most cases the answer will be none, unless you are, for example, receiving income such as rental for a property).
5. **How will diet and/or allergies be catered for?** You do need to research this carefully. Western countries' allergy levels are quite different from those in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Nuts and seeds form part of the everyday diet, and it is less common to find information about allergens.

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6. **What about medication?** This depends on the healthcare package offered by your prospective school. If you have a pre-existing condition, you should check if the same medication is available and, if so, who would be paying for it.
7. **LGBTQ?** Tolerance, diversity and inclusion are not the same across the world – if you identify as anything other than your biological sex, use different pronouns, or if you are in a homosexual relationship, choose your country carefully. A prison sentence or (in some cases) the death penalty is still in place for anything perceived to be outside of heterosexual, male-female relationships.
8. **But that's not my religion!** In some parts of the world, religion can very much influence daily life, in terms of dress, behavioural norms, food and drink, etc. This is a norm for those that live in that country. To anyone moving there, don't expect to be treated differently because you are a temporary worker – the same expectations, fines and punishments apply.

International teaching is an adventure, and many who start with the idea of doing it for a few years end up spending their lives and careers outside of their passport country. It is now very much a positive choice made by teachers, either straight out of university or soon after qualifying.

Thailand

By Scott Read, Year 1 Specialist Teacher, PSHE/Wellbeing Curriculum Leader – Foundation at Amnuay Silpa School, Bangkok, Thailand

For as long as I can remember Asia has always had a special place in my heart. I was taken by the collectivist cultures, the history and the warmth of the people I'd met. Ever since watching the 'King and I' with my grandmother at a young age, Thailand (formerly Siam) has always sparked my interest. I first travelled to Thailand in 2018, and I fell in love with both the country and its people. I quickly found that Thailand is not called the 'land of smiles' for no reason.

I began my training to become a teacher at the University of Greenwich – first completing my BA and then progressing onto my PGCE. The training was not easy, and I can assure there was a lot of blood, sweat and tears. However, I always had my end goal in sight to teach overseas in Thailand. Unfortunately, I did not know a lot about how I could teach overseas, so I began by watching YouTube videos and looking at the council of British international schools (COBIS) website. Towards the end of my teacher training, a friend of mine had seen a job advertised on TES and said I should apply. I applied without thinking I would get an interview, but I was mistaken. I was invited to attend an online interview with the principal and was asked to record a 10-minute demonstration teaching video. At that time, I hadn't had much teaching experience, but I submitted my demo video and attended the interview.

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Two weeks passed, and I thought I had not been successful. I prayed I would hear a response, and that same day I received an email from the school informing me that they would like to offer me a position as a Year 1 specialist teacher. Words cannot express how happy and excited I was. I booked my flight and applied to the Thai Embassy for my visa and certificate of entry into the kingdom of Thailand. When I arrived in Thailand I was welcomed with open arms by my school, and an amazing team of staff who are so supportive and made me feel part of the team right away. Every day I thank the Buddha for this amazing opportunity that has come into my life.

I am very fortunate to have been blessed to work at the first and only accredited bilingual thinking school in Thailand as my first official teaching job. Moving 6000 miles away from the UK can be a struggle, and I do get days where I miss home, but seeing my students' faces and smiles reminds me just how much I am making a difference to their lives. Thai children highly respect their teachers and are all willing to learn and really push themselves to try. I commend them as learning a new language has its ups and downs and being EAL students the commitment and proactiveness they put into each, and every lesson is a joy. Learning is a journey, and I am truly glad I get to share my learning and teaching journey with my students.

It all Started with Backpacking...

By Mark Cratchley, English Teacher at Cheltenham Bournside School, Cheltenham, England

Halfway through a backpacking trip around Southeast Asia, I stumbled on the idea of how I could live that kind of life more permanently; TEFL teaching. Fifteen months later, I was back in Thailand with a rucksack and guitar, a CELTA under my belt, and a vague plan to work either there, Singapore or Japan.

Whilst I was making my mind up, I ended up teaching the manager of the beach bungalows I was staying at on Ko Pha Ngan, and her nephew. Every afternoon, I would head off to teach in my first classroom; a pagoda on the beach. The boy's mother had contacts in Bangkok and told me about an available teaching position there, and within a few days I was teaching at a kindergarten off the Samsen Road.

I had my own classroom, and the classes would come to me throughout the day for their weekly 30-minute lessons. As part of the contract, I also taught elementary and junior high school students on weekend mornings, with a day off on Monday. This seemed to be the norm for many agencies, and unless you work in a regular school or an international school, you can expect to work six days a week. Many teachers also work the weekend classes for extra cash. My guitar came in handy for me, and I had a nightly gig in a local bar, away from the beaten track of the Khao San Road, with a regular clientele of Uni students, expats and Bangkok musos. I was also lucky enough to have the unique experience of delivering a week-long course to a group of Thai teachers from all over the

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country at a remote tamarind farm for the Dept. of Education. The old phrase of no two days in teaching ever being the same is amplified when working abroad!

Then a call came from Japan.

I'd made many great friends in Thailand and loved living there, but the time was right to move on, and if I hadn't taken up the job offer, I know I would have regretted it. So, within a few days, I found myself (eventually) navigating Ueno train station and heading to Saitama to meet my friends from back home who were living in a 'Gaijin House' in a small town near Omiya.

In all, I was there for 11 years and, as you can imagine, had a plethora of experiences in that time. In the smaller private language schools I taught every age range, from children as young as two to octogenarians. I taught in immersive kindergartens, worked for the local council visiting schools as part of a cultural exchange programme and briefly dabbled with one of the big corporate English schools – being recently married and a new parent, I wanted a more secure job, but the battery-farm style of teaching was not my cup of tea.

So what could I do to ensure stability for my new family? Start my own school. That may sound counterintuitive, but we were offered the opportunity to build a house from scratch, so that's we did. We designed the house with the classroom downstairs and the living area upstairs. We worked hard to advertise the school locally and quickly built up a solid base of students, running an immersive kindergarten class in the morning, cram classes in the afternoons and adult classes for stay-at-home parents, business people and doctors from the local hospital. We ran special events for Easter, Halloween and Christmas, and summer camping trips. As you can imagine, there are pros and cons to running your own school, but ultimately it is worth every effort, and if you are planning to live abroad for the long term, a wonderful way to be able to do it.

So, what are my main takeaways from teaching abroad? Be prepared for some culture shock but know that it does become easier, and you will very quickly learn to appreciate and celebrate the differences. Find the job that's right for you – there are many different types of school and jobs within those schools – you will find your feet and make it work for you. Seize opportunities when they are presented to you, you will open yourself up to some unique and life-changing experiences.

How Teaching Abroad has Made me a Better Teacher

By Nieky van Veggel, Senior Lecturer in Animal Health, Writtle University College, Chelmsford, England

Nieky can be contacted via *nv@writtle.ac.uk* or alternatively via @NiekyWUC on Twitter.

Throughout my career as an educator I have been fortunate enough to teach abroad on multiple occasions. I have been fortunate enough to teach in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Ukraine and Armenia. This was done through informal personal links, as well as part of formal international exchange projects.

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To me, the most interesting aspect of teaching abroad is that it has really opened my eyes to different ways of doing things. I found that irrespective of where I was teaching, everyone involved has a common goal, which is getting their students to achieve to the best of their ability. However, the means of getting there, through the various education systems of different countries, is infinitely fascinating.

On a more personal level, I have found teaching abroad incredibly rewarding. Despite what the media portray, the UK has a good reputation for producing high-quality teaching staff. It was humbling to be treated as an expert educator by fellow university teachers simply because I came from a better resourced institution in a Western country. Equally, it was fascinating to have discussions with students abroad, who are not only interested in what I have to say, but also endlessly fascinated by what student life is like for my students.

I guess my concluding message is this: If you get the chance to teach abroad, even if it is only for a short time, do it. It will make you a better educator, guaranteed!

Zambia

By Thomas Godfrey-Faussett, Research Assistant and DPhil Candidate at the University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Onora O'Neill, initially in her 2002 Reith Lectures and since in other talks and articles (2004, 2013a, 2013b), has explored the role of trust and relationships in systems of accountability. In essence, my understanding of her argument is that systems of accountability do not replace trust between individuals; they merely redirect it. In education, accountability systems mean that rather than trusting the teacher of your children to provide a quality education, you can place your trust in an external regulator, such as Ofsted, who will hold them to account on your behalf. When asked to reflect on my time teaching in a parent-owned community school in Zambia, I immediately thought back to O'Neill's discussion and the role of teacher-parent relationships in education.

Before moving to Zambia, I had trained and worked in London at a 2500-pupil secondary comprehensive school. Moving to a parent-owned community school was a revelation. The entire secondary school catered for just under 200 pupils. I taught 70 pupils. I could reflect generally about working in a smaller school, but specifically what I want to think about here is the impact that the school being parent owned had on teacher-parent relationships. In particular how this impacted both the ways in which we, as teachers, were held accountable and the meaning of accountability in the first place. In this school, parents were deeply involved. There were the usual parent's evenings, which happened every term, but because parents had been involved in the initial design of the school, systems were in place to ensure their involvement in many

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different aspects of the running of the school. This meant, as teachers, we were held to account much more directly by teachers. At the extreme end, ultimately it was their decision whether or not contracts were renewed at the end of each two-year period! A dictionary definition of 'accountability' throws up four synonyms which, to me, highlight this shift (Merriam-Webster, 2022):

1. Liability or culpability
2. Answerability or responsibility

In my time teaching in London, accountability came to mean liability or culpability. My response to systems which were designed to hold me to account was to produce data or evidence which I could point to in the instance that I was blamed for the poor outcomes of a pupil or a class. In Zambia, accountability was a much broader term, whose meaning was closer to answerability or responsibility. Parents wanted me to be able to explain why I had chosen to make certain decisions. It was all very well if their child was on target to get an A, but were they happy? What excited them in class? And the flip side was I could ask parents to support their child outside of school or find out what they were interested in at home. The Home-School Knowledge Exchange project is an example of an attempt, in England, to similarly blur the boundary between the home and the classroom (Feiler et al., 2008). Could state-run schools learn from the approach of this parent-owned school to explicitly design for greater parental involvement, particularly in the systems of accountability? At the very least, it feels to me that as a classroom teacher, making strong and collaborative parent-teacher a priority feels like a good way of being accountable beyond the performative data production mechanisms of accountability which seem to be threatening our current system.

Teaching Refugees Abroad which Led to Setting up the First 'School of Sanctuary' in Suffolk

By Jasmine Kay-Moyle, Assistant Headteacher and School of Sanctuary Leader for Suffolk, Suffolk, England

In 2016, I was laying newspaper on my classroom tables in preparation for a painting lesson with my Year 6 class. A headline caught my eye: 'Swarms of Migrants Heading for Europe'. The terminology alone made me internally curse. The derogatory language used to compare refugees to loathsome insects was repulsive, and similar quotations were rife within the mainstream media at that time. I scrunched the newspaper up in frustration. In my classroom, I promoted empathy and an anti-racist curriculum, but it felt like the outside world was becoming more hostile every day.

At this time, there were 10,000 refugees in Calais, France, just a few hours from my home. I was hesitant to visit initially. Whilst at university, I had visited The Gambia on an alternative teaching placement. The intention was to support unqualified teachers

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by regurgitating our lecturers' recently taught pedagogy. When our team of inexperienced trainees arrived, 100 children greeted us in one class. Our limited experience of teaching in England had not provided us with transferable knowledge, and we spent the week singing nursery rhymes and relaxing in the hotel pool. We naively snapped pictures of children who clung to our waists and made us feel like celebrities. I feel ashamed that we had not applied our safeguarding training to our new environment. It wouldn't be appropriate to post a selfie on social media with a photo containing one of our students in England, and later this would be one of the biggest reflections from my trip 'teaching' abroad: even if the overseas organisation deems this an acceptable move, you should never do something abroad that wouldn't be acceptable in the UK. Thankfully, over the last decade or so on my travels, I've seen a decline in cultural experiences which exploit local people and animals.

Not wanting to repeat previous voluntourism mistakes, I signed up to complete purposeful work in a warehouse on the outskirts of Calais near to the refugee camp. I spent weeks helping to prepare Afghan bolani, cardamom chai and Sudanese peanut stew. I had been tasked with checking retro 1970s tents (without instructions) to check that they were complete before distribution. I organised collections of sleeping bags, toiletries and clothing back home and would drive them over before completing long shifts in the warehouse. It wasn't glamorous work: it was exhausting, but I was part of something that felt exciting. Being around like-minded people was refreshing. A bouncy American solider whose jokes were a gift during those bleak winter months kept my spirits up during those physically demanding tasks. He felt conflicted about his role serving on a base in the UK and wanted to engage with the refugee crisis. He would lie about his real job on distribution in fear of repercussions from refugees who may have worked for the American army and felt as though they were left behind. It wasn't the refugees who he needed to fear though, for he would be run over by French national on one of our trips. Hate crimes were common and were aimed at both refugees and volunteers. For the first time in my teaching career, I was in danger due to the work that I was completing – many Europeans disagree with people helping refugees, and some will go to extreme lengths to prevent charitable acts from taking place.

When I later became a teacher in the camp, it wasn't uncommon for students to enter the classroom needing medical attention after being attacked. When people ask me about the camp, I usually focus on how intrinsically kind the residents were and rarely go into detail about the unsanitary conditions that the men, women and children lived in. I heard stories in that settlement that will haunt me for the rest of my life and saw things that regularly keep me up at night. It is clear that no one chooses to live in such conditions in the age of the budget airline.

Many of the residents in the camp started to recognise me. On one occasion, I spotted Will I Am playing Connect Four with a group of refugees. Like a true fan girl, I started to sing 'Where is the Love' to some of the refugees who were asking me why I was so intrigued by this man.

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'You're lewanaii', they remarked. 'Lewanaii' means 'crazy' in Pashto. 'He's not famous here. No one knows him but we all know you. You're the crazy English girl who drives her car here every week to help us'. I was building connections with people, and I knew that I could not walk away. I taught English, maths and basic French. It was common for journalists to walk into my lessons and start snapping away without permission or to be tear gassed mid grammar lesson. People were hungry, cold and frustrated. Lessons were a welcome distraction from rat-infested tents, distribution lines and dangerous border crossings. Residents often died trying to swim to family members in the UK; they suffocated in lorries and fell from the bottom of vehicles. Some of the unaccompanied minors had French IDs, but there was a lack of practical information for them to improve their situations. I always remembered that I was a teacher and never pretended to be a medic, councillor or lawyer. As their teacher, they put their trust in me, and at times, I was able to connect them with appropriate services. Sadly, I have also spent time in A&E with students who have attempted suicide.

Continuing to work and volunteer with reputable charities allowed me to access training on psychological support, cultural appropriation and unconscious bias: all of which provided me with a fantastic foundation for the work that I have continued to do supporting refugees over the years. I came to realise that teaching abroad could have long-lasting impacts on those you are supporting under the right conditions. It is important to be mindful of your impact when thinking about such professions:

- As a teacher abroad, are you potentially taking a job from a local person?
- Are you qualified for the role?
- Are you able to commit time to ensure your students make progress?
- Why are you volunteering? Do your actions benefit you more than those you are seeking to help?

By the time I was invited to become a project lead in a camp for Yazidis in Greece, I felt that I had transferrable skills for the role. I wanted to encourage some of the residents to teach alongside me. I was thrilled when I found out some had been teachers in Iraq. However, I had underestimated the trauma that these people had experienced during the very recent genocide. My vision of taking a step back was not going to work: they wanted me to support their children within our safe space so they could prioritise on accessing psychological and legal support also available within the camp. I had learnt another important lesson here: allowing refugees to have a say in the type of support that you are offering is paramount.

As we develop into a more culturally diverse society in Europe, blame can grow and people in positions of power have been known to point fingers at refugees for our country's problems. In reality, the UK hosts 0.26% of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2016) and the majority of refugees are in countries that surround conflict zones. When my local Afghan bridging hotel began to house holidaymakers again, one of my students was saddened that the staff started to place tablecloths on the tables

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at mealtimes. Her husband was also continuously rejected for cleaning jobs despite being overqualified with a first class degree. She felt dehumanised – it is this systemic racism that needs addressing too. Our children in UK classrooms often believe racism is a thing of the past, occasionally presenting itself as a slur at a football match or a bar fight. Contrary to this, racism is so entrenched within our society and teachers have the responsibility to have challenging conversations with colleagues, parents and children to ensure that our society does not limit somebody due to their cultural heritage.

In 2022, my community primary school in Suffolk was awarded the 'School of Sanctuary' award. We were the first to achieve this within our county, and we hope that other schools will follow the steps that we have taken to address misinformation surrounding migration. A School of Sanctuary is a school that is committed to being a safe and welcoming place for all children including migrants and refugees. As staff, we teach the pupils about the difficulties that people experience around the world, which builds empathy and understanding. We encourage visitors to the school to ensure the pupils have a broad understanding of the wider world as well as their own culture and identity. Since the launch of the award, many parents from diverse backgrounds have offered their skills to enhance our curriculum including multicultural cooking workshops and language exchange sessions. We have amplified our message of solidarity through art exhibitions, sent welcome cards and gifts to new arrivals and provided information to our pupils to allow them to make informed opinions about migrants and refugees. Our children know that diversity is a strength. As teachers, we have an incredible gift to allow empathy, equality and love to win within our classrooms. In turn, our lessons may contribute towards a fairer society for all.

My Experience of Teaching in Russia

By Oksana Agamova, PhD Student, Norfolk, England

I am a Russian PhD student, currently living in the UK. The topic of my PhD is exploring the formation of moral values in medical students, within an educational environment. I have extensive experience of teaching college students in Moscow. I have taught the English language in several colleges across Russia, in addition to the basics of Latin with medical terminology to students aged 14 to 16. In contrast to the educational pathway in the UK, the students I taught were already studying towards a medical degree, such as medicine, nursing and midwifery.

School education in Russia is free and divided into three main stages: primary, basic general and secondary. Primary education starts at age six or seven and lasts for four years, basic general education continues for the next four years and secondary education for the last two years. Russian school education lasts for 11 years

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in total; however, each pupil can decide whether they want to leave after this time or continue. There are also examinations throughout schooling that the children must pass. At the end of basic general education, each pupil must pass a compulsory examination called the Basic State Exam (BSE). The children can then decide whether to continue their education in college or to stay in school for two more years and then sit the Unified State Exam. If a pupil unfortunately fails their BSE, they are not allowed to continue their education in secondary school and have to decide whether to find employment or try to pass placement exams in different colleges.

There are schools in Russia that specialise just in primary education, where upon completion of which, a child's parents or carers have to decide on further education. They will choose the school for their child so they can receive basic general and if needed secondary education. Separate primary education schools are gaining popularity due to the fact that by the end of the 4th year the pupil is showing interest towards this or that subject, making it easier for parents or carers to understand in which area their child is likely to succeed. Some parents or carers prefer private schooling or home education to the state schooling. They believe that private schooling or home education is of good quality as their children are taught by highly qualified professionals, whereas state schools are lacking good specialists. However, state schools are very careful in choosing their teachers and every teacher must be highly qualified in order to be successful.

An important role of primary school teachers in Russia is to help develop a portfolio of and for each pupil concerning their academic performance in different subjects, grades they have received, certificates they have gained and extracurricular activities such as crafts. This portfolio is open for parents to view and forms an important role in the pupil's future. This portfolio is seen as a reflection of the pupil and will be examined by the headteacher at any future schools the pupil may attend. Each school has a different focus and intensively teaches a particular subject such as English, physics, mathematics and so on.

Moving to Russia to teach

If you are thinking about teaching in Russia, there are various routes. Initially you will have to prove your qualification and appropriate degree, as well as passing DBS checks. You will then need to undergo a health check alongside psychiatric and substance abuse examinations, a yearly requirement for teachers in Russia. Then, you will have to demonstrate your Russian language skills as all classes, except for the English subject, are taught in Russian within the colleges. If you wish to teach English in Russia, you should have a TEFL/CELTA or equivalent qualification. Depending upon your teaching specialisation, you have to upgrade your skills at least every five years and gain certification by the state organisation. It is also a necessity to provide classes teaching morality and ethics to the students.

Vietnam

By Joe Rose, Further Education Curriculum Team Leader, Lead IQA and Lecturer at The Sheffield College, Sheffield, England

> Being 6,000 miles away from home, in 45°C heat (with 100% humidity) in the middle of nowhere playing 'talk for a minute' with 48 overly excited teenagers screaming and cheering on their peers, was probably the most enriching moment in my teaching career to date.

The phrase 'You weren't there man' or if that wasn't as obvious as I thought maybe 'Good Morning Vietnam' sheds light on where my overseas teaching experience blossomed. How did I end up teaching nearly 6,000 miles away? In short, a childhood of British holidays (brilliant I may add) and a rather progressive yet 'traditional' professional career that had created an itch that simply moving to another city/role wouldn't scratch. My ambition to 'see the world' but use my passion for education saw endless 3 am Skype interviews until a gifted high school and primary state school in Halong Bay, Vietnam, offered me a position.

Vietnamese culture is vibrant, beautiful and exciting and exquisitely emphases the images you might see on TV or in travel brochures. Teachers are highly regarded in society, and the manner in which they are respected is evident. However, the stark differences from what you would experience in a traditional classroom back home can at first take you back. As you enter the sense of an authoritarian style of classroom management is overwhelming. Students sit in rows, quietly in rows; they raise their hand, stand up, answer and bow after each interaction. All classrooms have very strict (even physically punishable) rules when it comes to participation, desk tidiness, student conduct and even the neatness of their handwriting. Students at this age attended school Monday to Friday 8 am–5 pm and Saturdays 8 am–1 pm with a massive emphasis on grades and national targets. The entire opposite to what I imagined my teaching environment to be. However, I had a motivation 'environments create environments'.

In Vietnam, students at primary age were not required to attend preschool and primary school isn't entirely free. Many from lower income families do opt out and prioritise work and in turn sadly encourage gender inequalities. I saw this as an opportunity to create an environment where equality was the focus: a small plenary where answers were anonymously screwed up and read out by different students. At first I was blissfully unaware of the impact, but my teaching assistant noticed the smiles and look of pride from several of the more reserved girls in the class. Simple yet effective, with limited resources you had to think on your feet.

My inspirational idea wasn't as such an innovative method of pedagogy, nor a world-changing teaching activity. My idea was simple and stemmed from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Create an environment that clearly shows students that they're respected and loved and their participation and involvement is valued and sought

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after. Stripping it back to basics enabled me to see the students in their rawest form, over time challenging their ideas and allowing them to develop and articulate an opinion, collaborate, problem solve and even some begin to self-actualise. It can be easy as an educator to fall into the trap of trying to use the most innovative methods all the time but don't forget the basics. I highly recommend any aspiring or new teacher to take the plunge and use your gift to teach to see the world. In my opinion it's the greatest opportunity to learn more about yourself as a teacher and as a human.

Developing Student Teachers' Intercultural Competence through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)

By Simone Hackett, Department of Physical Education Teacher Training at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands

As migration patterns change and the world and our classrooms become more multicultural, there is an urgent need for student teachers to be prepared for this by being culturally responsive in their teaching to meet the learning needs of their students. However, research has indicated that teachers feel they are ill prepared and need more training for teaching children of diverse backgrounds (Lin and Bates, 2014; OECD, 2014; UNESCO 2020).

What is Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)?

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an online pedagogy that facilitates students' intercultural competence development. COIL falls under Virtual Exchange, which is a term used to describe activity which involves online intercultural interaction and collaboration with students from other cultures or geographical locations as an integrated part of course work, under the guidance of educators (O'Dowd, 2018). COIL is seen as a more inclusive and efficient way to internationalise the classroom and promote intercultural learning compared to approaches such as studying abroad, as it offers students an international experience at their home institution. The essence of COIL is in 'developing team taught learning environments where teachers from two different cultures work together to develop a shared syllabus, emphasising experiential and collaborative student learning' (Rubin, 2017). This includes educators from different countries connecting and co-designing collaborative online group assignments for their students with intercultural learning in mind. During a COIL course, which can be anywhere between 4 and 20 weeks long, students work on collaborative assignments in multicultural teams online and through this process develop intercultural competence (see Figure 14.1).

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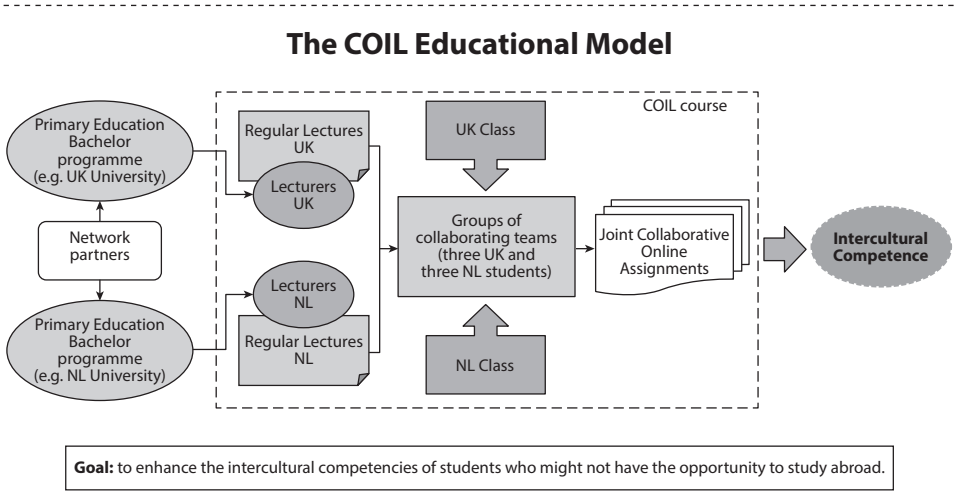

Figure 14.1 COIL model

Theoretical foundations of COIL

COIL is based on two educational learning concepts. First, COIL's essence is based on the collaborative learning educational approach, which involves pairs or teams of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product either in a face-to-face or online setting (Dillenbourg, 1999; Janssen 2014). Collaborative learning is rooted in social constructivism and Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about a zone of proximal development, in which the focus is on learning and building on knowledge through social interaction. The second is contact hypothesis theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) which holds the view that exposure to diversity will lead to increased intercultural competence

Implementing COIL with teacher training programmes

Developing a COIL course includes several steps. First, educators need to find a partner to co-design the COIL assignment with. Once educators find a suitable partner, it is important to ensure that both parties are equally committed to developing a COIL course, their institutions support this initiative and the educational visions and curriculums align and match. Important elements to consider are as follows:

- Course schedules: Course schedules should be checked to ensure that they are offered during the same term and that the timelines of both courses match (i.e. start/end dates, holidays and exam periods).
- Class size/student numbers: The class size should be equal on both sides so that there is a balance when forming collaborating teams.
- Duration: Although students can meet asynchronously, students collaborate best when they can meet during class time. Therefore, ensure there is enough time

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during class time for students to meet online and collaborate regularly during the course. A minimum of four meetings for a least 45 minutes to an hour is recommended to create team cohesion and ensure intercultural learning occurs.

- World time zones: It is important to check what time zone each partnering COIL institution is in. It is also important to check whether daylight saving changes will occur during the course which could interfere with scheduled collaborative asynchronous sessions.
- Credits: Ensure credits that are awarded for each course are equivalent as this could interfere with how much effort and commitment students have to the course and assignments.
- Team formation: Collaborating teams should consist of two or more students from both partnering universities. Although teams of two (pairs) can work, they are vulnerable due to the chance of one student dropping out of the course and leaving the remaining student alone to complete the tasks.
- Online platforms: Decide on what online platforms are available and will be used for collaboration, and ensure all students will be easily able to access these.
- Data protection and sharing: Is there a data sharing and protection agreement in place between the two institutions to protect students' personal data?
- Formal partnership or Memorandum of Agreement: Although not necessary to initiate and develop a COIL course, a formal agreement is advisable to ensure commitment from both partnering institutions.

Given this, COIL is a valuable tool for developing student teachers' intercultural competence and therefore would be a beneficial approach to embed in teacher training programmes to better prepare student teachers for their future careers and deal with the increasing cultural diversity within their classrooms.

Conclusions

- Teaching abroad offers opportunities for different pedagogical and cultural experiences.
- Teacher requirements may vary from country to country.
- School systems and educational curriculums are widely diverse.

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