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Challenges facing teachers new to working in schools overseas

Margaret Halicioğlu

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I. Introduction

There is a growing need for teachers, especially native English speakers, to go abroad to work, largely because of the recent mushrooming of “international” schools designed to serve demand around the world. The demand might be from the community of multi-national employees, or it might be the demand of locals who value, and can afford to pay for, a specific type of education in a specific language, leading to an international qualification. Thus, more and more teachers are being enticed into what many might see as doing the same job, just in a different, more exotic location. These teachers are usually not trained for their new educational context (Hayden, 2002).

As a leader of one such school annually searching for expatriates to teach in just such an “exotic location”, the importance of understanding the challenges such teachers might face, helping them cope with any difficulties encountered so that they thrive not only survive, should not be underestimated. Leaders of schools all over the world who employ teachers from other countries will save a lot of time and money by taking such challenges seriously and being proactive. Similarly, teachers considering moving abroad to work need to carefully research (Joslin, 2002) and prepare themselves, since the change of location and culture, the change in the student body and colleagues, the change in parental expectations, the loss of familiar signs and symbols, and so forth, will have a huge impact on their professional satisfaction and personal happiness. The number of websites and blogs advising teachers working abroad on how to break contract (for example, International Schools Review, 2006; Heckscher, 2011; Archer, 2013) is an indication of the degree of dissatisfaction experienced by some, who have been unable to adapt. Conversely, other teachers can be happier abroad than in their home country. Coulter and Abney (2008), for example, found that Canadian teachers working overseas suffered considerably less burn-out than Canadian teachers working in Canada and even suggest that teachers considering dropping out of the profession should instead consider moving abroad to teach, where the conditions are more favorable. Thus it appears that some teachers accept challenges; others do not.

Most of the research done so far concerning the experiences of teachers working abroad has been conducted in international schools. Originally, international schools were designed to serve expatriate children, who found themselves abroad thanks to their parent's work, who needed a stable education and a common curriculum so that they could slot into a similar international school when their parent was posted to another country, and attain an international qualification for entry into university. Now, many international schools also attract local children, whose parents value the type of education being offered. However, teachers also go abroad to work in national schools, which value multilingualism and/or an international education, and there is a paucity of research in this specific area. This paper will address the challenges facing teachers moving abroad for the first time, regardless of the type of school in which they work, regardless of its location, and regardless of the teachers' nationality or native language. This paper does not investigate challenges facing teachers going abroad to work at adult language schools; this is another area requiring research due to the ease with which native speakers can secure such a position, even without appropriate qualifications (Hubbs, 2014). Since most research of those going abroad for work, either academic or professional, concerns international students, business people or aid volunteers, rather than teachers, I shall use the word "sojourner" as an all-encompassing term, content with Ward *et al's* (2001, p.6) definition of sojourners as "temporary between-society culture travelers".

II. Finding the optimal school

The first challenge facing teachers is finding the optimal position and the need for teachers to research the type of school they want to work in, not just its geographical location. There is much online advice for teachers moving abroad (such as Hines, 2009; Mernin, 2012; TES, 2013), including choosing location and checking on important details like the specifics of the teaching contract. Even the term "international school" is not a true guide to the understanding of the context of such a school since international schools can vary greatly in their style and approach (Garton, 2002). Most international schools follow the British or American national education programmes, but in a country other than the UK or the USA (Haywood, 2002). Some international schools make their approach clear with their titles, such as "The British International School", but this is an oxymoronic description: is the school British or international? Some schools are more specific in their purpose, such as the

American Sponsored Overseas Schools (ASOSs), which are located outside the United States and receive annual funding through the U.S. Department of State, designed to educate American children abroad (Mott, 2012). The literature is full of confusion regarding definitions of different types of schools abroad: Ortlhoff and Escobar-Ortlhoff (2002), for example, erroneously use the terms “American international schools” and “American overseas schools” synonymously, even in the same paragraph. They also state that the American parents they contacted wanted the same experience for their children as if they were in America; this ethnocentric approach denies the benefits of an international education and questions why the word “international” is used in such school titles. This is very different from Blaney’s (1991) ideal of a school with a group of teachers from the major cultures of the world, providing a range of different perspectives and role models. He also reminds us that some international schools consider it of paramount importance to have host national teachers, otherwise they would be “overseas” schools as opposed to “international” schools. This distinction is an important one: teachers doing their research before signing a contract should examine the diversity of the teaching staff and the diversity of the student body, as an indication of the type of school they are considering (Richards, 1998).

Teaching abroad does not necessarily mean teaching in international schools. It should be remembered that many national schools around the world, whether state or private, hire foreign teachers, either to teach their native language or to contribute to the bilingual, trilingual or multilingual education offered at those schools. The Council for International Schools (CIS) has many accredited schools which are national schools, offering an international-type education, whether through an international curriculum (such as the IBO programmes) or through a national curriculum with an international slant. If Turkey is taken as an example, 17 schools are accredited by CIS (CIS, 2014), yet 14 of those schools are national schools, most of them teaching in English as well as Turkish. All of these schools are examples of “internationally minded” schools, to use Hill’s term (2000). Hong Kong is another example where foreigners are employed since all state schools are entitled to recruit one or two native English speakers (Luk, 2012).

Hayden (2002) points out that there will be a range of challenge intensity according to the context of the school: for example, a British teacher moving overseas to teach

in a British international school, with mainly British expatriate children, and following the UK's National Curriculum, will not be as challenged professionally as another British teacher moving to a non-British school with possibly a high number of different nationalities making up the classroom. In addition, having British colleagues will mean a familiar workplace culture. Fee (2011) conducted research on Latino teachers who had travelled abroad to work in the United States, needed for the increasing number of bilingual schools there. These teachers faced more extreme conditions than many teachers going overseas to an international school, including the challenge of working in urban schools with deprived Latino children. In addition to their academic and school-based challenges, they often felt they were treated as second class, including being ridiculed for their English accents. Many of Dunn's (2011) Indian teachers who had moved to the United States felt that their dreams had been shattered thanks to their experiences both in the classroom and in the community. However, most western teachers going to schools abroad are revered locally. Gillies (2001), for example, comments on the privileged position which many Americans hold in countries abroad due to their connection with the local "American school". Roskell (2013) suggests that satisfaction with the school environment is more important for adjustment to a new location than satisfaction with the host country. This might explain why some teachers are happy to work in schools in countries which may not be so appealing.

III. Culture Shock

"Competent adults in their home culture come to feel like helpless children in the other." Ward *et al* (2001, p.52)

Even if the teacher new to an overseas assignment has done her homework and is ready for the move, elements of culture shock may strike as soon as the plane lands: experiences with locals in the airport and even the drive to the accommodation can be an intense introduction to how things are done differently in the new location.

Of all the definitions of culture available in the considerable literature, Weaver (2000A, p.1) has a useful description, considering culture as "a system of values and beliefs which we share with others, all of which give us a sense of belonging or identity". Highlighting the difficulty of understanding one's own culture is succinctly achieved through Fennes and Hapgood's (1997) analogy to a fish trying to

understand what water is: the water surrounds the fish, the water is essential to the well-being of the fish, and, I would like to add, it is largely invisible. Similarly, our own culture surrounds us, is essential to our well-being, and is largely invisible. Triandis (1975) splits an analysis of culture into two distinct areas: “objective culture”, which is observable, such as clothes, food, music; and “subjective culture”, which is largely hidden: values, beliefs and habits. Hall (1976) created a useful iceberg analogy to explain culture, whereby what is observed on the surface is just a fraction of the heavy mass of culture which is hidden. Weaver (2000B) extends the analogy to question what happens when two icebergs collide underwater: on the surface, everything appears the same, but underwater, there has been conflict and damage. This superficial and false state of affairs, where everything is perfect on the surface but damaged at the root, is something which is unhealthy in organisations, such as schools, employing people from different cultures. If we accept Cushner and Brislin’s (1996, p.6) view that culture is like a labyrinth, then the complexity of people moving abroad to work becomes apparent. We could even go beyond this and suggest that the complexity results from two labyrinths interconnected: the person’s own culture as well as the new culture encountered. Jandt (2013) suggests that culture refers to all knowledge and behaviour which, if gained by a foreigner would result in her not standing out as a foreigner in the new culture. To some extent, this is true but even knowledge and behavior patterns learned cannot prevent a foreigner from being stared at or held metaphorically at a distance.

The term “culture shock” was coined in the 1950’s, with authors such as Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) elaborating on its manifestations, to describe our reactions when behaviour we consider to be normal is not perceived as appropriate in the new culture; and when the behaviour of others from the new culture causes us confusion or even distress (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). Subsequent authors have questioned the appropriateness of using the word “shock” to describe the experience of finding difficulty in a new culture and created their own terms:

- “culture fatigue” (Guthrie, 1966)
- “cross-cultural learning experience” (Adler, 1972)
- “cross-cultural adjustment stress” (Weaver, 1986)
- “cultural bereavement” (Bhugra *et al*, 2010)

Guthrie's term (1966) suggests a certain weariness, where the new culture is gnawing away at the sojourner's defences, which may be more appropriate than the idea of receiving a shock in the new culture. Bhugra *et al*'s term (2010) was created to describe the experience of migrants, who are leaving behind their own culture, either voluntarily or involuntarily. However, it can equally be applied to teachers new to working abroad who are leaving behind their own culture, removing themselves from loved ones; Bhugra *et al* suggest that how the person has dealt previously with loss will have an effect on the degree of cultural bereavement. Since many teachers new to teaching abroad are young, possibly their experience of loss has been small and thus, maybe, their cultural bereavement will be intense. Bochner (1986), writing about Australian multicultural society, objects to the culture shock term since it implies it results from "some deficiency in the person's make-up" (p.348). Of all the descriptions above, Weaver's (1986) appears the most accurate as stress is occurring due to the needs of adjusting to cross-cultural interactions. Granted, there may be occasional, intermittent shocks when in a new culture, but it is the more constant, underlying stresses on a day-to-day basis which can be so waring. Weaver (2000C) extends the medical analogy by likening it to the common cold: it cannot be prevented and it can be caught repeatedly, in different forms.

Both Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) have a passive view of the sojourner's experience, looking at it from a psychological viewpoint. Oberg viewed culture shock as a disease with specific symptoms, requiring treatment or a cure. Indeed, some people do become ill but their symptoms may be psychosomatic (Cushner and Brislin, 1996). However, it should be remembered that being afraid of things which appear very foreign to us is a normal, defensive and self-preserving reaction, that teachers moving abroad into a new culture should consider some kind of culture shock as normal (Hayden, 2006) and that feeling afraid of what is foreign is "a universal phenomenon" (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997, p.6). Some authors consider there is considerable value in experiencing culture shock, or whatever term you choose to describe the experience, and psychologically developing as a person (Adler, 1975; Cushner and Brislin, 1996; Weaver 2000A).

The process of culture shock has been examined considerably. Lysgaard (1955) suggested a U-curve of adjustment, based on his research into Norwegian Fulbright students with grants going to the US, looking at their sense of satisfaction and well-

being. His idea was expanded by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) into a W-curve, incorporating the return to the home country and an inevitable re-adjustment period. Tange (2005) questions Lysgaard's model as most of the students in Lysgaard's study were going to the United States for a short space of time (from 3 months to 3 years, the average being a year), and they knew the exact time of their return: he believes this certainty affected how they adjusted to their surroundings. I would go further and suggest that this definite return date helped the recovery because the end was in sight. Tange also feels that Lysgaard's model doesn't take into account the probable overlapping of stages or blurred stages, and this is a common flaw in most process descriptions of cultural stresses, that there may not be clear-cut distinctions when one phase has moved into the next phase. Church (1982) suggests that the length of time to experience the U-curve varies so considerably that it renders Lysgaard's hypothesis without meaning.

Oberg (1960) identified a four-stage process related with culture shock:

- Fascination by the novelty of the new experience, often referred to as "the honeymoon period".
- Aggression and hostility towards the host country, since it isn't easy to get things done in the same way. This can be the crisis point of the "disease": either you'll come out of it and be strong, or you'll have to leave.
- Superior attitude to the host country, but starting to use humour, including laughing at yourself in the culture.
- Adjustment and accepting that the host country ways are just different.

There has been much debate about his seminal work. Some authors agree that the initial response to a new culture is a "honeymoon period" (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Adler, 1975; Torbion, 1994; Tange, 2005; Roskell, 2013) whereas others state categorically that there is no such positive period initially (Church, 1982; Ward and Kennedy, 1996; Ward *et al*, 1998; Ward *et al*, 2001; Brown and Holloway, 2008). More sensibly, Abarbanel (2009) suggests that there may or may not be such a period, depending on the sojourner's outlook, previous experience, and type of initial interactions with the new culture. There is considerable disagreement about the length of any "honeymoon period": Oberg (1960) says it could be a very short honeymoon of only a few days; Ward *et al* (1998) suggest the euphoria could be

waning within two weeks; and Roskell (2013), one of the few authors to have investigated culture shock amongst teachers working in international schools, gives a period of up to 4 months.

There is also much debate about the timing of the final stage of Oberg's model, that is, adjustment and acceptance. Roskell (2013) found that her teachers had reached the stage of acceptance and tolerance by 10 months; however, they were not happy and not fully adjusted. This is an important point: sojourners may accept, but may just be enduring the situation, using coping strategies, until their contract is over. Tange (2005) suggests it takes two years to adjust in terms of recovery from the traumatic situations which have been endured but he also found that even after 22 years, one of his 7 Scottish immigrants in Denmark was still occasionally confused and disturbed by aspects of the "new" culture. I wholeheartedly agree with this, as I believe it is impossible to let go totally of your cultural background, and fully adjust to a new culture. Adler (1975, p.20) believes that "no one culture ... is inherently better or worse than another since every culture is its own unique system for dealing with the question of being"; this point is crucial for teachers going abroad to teach. Isn't this what education should be all about? Isn't Adler a forerunner in the movement to develop world-mindedness? Teachers have to be role models and those who have difficulty adjusting to the new culture may have a damaging effect on their students.

Elaborating on Oberg's process, Adler (1975) identified five stages of culture shock, what he calls "the transitional experience" (p.14). The main difference is the insertion of a fourth step, "autonomy", where the individual becomes more sensitive to and understands better the new culture. This is a useful addition to Oberg, a kind of bridge into the adjustment period. However, I propose that there is always going to be an undercurrent of cultural discomfort, with occasional eruptions of various intensity.

It seems helpful to consider more active and positive responses to dealing with culture shock, compared with Lysgaard's and Oberg's passive approaches in a psychological tradition. Subsequent authors, led by Searle and Ward (1990), have chosen to divide culture shock into two distinct categories: psychological and socio-cultural. For example, Ward *et al* (2001, p.31) suggest a socio-cultural "culture learning approach", whereby sojourners need to learn how to ease their everyday

social encounters, including learning the language and getting to know locals; and a “stress and coping approach”, which is a developmental response to psychological stresses, with the sojourner drawing on and developing her personal coping resources to deal with the challenges being faced. Austin (2007) thus suggests that sojourners experience a “double culture shock”, both psychological and socio-cultural.

Abarbanel (2009), writing about 17-23 year olds going abroad for a period of study, also objects to the abruptness of the term “culture shock”, a term still regularly used in cross-cultural training, which relies “on language of catastrophe and crisis preparation” (p.133). She prefers to think about an “emotional passport” from which the foreigner can pull out whatever skills are needed for the situation in which she finds herself, so that she can regulate the emotional rollercoaster of cultural interactions. This is a very useful analogy, following on from the ideas of Ward *et al* (2001). She says students will experience “intense emotional challenges” which they need to be able to regulate. The same is true for new teachers, I suggest. The emotional intensity of feelings can be very surprising (Cushner and Brislin, 1997). Roskell (2013, p.161) describes the “the four D’s” experienced by her British teachers in an international school coming to the end of their two year contract: “depressed, de-moralized, de-motivated and desperate to leave”.

“Culture is a secret” (Cushner and Brislin, 1996, p.7) and it is only once we move out of our own culture into a new culture that we are able to understand more clearly our own culture (Weaver, 2000A). As Adler (1975) points out, what can be the biggest shock is the realization that we are products of our own culture, a fact which we may not have considered prior to interaction with a new culture. The psychological well-being of those who move abroad has been shown to be strongly related to our own cultural identity, not related to contact with the host culture (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000).

A major component of culture shock is the frustration with the inability to communicate. This can refer to non-verbal communication (Weaver, 2000A), which is the usual way in which we express our feelings. Back in 1960, Oberg was aware of the hundreds of communication cues which we are not consciously aware of. Learning the language is an important start in breaking down communication barriers

(Ward *et al*, 2001). Of course, it should be remembered that learning a language is not just about the words used, but about how the language is used to be culturally appropriate; Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993) found that this was a major stumbling block for their Japanese managers posted to London, who were fluent in English but lacked the cultural awareness to use the language effectively. This “hidden language of interpersonal interaction” (Ward *et al*, 2001, p.69) can be a huge challenge to those moving abroad, and, I would suggest, can even happen when you share the same language but not the same culture.

Anyone who is psychologically unstable is likely to suffer from more extreme culture shock, since experiencing a new culture will be a further demand on her sense of security and identity (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). According to some authors (Searle and Ward, 1990; Ward and Kennedy, 1993), the psychological aspect of culture shock can be predicted according to the individual’s personality and previous experience of change, e.g. extraversion, feelings about loneliness, previous ability to cope with major changes, and relationship experiences. The socio-cultural aspect of culture shock depends on cognition and social skills: knowledge of culture, ability in the language, cultural distance, and cultural identity (Ward and Kennedy, 1996).

Adler (1975) suggests that Americans are more prone to culture shock than any other nationalities, because they tend to think they are culture-free. When the new culture is very different from the sojourner’s own culture, there can be severe culture shock (Weaver, 1993; Ward and Kennedy, 1996; Ward *et al*, 2001). However, those entering a culture quite similar to their own can also experience a surprising level of culture shock, since they may not anticipate the need for cultural adjustment (Guthrie, 1966; Triandis, 1986; Weaver, 1993). Cushner and Brislin (1996) suggest that most people expect to be in unusual situations when they move abroad, and to see different behaviors, but few expect that these situations will have such a strong effect on how they feel. Some people deal with this anxiety by avoiding any uncomfortable situations, i.e. withdraw from the host culture into enclaves of expatriates. Expatriate clubs abound around the world, symbolising “separateness and exclusiveness from the surrounding host society” (Cohen, 1977, p.41). Clearly, the use of such a defense mechanism, like a tortoise withdrawing into the relative safety and insularity of its shell, is not going to lead to any kind of personal growth. This relates to Oberg’s second stage of aggression and hostility towards the host country. Such reactions to

culture shock can create further challenges, since they don't necessarily deal with the cause of the problem but can actually exacerbate the problem.

There is a difference of opinion in the literature regarding advice on whether people having cultural adjustment difficulties should seek support or not from co-nationals. Some believe in the positive influence of support from co-nationals, who have been through similar reactions (Sykes and Eden, 1987; Adelman, 1988; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Finney *et al*, 2002; Fee, 2011; Dunn, 2011;). Others believe support from co-nationals intensifies the feeling of homesickness and being out-of-place in the new culture (Weaver, 1986; O'Neill and Cullingford, 2005; Brown and Holloway, 2008; Pederson *et al*, 2011; Roskell, 2013). Adelman (1988) suggests that co-nationals getting together can result in contagious discontent. Roskell's (2013) British teachers in an international school bonded in their discontent but the result was a lot of negativity, criticism of host country nationals and idealizing home country characteristics. If sojourners need to mix with the host culture as part of their jobs, and this is the case for many new teachers at international schools who may be teaching host country nationals, and certainly the case for those foreign teachers working in national schools around the world, then it is important from the outset not to rely too much on co-national support (Fontaine, 1986, reported in Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000, p.302). In many cases, a foreigner's attitude towards and performance in the workplace can depend on effective cultural adjustment (Osmani-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009).

It appears quite clear that host country support can be a positive influence on adjustment to the new culture (Oberg, 1960; Church, 1982; Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Weaver, 1986; Searle and Ward, 1990; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Masgoret, 2006; Hendrickson *et al*, 2011; Pedersen *et al*, 2011). Ward *et al* (2001) identifies host country support as being positive in terms of cultural information as well as social support. Joslin (2002) advises a compromise between support from co-nationals and interest in exploring the new culture: too much co-national support, what she calls relying on "a domestic mindset" (p.50), will stunt the cultural adaptation process. Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000), studying expatriate aid workers in Nepal, found that the quality of support was more important than the fact that it was provided by co-nationals or host nationals. Initial interaction with host country nationals may be difficult but will reap the benefits later, for those wanting to adapt to

the new culture (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000). Genuine relationships with host country nationals enable understanding which goes beyond the cultural stereotypes (Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Hendrickson *et al*, 2011). There is research to be done on how close personal relationships, such as marriage, affect cultural adjustment and understanding.

Cushner and Brislin (1996, p.3) are confident that everyone can overcome “the range of challenges they will face” when facing a new culture; note that they use the expression “will face”, since they expect everyone to experience some degree of discomfort in a new cultural situation. Thomson and English (1964, reported in Brein and David, 1971) reported that over 60% of Peace Corps volunteers returned early due to adjustment problems. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) gathered data from 281 international school teachers registered with ECIS, who were leaving their school or had left a school previously at the end of the first two-year teaching contract, to find out the reasons they were leaving. It would have been interesting had they refined the data according to whether or not the teachers were leaving after their first contract abroad. Only 11.2% of their respondents identified host country characteristics as a reason to leave.

Weaver (1986) suggests that controlling the symptoms of culture shock, again back to Oberg’s disease analogy, needs to be done before finding the cause. He suggests adapting some host culture situations to home country norms, so for an American, that might mean, he says, making a hamburger out of goat meat. He advises against travelling home during an intense period of culture shock, but instead advocates a deeper immersion into the culture causing the disturbance. Most international business people experience some form of culture training and orientation before they are sent abroad, or are even assessed as to their suitability to function overseas (Ward *et al*, 2001). Such training may include an examination of managerial and leadership habits and expectations, which is just as relevant for teachers. The school leadership style might conflict with the expectations of the new teacher and this may particularly be the case where foreigners move abroad to a school which is run by host country nationals, as is the case for many CIS accredited, national schools in the Middle East. Weaver (1993) is adamant that anyone who says she has not experienced culture shock overseas is ignorant of her own feelings, or has never tried to be cross-culturally aware.

Since some degree of cultural adjustment difficulties seem to be inevitable when moving abroad to work (Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Tange, 2005), isn't it amazing that so many people still choose to go overseas for professional reasons? Why would people choose to experience "hopelessness and helplessness (Weaver, 1986, p.118), to find the experience "bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety-provoking, humiliating, embarrassing and generally stressful in nature" (Furnham and Bochner, 1982, p.171)? For teachers, I suggest that the lack of cultural training opportunities, unawareness of the inevitability of culture shock and the misconception that teaching is always the same, regardless of location, might all be contributing factors to the continuing stream of teachers moving abroad to work. The fact that so many teachers continue on the international circuit suggests that they recover from the culture shock of each country they move to. Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993), who studied Japanese managers posted to London, found similarly that the advantages of expatriate life far exceeded the disadvantages. As long as sojourners remember that a "sense of anger and frustration is a necessary part of cultural adaptation" (Tange, 2005, p.7), and that these feelings can be worked through, challenges regarding cultural understandings can be overcome.

IV. Unfamiliarity with the teaching situation

There is the potential for copious school-related challenges facing a teacher new to teaching abroad. Acceptance of this fact and having a flexible approach are the starting points for overcoming such challenges. Add to this the acceptance that as teachers working abroad we need to be good learners (Leask, 2006) and that we cannot make any assumptions regarding international schools based on previous experience (Hayden, 2006), and the winning formula is in sight. Unlike most business employees, teachers, including lecturers, do not get special training for the shift in focus required for a new country and its culture, since it is presumed that "teaching is teaching" (Getty, 2011).

i) Unfamiliarity with the curriculum, its delivery, academic and pastoral, and the school's philosophy

The degree of challenge faced regarding the curriculum and the school philosophy largely depends on the previous experience of the teacher and her willingness to learn and adapt. The easiest scenario is when a teacher used to a particular

curriculum goes abroad to deliver the same curriculum to the same nationality of children. However, I would suggest that such a scenario is becoming more rare as the market forces demanding English-medium schools for local children mean that doors are opening up to a more multi-cultural student body, even in schools which label themselves as being for children of a certain nationality.

Any teacher going abroad to teach students whose first language is not English is automatically an ESL teacher yet I suggest that not all teachers going abroad realize this, and the majority are not trained for this acute reality. Teachers also have a responsibility to help develop students' intercultural competence and understanding. According to Giroux (1992, reported in Luk, 2012, p.249), teachers are "cultural workers", especially teachers of a foreign language.

Most of the schools which employ foreign teachers are doing so out of a desire to promote international education which celebrates diversity. Walker (2000) believes that such teachers have a responsibility to model a belief in the richness of diversity; depending on the teacher's previous background and experience, this could prove to be a serious challenge. Pastoral care can cause some challenges for teachers since it can be difficult to provide pastoral care which fits everyone's culture or needs. Teachers from different cultural backgrounds might have very different perspectives on values education and counseling, which can clash with different cultural perspectives (Drake, 1998). The importance of an international school providing the support and continuity for Third Culture Kids (TCKs), a term coined by Useem and Downie in 1976 to describe children who move around the globe following their parents' work placements, can prove a huge responsibility, since the school provides the social milieu for such children, most of whom have limited contact with the local community (Useem and Downie, 1976).

As mentioned previously, researching the kind of school a teacher wants to work in is important so that there are limited surprises on arrival. Fee's (2011) Mexican teachers working in the United States found that they were expected to teach high school, even though they were primary school trained. International teachers imported into the US face classroom management problems; unawareness of school policies; different curricula and instructional strategies; and culture shock (Finney *et al* 2002; Hutchinson 2005; Dunn, 2011; Fee, 2011). In addition, Dunn's Indian

teachers who moved to the United States were shocked at the American students' lack of cultural awareness and actual ignorance about India, their "academic apathy" and poor behaviour: one teacher's comment betrays her disappointment in the move: "all I saw were saggy pants and huge personalities" (Dunn 2011, p.1396). These Indian teachers were used to giving lectures and being respected for their position as teachers, and they had been misinformed by recruitment agencies about expectations of the schools.

DeBeer (2014) reminds teachers considering going to the Middle East that some of the expectations placed upon them may be difficult to swallow, such as accepting censorship in school, including the amendment of western texts and curricula to be in line with Islamic beliefs and values.

Again referring to the type of school selected for employment, Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found that 27.9% of comments made about the reasons for leaving at the end of a 2 year contract concerned the negative factors of proprietary schools, where the perception was that decisions were made based on the desire for profit.

ii) Unfamiliarity with the student body

Teachers new to teaching abroad are probably going to encounter a different type of student body from what they have been used to. Since there is no teacher-training textbook to show how to respond to and meet the needs of different students, again the need for a teacher to be flexible and willing to learn is apparent. The chances are that some of the teacher's students will be more interculturally aware than she is: Killham (1990, referred to in Weaver 2000C) says that the average "Global Nomad" has lived in 6 different countries by the age of 18. Jordan (2000) suggests that these TCKs will be conduits to helping mono-cultural people understand others. Thus the wise teacher, inexperienced with a multicultural student body, will use her students as a rich resource.

Langford (1998) reminds teachers of their responsibility to meet the needs of these children who have "childhoods of transiency" (p.34), who have very different personal characteristics, due to their relative domestic instability. In addition to delivering the curriculum, there is the added responsibility of helping the children adjust to their new environment, she says. The school may well be the social center for the child, who

has little in common with the school's immediate environment. Allen (2002) reminds us that international schools themselves are a cultural divide between their school community and the local community; this is the same for many national schools, especially selective national schools around the world, which may be located in low socio-economic areas.

Accepting that some children will think or behave differently as a result of their cultural background is an important lesson. Fennes and Hapgood (1997) have many examples of actual cultural misunderstandings in the classroom between teachers and students. Joslin (2002) appeals for teachers to consider different cultural approaches to issues, and not be drawn into following a single national approach. However, it should be remembered that "intercultural sensitivity is not natural" (Bennett, 1993, p.21) and is something which has to be worked at.

Most of the "international" curricula taught in schools have a western domination (Allen, 2002). As Walker (2000) points out, some cultures strongly resist the influence of the west, so western teachers may feel this open or covert resistance in their classroom, which could feel very uncomfortable. Other uncomfortable situations may arise when an event at the other side of the world has a major effect on students in the classroom from that geographical region (Allen, 2002): again, flexibility and understanding are called for by the effective teacher. Leask (2006) reminds us that students learn in many different ways, that we should encourage them to extend their repertoire of learning strategies without denying them access to their own cultural learning strategies which they have used in the past. Students may react unpredictably to tasks and activities we set, or to things we ask of them. Therefore, teachers have to adapt accordingly and appreciate that the definition of good teaching can vary considerably, depending on the context (Dunn, 2011).

Attitudes to plagiarism can be a challenge for many educators, regardless of their location in the world. Brennan and Durovic (2005) found that students from the Confucian Heritage Culture do not consider copying without attribution as plagiarism. There are definitely some challenges here for a teacher trained in and dedicated to academic integrity. It is clear that "plagiarism is a complex, culturally loaded concept" (Leask, 2006, p.183). Classroom behaviour of Chinese and Japanese students may prove a challenge since they may not be prepared to stand out with extraordinary

performances since that would be an individual act, going against the respected group mentality. This creates more challenges for a western teacher in a classroom with Chinese and Japanese students, and might result in a teacher “feeling unexpectedly de-skilled” (Hayden, 2006, p.85) since her tried and tested techniques are not getting the results she wants.

iii) Unfamiliarity with staff cultural norms

Just as their students may well be different from who they have encountered in their previous classroom, probably some colleagues, support staff and school administrators are going to come from a different cultural heritage. The greater the staff’s cultural heterogeneity, the more likely the difficulty of it performing well (Shaw, 2001; Ward *et al*, 2001). As Shaw (2001, p.157) points out quite rightly, “the potential for dissonance through misunderstanding exists in every school, but in an international school this potential is increased when people of different cultures have differing expectations of each other”. Dissonance can center on inequalities demonstrated to local and foreign staff (Cambridge, 2002), or indeed, to differences shown towards foreign staff hired locally and foreign staff hired abroad. The ideal staff room would be one where there is what Kingston and Forland (2004) refer to as “cultural synergy”, a place where all cultures are valued. A teacher new to teaching abroad thus has to contribute to such an aim. While it is the responsibility of the school leaders to address such issues, it requires all members of staff to behave collaboratively to ensure that the school fulfills its purpose. Mullavey-O’Byrne (1997) advocates empathy as an essential component for cross-cultural communication; she says that the skills needed for intercultural communication are exactly the same skills needed for any communication, just with different emphasis, and used flexibly.

Host nationals’ behaviour may prove very different from what is familiar. In China, for example, Hart (2000) reports that locals generally have no interest in foreigners; so a new teacher who tries to be friendly towards her Chinese colleagues might find her advances ignored. Getty (2011) found a distrust of putting anything in writing, including emails in the Chinese university where she was working, and found that people insisted on face-to-face conversations. A difference in chronemics can cause frustration in some locations: for example, in Arab countries, it can be acceptable to arrive 30 minutes late for an appointment or a meeting (Argyle, 1982) which may

cause resentment in those coming from a more punctual culture. For some people moving to America or to a school following an American approach, the informal relationships between leaders and subordinates can be unsettling for those used to a more strict hierarchy (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963).

iv) Unfamiliarity with leadership styles

Style of leadership may be different from what teachers are expecting and thus create challenges. The research of Odland and Ruzicka (2009) into reasons for teachers leaving an international school after a two-year contract, shows that the top reasons all relate with leadership styles. Leaders who are unable to appreciate the value brought by teachers from other cultures clearly do not lead by example: Dunn (2011) found that one of the US principals she interviewed felt that it was more important for teachers to understand American values than to promote international understanding. The Spanish teachers of Finney *et al* (2002), who moved from Spain to South Carolina schools, found a discrepancy between their academic standards and those of the school principals, who were clearly under pressure to have students pass at all cost.

As early as 1963, Gullahorn and Gullahorn predicted that American teachers travelling to work in national schools in the Far East might find that their modern teaching methodologies would not be accepted by school administrators, since there was a strict national curriculum and lectures were expected. Over fifty years later, this could still be the case in certain areas of the world.

V. Personal life challenges

Assuming that the teacher new to teaching abroad has been able to succeed in enjoying her professional role and start to accept and adjust to the new cultural situation, what about other challenges to her personal life? Often, it is the most simple and basic habits or requirements which cause significant stress. A common challenge, especially for singles moving abroad, is the ability and opportunity to make real friends, not just shallow acquaintances (Cushner and Brislin, 1996). A real challenge for some working in the Middle East is the adaptation to the Islamic weekly calendar, such as adjusting to Sunday being the start of the working week (Garton, 2002). Even for non-practising Christians, not getting time off for Christmas or Easter

can also be a cause of dismay. While, in some countries and for some schools, appointment of a gay teaching couple may be impossible due to local or national laws (Hayden, 2006) or due to cultural limits on acceptable behavior, those who are not open about their sexuality during the recruitment stage may find themselves marooned in a sea of heterosexual, marital morality, which can cause understandable stress.

Living accommodation may not live up to expected standards. Often, especially in developing countries, the schools attracting foreigners may be “private islands of plenty” (Hayden, 2006, p.147) in an impoverished locality, which in itself can be demoralizing on a daily basis, where the accommodation provided has tight security. Stevenson (2014) gives the example of her steel-reinforced walled bedroom and bathroom in Johannesburg, whose steel door was referred to locally as “the rape door”: this reinforced area was created so that should an intruder enter the apartment, she could lock herself into a fortified area of her own apartment where she could be physically safe while the rest of her apartment would be ransacked.

Foreign teachers’ political conscience can be seriously tested when events in the local country create situations which conflict with their beliefs. Teachers may have to be reminded that they are guests in the country and have no right to put their employer(s) at risk by becoming politically active. This was certainly the case in Turkey, during May-June 2013 when the Gezi Park protests caused unrest around the country and many foreign teachers were anxious to play a part in the exposing of political corruption. Ward *et al* (2001) recognizes that sojourners need to learn the way of doing things in the new culture so as not to draw undue, unwanted attention to their behaviours. Something as simple as learning the traffic rules caused major problems for some of Fees’ (2011) teachers.

International schools can be considered as the “French Foreign Legion of the education world” (Hayden, 2006, p.75), in that teachers may choose to move overseas to work as a means of escaping from issues at home. A teacher with this impetus for working abroad may well experience more challenges than others who make the move as part of a definite career plan. Walsh (2007), for example, found that many of her young, British teacher participants working in Dubai had deliberately chosen to leave the “domesticated couple intimacy” which they found stifling in

Britain. Some people may be attracted to work abroad due to xenophilia, which is fine as long as teachers have not glorified an unrealistic image in their mind.

For those new teachers to teaching abroad who are married, some of whom have trailing spouses, there can be different and unique challenges. While there appears to be no research on teachers' trailing spouses, there is considerable work involving business people's trailing spouses (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Huckerby and Toulson, 2001; Arieli, 2007; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009; Cole, 2011; Gupta *et al*, 2012; McNulty, 2012). The attitude of the spouse is crucial to the move: Konopaske *et al* (2005) found that some spouses look forward to the move overseas as an opportunity for the family to become a tighter unit, to experience another culture, to learn another language and to travel. Not surprisingly, some authors have found that unhappy spouses, male or female, can contribute to the reasons why contracts are not renewed or even broken (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Huckerby and Toulson, 2001; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009; Gupta *et al*, 2012). If the spouse is reluctant to make the move overseas, the chances of an early return are higher (Gupta *et al*, 2012). Ward *et al* (2001), again not surprisingly, found that spouses had a great influence on the employees' adjustment to the new cultural situation, as well as on their success at work. No matter how happy a new teacher might be in school, if her spouse is unhappy in the new location, it is bound to have an effect on her. Conversely, Cole (2011) reports that the spouse and family adjusting well to the new culture has a positive effect on the employee's adjustment. However, she comments that everyday issues, such as shopping, going to the doctor, and so on can cause stress in the new environment. If, in addition, the spouse has put his/her career on hold, then the difficulty with adjustment is compounded. Spouses looking for jobs can have difficulty making contacts, visa issues, language problems, and prejudice against hiring foreigners. Harvey *et al* (2007) found that this difficulty in finding appropriate work for the spouse wanting to continue a career created added stress for the couple. The research of Reynolds and Bennett (1991) showed that the divorce rate of expatriate couples is higher than average, so even a marriage can be put at more risk by moving abroad. McNulty (2012), her research covering 264 trailing spouses in 54 locations worldwide, found that 99% of her participants stated that "a strong and stable marriage" is an essential component for adjustment.

For teachers moving abroad with school-age children, Zilber (2005) tells us that there are more challenges than advantages, but she recounts many of the positives which include practical issues, such as same calendar and shared transportation; strong social bonds for students and parents and the easy of communication with the child's teacher.

An individual's ability to deal effectively with intercultural encounters is effected by the individual's personality (Huang *et al*, 2005; Shaffer *et al*, 2006; Van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2013). Thus, a teacher's personal characteristics will prove problematic if they are not conducive to helping her make the adjustments necessary to her move overseas. Curiosity is vital, and a curious approach should start long before the signing of a contract so that the teacher is prepared for the move (Cushner and Brislin, 1996). This includes interest in learning the new language, which not only aids cultural adjustment but shows a positive attitude to the host culture. If a teacher does not have "a tolerance for ambiguity" (Cushner and Brislin, 1996, p.271), then she will face many challenges overseas. Similarly, anyone who does not share Walker's view of education (2000, p.202) will struggle in a multicultural environment: "human diversity is an enrichment and a source of strength". However, Garton (2000) questions whether a teacher going abroad to work needs to be any different from a regular, qualified and effective teacher in her home country, and it is true that those teaching at home need to be prepared for their classrooms which are becoming more and more culturally diverse (Weaver 2000A; Thomas, 2005; Santoro and Major, 2012).

VI. Conclusion

It appears without doubt that there are a variety of challenges for teachers new to working in schools overseas to face, and that some challenges will be more extreme than others, largely depending on the individual's situation, previous experience and personality. The challenges relate to their school environment and conditions, the culture of the country where they are located, and their personal lives. Teachers should be reminded that challenges related to the new culture are inevitable and that the working through of these challenges will enable personal growth. The number of teachers on the international circuit who move around the globe happily and

confidently demonstrates that such challenges can be surmounted, if there is the will to do so.

This paper has not attempted to address how school leadership can ease adjustment in any of these areas. That is another area for consideration. But it has raised issues for consideration by wise and caring school leaders who understand that the level of contentment of their staff has a direct impact on the students' quality of education. There is the need for more qualitative research into how teachers adapt when they move abroad, as well as an examination of the adjustment of school leaders who move overseas for the first time.

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