

What Teacher Capacities do International School Recruiters Look For?

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Abstract

This article frames the intersection of the emerging fields of internationalizing teacher education (ITE) and international schooling (IS) and presents findings of a qualitative study that draws on interviews with international school recruiters to explore teacher qualities valuable for thriving in international school settings. Beyond general characteristics of good teachers, recruiters note the importance of adaptability to living and working in a foreign setting, cultural-sensitivity, and, especially, pedagogical flexibility. Additionally, recruiters discussed the significance of “fit” between the teacher and the school (and school community) as playing a role. Fit overlaps with adaptability, cultural sensitivity and pedagogical flexibility but also introduces more school-specific, subjective

(and potentially parochial) factors for “fitting in.” Implications for teacher education are discussed, particularly on the importance of fostering teachers’ pedagogical flexibility.

Keywords: internationalizing teacher education (ITE), international schooling (IS), international schoolteachers, teacher education, international education, global competencies, global teacher competencies

Résumé

Cet article établit le rapport entre les domaines émergents de l’internationalisation de la formation enseignante et de l’école internationale et présente les résultats d’une étude qualitative qui relève des entrevues menées avec les recruteurs des écoles internationales pour explorer les compétences inhérentes aux enseignants capables de bien fonctionner dans ces contextes. Au-delà des caractéristiques indispensables aux exigences de la profession enseignante, les recruteurs ont spécialement mentionné l’adaptabilité à vivre et à travailler à l’étranger, la sensibilité culturelle et la flexibilité pédagogique. En outre, les recruteurs ont parlé du rôle important que joue la capacité de se ‘conformer’ entre l’enseignant et l’école (et, la communauté scolaire). En effet, cette capacité se dédouble de l’adaptabilité, de la sensibilité culturelle et de la flexibilité pédagogique, mais aussi introduit des facteurs scolaires plus spécifiques, notamment les facteurs personnels contribuant à la conformité. Les implications pour la formation enseignante, particulièrement dans le domaine de la flexibilité pédagogique, sont abordées.

Mots-clés : internationaliser la formation enseignante, écoles internationales, enseignants des écoles internationales, formation enseignante, éducation internationale, compétences globales, compétences globales pour enseignants

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Introduction

Canadian teachers are increasingly (*out*) *in the world*, whether joining the growing ranks of teachers going abroad or finding assignments in Canadian classrooms, where “the world” also has significant presence. Expanding global teacher labour markets, heightened student mobilities, transnational curricula, and intensifying global cultural flows are placing new demands on Canadian schools, teachers, and teacher education programs. One response to these demands is the heightened attention to, and programmatic initiatives for, internationalizing teacher education (ITE). In the emergent ITE literature, there are multiple foci, such as “international placements” and “culturally relevant pedagogy.” This article explores the international schools sector, where an increasing number of new teachers are finding employment. Specifically, it examines the teacher capacities deemed most important by experienced international school recruiters attending international recruiting fairs in Canada in 2015 and 2016. There is a paucity of academic research on international schools,¹ and the small-scale exploratory study presented in this article breaks new ground in connecting the perspectives of international school recruiters (as gatekeepers to the job market of international schools) to the internationalization of teacher education. Illuminating the perspectives of a small number of recruiters (typically school heads or administrators) working in the international school sector offers insights for ITE as attenuated to the conditions and contexts of international school teaching, where hundreds² of Canadians, among other Anglo-Westerners, are beginning their teaching careers.

Canadian graduates of teacher education programs are travelling beyond the local, due to, at least in part, a scarcity of opportunities to teach in local school boards. In many parts of Ontario, for example, there are few opportunities for recent Bachelor of Education graduates to find employment (Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], 2014).

1 This article takes on the broad working definition of international schools put forward by Tristan Bunnell (2016) and the UK-based International Schools Consultancy Group (ISC Research) which reads, “International Schools are schools outside an English-speaking country offering a curriculum through the medium of the English language” (p. 545).

2 Precise data on the numbers of Canadian-certified teachers in the international school sector remains unavailable. In our Faculty of Education alone, we roughly estimate that in recent years about 15 teacher education graduates per year begin their formal teaching careers with an international assignment.

The demand for certified Anglo-Western teachers is rising in relation to the rapid growth of the international school sector in many parts of the world (Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2016). Studies claim that an increasing number of Canadian teachers are teaching internationally (Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Despite intensifying calls to internationalize teacher education as aligned with globalization (Association of Canadian Deans of Education [ACDE], 2014; Kelly, 2004; Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Longview Foundation, 2008; Quezada, 2010; Zhao, 2010), there is little available knowledge on the diverse international school contexts where an increasing proportion of Anglo-Western teachers begin their formal careers (Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Resnick, 2012; Tarc & Mishra Tarc, 2015).

Illuminating the pedagogical conditions and qualities of international schools is important not only for ITE but for state schooling writ large as many international school-teachers re-enter home-country school systems.³ A key point to acknowledge here is that the international schools sector has also become significant for *Canadian* K–12 classrooms, given the increasing numbers of Canadians who have *formative* teaching experiences in international school contexts and return to teach in Canadian classrooms (Savva, 2013). There do exist a small number of studies on the pedagogical conditions of international schools, typically case studies (e.g., Ledger, Vidovich, & O’Donoghue, 2014; Tamatea, 2008). However, in the wake of calls to internationalize teacher education, there remains fundamentally a paucity of research on the diverse and diversifying international schools sector hiring expatriate teachers (Bunnell, 2016; Tarc, 2013). This deficiency begs the question of whether teacher education is sufficiently adapting to the heightened mobilities and career trajectories of an increasing proportion of its graduates.

This article explores two main research questions: (1) What teacher capacities do international school recruiters perceive as most desirable for international school contexts? (2) What implications can be drawn for internationalizing teacher education? As a small-scale, exploratory study it seeks to develop insights for current and prospective researchers and educators involved in ITE.

3 Additionally, research in international schools could also inform understandings of “multicultural education” in state schools with complex levels of diversity.

Internationalizing Teacher Education and International Schooling

We situate this research study in two emerging fields of scholarly inquiry, namely internationalizing teacher education (ITE) and international schooling (IS). There are but a handful of empirical studies (Lagace, McCallum, Ingersoll, Hirschkorn, & Sears, 2016; Shaklee, Mattix-Foster, & Lebrón, 2015; van Werven, 2015) that bridge these two fields along one register or another; in this respect, our article engages relatively uncharted territory in need of exploration. Literature in ITE is small and relatively new. While the predominant rationale for ITE foregrounds the changing global context, most of the literature focuses on studies of teacher preparation for increasingly diverse populations in *home* country schools—“internationalization at home.” Most of these articles are written from an American perspective (Cushner, 2012; Merryfield, 2000; Shaklee & Baily, 2012; Sharma, Phillion, Rahatzad, & Sasser, 2014), with fewer situated in Canada (Guo, Arthur, & Lund, 2009; Pike, 2000; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011) and other countries (Anderson, Young, Blanch, & Smith, 2018; Tudball, 2012). The importance of an international or intercultural experience, practicum, or exchange is the major thrust in ITE (Cushner, 2009; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Gilson & Martin, 2010; Santoro & Major, 2012). Some approaches draw on the “intercultural competencies” approach (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2008) that employ instruments to *measure* degrees or stages of intercultural sensitivities. Most relevant to the current study are the ITE articles with more open and nuanced conceptions of interculturality,⁴ and those assuming more transnational horizons, where both students *and* teachers are mobile and/or engaging with global cultural flows. In other words, while ITE has mostly centred on student diversity in multicultural contexts, there are emerging conceptualizations that are more embedded with international and transnational contexts

4 We recognize the value of multiple approaches, but find resonance with the emerging critiques (Dervin, 2016; Grimshaw, 2015; Hayden, Levy, & Thompson, 2015; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016; Savva, 2013; Schepen, 2017; Tarc, 2013) of intercultural competencies as discretely measurable.

(Levy & Fox, 2015).⁵ This distinction is not clear-cut, but might become useful in differentiating ITE literature as the field evolves.

The “field of International Schooling” (Bunnell, 2014) is a “research stream” of international education emanating from the international school movement (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). Although the significance of international schools has more recently emerged on the radar of academic research (Arber, Blackmore, & Vongalis-Macrow, 2015; Bagnall, 2015; Bates, 2011; Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2016; Hayden, Levy, & Thompson, 2007; Hobson & Silova, 2014; Pearce, 2013; Tarc & Mishra Tarc, 2015), the scope, analytic acuity, and effect have been somewhat limited. Largely, research in the IS field has been practice-based, typically examining the registers of educational aims (“as international mindedness”), curriculum, professional development, “third culture kids,” and leadership.

To situate our empirical inquiry, we first turn to a small set of articles that are most relevant. Only one (Snowball, 2008) examines international school recruiters’ perspectives, and only three (Lagace et al., 2016; Levy & Fox, 2015; Shaklee et al., 2015) connect the international school teaching experience with teacher education. We anticipated that our findings would resonate with the findings and perspectives of these studies, albeit as qualitative researchers we wanted to not only corroborate findings but *qualify* them—dig down into the qualities and potentially problematic features of such popular and floating terms as “adaptability” and “global competencies” prevalent in current discourses of international education (Mannion, Biesta, Priestley, & Ross, 2011).

Given the growing demands for “highly qualified” teachers in the international school sector, Shaklee and colleagues (2015) conceptualize the qualities of the “strong educator.” They draw on the oft-cited US teacher education scholars Lee Shulman (1987) and Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) to identify a set of indicators and criteria for strong educators and their development through teacher education. Drawing upon their roles within George Mason University’s FAST TRAIN⁶

5 It is important to note here that some of the more critical analytic work is presented within nation-state-focused models (Sharma et al., 2014) and that the less state-centred conceptualizations sometimes tend to embrace the individualist, flexible neoliberal “21st century” approach (Zhao, 2010) for the upwardly mobile 20% who benefit from globalization.

6 FAST TRAIN is a “unique teacher preparation program for international schools [operating] for more than 25 years” (Shaklee et al., 2015, p. 50).

program, Shaklee and colleagues (2015) list the additional important elements for “strong teaching” for *international* school teachers, as follows:

- Have an in-depth understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse and exceptional learners.
- Learn to select from relevant knowledge and skills that differentiate instruction between and among groups—for exceptional learners as well as culturally and linguistically diverse learners—to promote positive engagement and effective learning.
- Develop intercultural competency, diverse perspectives, advocacy skills, world language skills, and a willingness to engage with issues of global significance.
- Learn to teach and work together as allies on behalf of student learning and development.
- Have meaningful experiences in multilingual, intercultural and international settings in order to fully develop positive dispositions for teaching and learning. (p. 51)

The authors report that these elements are infused in their “Teaching Culturally, Linguistically Diverse & Exceptional Learners” program.

Mikulec (2014), Levy and Fox (2015), and van Werven (2015) traverse similar terrain in their articles that offer answers to the question of what “competencies” teachers require for international/global engagement. Levy and Fox (2015) and van Werven (2015) are focused on the international school sector and, accordingly, corroborate well with Shaklee and colleagues (2015), presented above. Most generic is Mikulec (2014), who elaborates upon five inter-related core learner dispositions to “prepare students [and teachers] for global engagement” (p. 5); these are curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, reflexivity, flexibility, and persistence. *Curiosity*, manifesting as the compulsion to *question* and know more, presses the student to engage with and come to know more about the world. *Tolerance for ambiguity* is especially needed in intercultural contexts where there is no simple or single answer; students need to be able to be comfortable with such ambiguity, contradictions, or unknowns. *Reflexivity*, for Mikulec, “challenges one to understand the nature of cause and effect in a more cyclical way. Rather than an event simply impacting the agent, the agent must also consider how their actions impact the context in which they are acting” (p. 9). *Flexibility* refers here to cognitive flexibility; Mikulec (2014) writes:

Flexibility requires that learners adjust their conceptual map as new information presents itself. This disposition allows learners to receive and process new information and acknowledge that it may not fit with their preconceived notions of how the world should be. (p. 10)

Finally, *persistence* is vital such that “learners continue to engage and do not give in when tasks or ideas become a challenge” as can often happen in international and intercultural contexts (p. 10).

Snowball (2008) surveyed “effective traits” of international school teachers. Based on 440 respondents (international school teachers, students, parents, administrators, and teacher trainers), the three traits deemed “most important” collectively and for administrators as a group, were “differentiated teaching for diverse learning styles,” “pedagogical understanding,” and “open to new ideas and multiple perspectives” (p. 102). As aligned with the Shaklee and colleagues (2015) conceptualization here, the importance of current notions of “best” pedagogical practices is captured by the first two traits, with extra attention to diversity/differentiated learning (first trait). Openness to “multiple perspectives” represents perhaps the trait most uniquely tethered to the international school context.

Hirsh (2016) draws on a set of studies (Hayden, Rancic, & Thompson, 2000; Joslin, 2002; Snowball, 2008; Sunder, 2013) in presenting the “skills needed to teach in an international school” (p. 41). These skills include intercultural competence and sensitivity, flexibility, adaptability, and self-awareness. Indeed, these are relatively common notions circulating anecdotally in the discursive field of international school teaching. We believe the ubiquity and perhaps multivalent meanings of these terms require scrutiny. As Hirsh (2016) herself warns: “Teachers who are more flexible and adaptable may be constantly required to work outside their area of expertise or to take on roles that may be less desirable at the school, in comparison to teachers who are less flexible and adaptable”⁷ (p. 145). Further, we would add, flexibility can compromise one’s core values as a teacher. Thus, these terms need unpacking in terms of their purposes—flexible for what ends?—as

7 To theorize this comment one might consider how flexibility represents a technique of governmentality within current mobilizing discourses such as “lifelong learning” (see Tuschling & Engemann, 2006). One performs flexibly in adapting oneself to the demands of the job market and employability, consolidating a subjectivity aligned to these market or institutional logics, rather than from a sense of autonomy or thought-out purpose.

well as their specificities—flexible, in what ways, along what registers, at what moments, and with what effects?

A recent chapter by Lagace and colleagues (2016) from a compendium published by the Canadian Association for Teacher Education hits closest to our study. The researchers interviewed 12 Canadian international school teachers who were working either in state schools in England or in a Canadian/International Baccalaureate (IB) international school in East Asia to ascertain which competencies were needed for teachers to be successful internationally and how these might be addressed via pre-service teacher education. Resonant with the above studies, the teacher participants highlighted “soft skill” competencies for international teachers: “adaptability, open mindedness” (p. 37) and, to a lesser extent, “cross-cultural competence, knowledge of different approaches to assessment, ability to teach in a second language environment, and familiarity with different curricular systems such as IB” (pp. 37–38). Albeit, the most compelling finding revealed in this study was the dramatic difference between how teachers experienced the two international contexts. In the English state schools, “virtually all of the participants spoke of how constrained they felt by the strict requirements of the National Curriculum and the heavy regulatory regime of national and school level inspection and observation of their work” (p. 30); whereas, in the South Asian international school, teachers felt greater levels of autonomy and support for progressive modalities in vogue in the international school sector.

The striking contrasts raise the question of how, if at all, teacher candidates can be better prepared for international contexts through ITE. For the most part, the teachers in the English context did not view their own international teacher education preparation as useful and were skeptical that much could be done before the experience (Lagace et al., 2016, p. 38). On the other hand, the teachers in Southeast Asia viewed their prior international teacher education program more positively and were more optimistic that preparation could be efficacious. Beyond corroborating with a handful of studies around desirable competencies for teaching in international contexts for Canadian teachers, this exploratory two-sited study revealed a set of tensions for ITE, including how to educate teachers for diverse conditions given the needs of local and diverse international contexts. We agree with the authors, who imply that a crux of the challenge is that teacher candidates privilege the practical over the theoretical, but a focus on the practical, as concrete methods, tends to advance a notion that good teaching is universal, rather than

context-specific. We return to this pedagogical dilemma when we unpack our key finding around “pedagogical flexibility.”

Methodology and Research Context

This small-scale qualitative study gathered and analyzed empirical data to enhance understandings on the perceptions of recruiters working in the international school sector. More specifically, we draw on a set of interviews with six recruiters from the international school sector conducted at or shortly after an international recruiting fair in 2016; we also include in the analysis two interviews conducted the previous year at a different Canadian recruiting fair. Given the intense and fluid nature of the job fair(s), interview times and locations were quite flexible—interviews were conducted whenever recruiters had a short window of time to spare and locations were chosen based on having some degree of privacy. Although an exploratory study may ideally use open-ended interviews, our starting expectation was to conduct the interview in about fifteen minutes with four key questions. Most of the interviews, however, lasted for at least 25 minutes and were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis (one interview was not recorded; handwritten notes were taken and reviewed soon after the interview ended).

The authors conducted five interviews during the three days they attended the fair. An additional interview was conducted by telephone after the fair. Additionally, two open-ended interviews conducted more spontaneously at a different recruiting fair in 2015 are included in the data set. Only the parts of the 2015 interviews that engage the same content as the 2016 protocol were included in the data analysis. Table 1 below summarizes the background of the participants in relation to their international school experience. We provide little information on the participants or schools to ensure that our participants cannot be identified.

Table 1. Participants' Profiles

Pseudonyms	Gender	Interview	Current Context	Years in Education	Years in International Education	Years in Current Context
Neil	M	2016 Fair	Singapore	25+	9	9
Lance	M	2016 Fair	Thailand	35+	8	8
Zach	M	2016 Fair	Egypt	25+	25+	Unknown
Scott	M	2016 Fair	Portugal	15+	15+	Unknown
Greg	M	2016 Fair	Qatar	18+	10-15	7
Allen	M	2016 Post-Fair	Japan	20+	20+	20+
Mike	M	2015 Fair	Mongolia	20+	13+	5
Mary	F	2015 Post-Fair	Turkey	20+	10+	10+

As an exploratory study in an under-researched area, we decided on a relatively small data set to explore the degree of diversity of recruiter perspectives and their international school contexts, and we did get a sense of saturation around the core themes of “cultural awareness,” “fit,” and “pedagogical flexibility,” discussed below. We also wished to “test out” the suitability of the recruiting fair as a site for researching international schooling. We wanted to generate core themes and tensions to inform ITE and future research on the intersection of ITE and international schooling. Although we had set interview questions that we used to organize our findings, we did not impose a fixed notion of global capacities or competencies to allow for *tight* claims to be made on the extent to which our participants’ responses align to some (pre)fixed notion. Rather, we attempted to support free-flowing conversations in the general topic area that would reveal our participants’ experiences and understandings on the teacher capacities most desirable for international school contexts. The results of our study are not statistically generalizable but they can inform larger-scale (quantitative) research examining recruiters’ (and other stakeholders’) perspectives, and new theorizations of the (diverse) pedagogical conditions in the international school setting. As a stand-alone study, our article contributes in framing the intersection of internationalizing teacher education and international

schooling and identifying and discussing three core insights emerging from these eight interviews.

Our sense is that the international school recruiting fair is an appropriate site for researchers to forge relations and to conduct face-to-face interviews with international school recruiters who come together to a single site for a few consecutive days. However, there are two important considerations worth noting. First, given that the recruiters' main task is hiring teachers under a time-intensive schedule, it can be challenging to solicit interviews for research purposes, even where the recruiter may be amenable to the research topic. Indeed, there were a limited number of recruiters who did agree to an interview; some of these recruiters asked to be contacted and interviewed upon their return to their schools, but only one of them followed through with the interview. Second, we had a sense that our questions on the desirable teacher capacities for international schools were sometimes inflected by the recruiters' present context of *hiring*. At times, recruiter participants seemed more focused on the practice of interviewing and evaluating the prospective hires than reflecting on the day-to-day professional practices of the teachers at their schools. In other words, how teachers *performed* themselves (and their capacities) in the interviews to be successful in finding a position may have influenced the recruiters' notions of what teacher capacities are desirable in their day-to-day work in international schools. While we expect that international school recruiting fairs will become much more common sites for research, we suggest that researchers need to acknowledge the *limitations* as well as the productive potential of the fair as a site for research.

Because the recruiters come to the fair for a few intense days to find teachers, we were quite focused with our questions. Our very first question asked participants to list their overseas teaching and leadership positions so that we had some background understanding of their geographic and school contexts. The remaining questions asked of each participant were the following:

- What makes for an excellent international school teacher? How is this different or the same from what makes an excellent teacher in general?
- What do you look for in recruiting a teacher to your current school?
- What advice would you give teacher education faculties who want to prepare teachers for international in addition to local contexts?

These questions were included in the packages recruiters received prior to the start of the fair. We also had a poster of these questions visible at the table we set up in a main lobby during the fair to recruit participants. Our participants, therefore, may have had some familiarity with the questions we posed before participating in the interviews. We asked follow-up questions drawing on the vocabulary and examples interviewees used in their responses.

Findings

We conducted a thematic analysis of the data (i.e., interview transcripts/notes) looking for common trends and significant tensions or surprises for each question on its own. We also looked for commonalities and differences when comparing between questions and between participants. The core themes we highlight below were generated by their common take up across all participants. We read some of the more unique expressions back against the common themes to move from a thematic analysis to more in-depth qualification and identification of the novel aspects of our findings. Although the common themes can be anticipated from our literature review, the novel aspects represent a distinctive contribution. The summary of our findings is organized according to the three main themes: being a good teacher, the right fit, and pedagogical flexibility.

Being a Good Teacher

All the participant recruiters suggested that there are at least some aspects of being an excellent teacher that transcend context. Allen, Lance, and Mary, for example, profess that regardless of where one's school is located, being a "good teacher" means employing a basic teaching skillset and practicing the fundamentals of education that lead students to successful learning. For Neil, being a good teacher involves exploring new teaching strategies, maintaining a keen interest in the well-being of students, and committing oneself to the larger ethos of the school in which one teaches. Greg made a similar statement and added that the teacher should do this enthusiastically. Scott stated: "The teacher is there, and their sole objective is to help get the best out of the kids that are in the classroom, ensure that the learning outcomes are maximized, that the kids smile, that the kids enjoy

their education.” Generally speaking, recruiters view good teaching as “learner-focused” and relatively consistent across contexts.

Each of the recruiters, nevertheless, felt that there were indeed some specific qualities particularly well suited to international school contexts. First among these was cultural awareness. Lance, for example, affirmed that having “a sense of culture” distinguishes a teacher as well suited for work in international school contexts. Particularly important for Lance is a teacher’s capacity “[to] be open and sensitive without giving up their personal ideals...[to] come into a position and see something that happens and not judge it based on their personal morals and convictions.” Allen emphasized the importance of a “cultural understanding” in which international teachers are (or become) aware of the different cultures and cultural nuances at play in their classroom. He emphasized, “Students need to know that teachers are being fair...and if the teacher doesn’t know what fairness is in that cultural context then it becomes a big problem.” Understanding the cultural nuances at play in their classroom enables teachers to understand and act on how their students perceive fairness. Mary stated that teaching in an international setting requires “flexible decision making” and “cultural adaptation” both inside and outside of the school. As she explains,

If a student is doing a certain thing, what’s the translation in one culture? and what’s the translation in the other culture? [It] can be different...like food is different, manners are different, you know, fun is different, sometimes loneliness is different, the whole rhythm is different.

Similarly, Darren remarked that teachers need to be tolerant, flexible, and “internationally minded” in international schools but also in culturally diverse schools in Canada. According to Scott:

Teachers that want to work overseas [need to understand] the cultural, social, ethical, religious aspects of the country that they’re in. Because there are some things that one is able to do in Canada, for example, which would not be acceptable overseas.

Some of the participant recruiters emphasized that what sets an excellent international teacher apart is *adaptability*, and a commitment to go beyond the formal curriculum and into the extracurricular, collegial, and wider activities of the international school

community. For some, building good relationships in international contexts requires teachers to ease whatever personal or professional sense of “separation of boundaries” they may have come to expect. In other words, as an international teacher you should, as Neil stated, “[be] prepared to throw yourself into the community and to establish really quite, in some cases, demanding but very richly rewarding relationships with colleagues.” In an international context, community and colleagues serve as teachers’ primary personal and professional support. Greg warns that having too rigid an approach to work does not usually translate into success in international teaching contexts.

The Right Fit

We asked what the recruiters were looking for in teachers for their current school so that we could engage the similar terrain of what teacher capacities are desirable, but from a different prompt, to potentially draw out further explication from our participants. We also wanted to hear how recruiters spoke about their particular school contexts to gauge their conceptions of how *context-specific* are the qualities of a good international school teacher, given the diversity of international schools and communities. What emerged in responses to this question was a dominant concern for finding “the right fit.” It appears that recruiters typically feel that being a certified Canadian/Ontario teacher fulfills their basic requirement that a teacher is appropriately qualified and capable; whereas “fit” refers to that “right” match for the particular school, community, or location, as well as a notion of a subjective “something extra,” often likened to teacherly dispositions as enthusiastic and passionate about learning and collaboration.

The school. In the first meaning of “the right fit,” recruiters consider how well the applicant teacher would fit into the existing ethos, faculty make-up, and teaching philosophy of the international school. For instance, Darren, who privileges schools that are international in mission and curriculum (“internationally minded schools”) over location or make-up (“overseas schools”), prefers teachers trained in the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework. On the other hand, Allen’s school uses the Ontario curriculum and thus he requires 80% of his teachers to have training and experience from Ontario, Canada. Beyond Ontario qualifications, Allen emphasized the need for English Second Language (ESL) teachers in Japan; he comments: “Yeah, ESL experience is huge...not just

the experience...but having the academic background to understand it.” Other recruiters have more general staffing and curricula expectations. As Greg explains,

On paper there are things that we are looking at, you know, qualifications, experience to date. Do some of their experiences line up with what we are doing? So, we are a “workshop model” school, do they have “workshop model” school training? What kind of math do they do? Are they “constructive” as to their philosophy? That type of thing.

For other recruiters, curricular knowledge and experience are not as central to what they are looking for. Neil, for example, reasons,

It is more important to visualize the person as a teacher in your school and then, working with what you know about the school’s needs, imagine the people this teacher will work with, the person(s) they will replace, the position they will fill, and finally what profile are we looking for.

Thus, while recruiters hold some rigidity around what sort of teachers are “the right fit” for their philosophical and curricular approach, there can be flexibility in their expectations of past training and experience.

Being a “team player” is considered important for most of the recruiters; they are generally looking to hire teachers who exhibit an ability to work well with others. Recruiters prize teachers who collaborate well in a team, because, as Allen puts it, “not only is that team your professional learning group but it’s also your social learning group... your emotional support group...because [the teachers] don’t have friends or parents and all that here.” Similarly, Lance stated: “I’m not really worried about whether they can teach. I’m worried about how well they’re going to fit in so that they can do what they’re trained to do.” In this way, sometimes teachers’ curricular expertise is secondary to their capacities to work well with others.

Mike added:

The type of education that we’re using with the IB requires a lot of collaboration, a lot of working as a team, so we’re looking for people who are good team workers, good collaborators. Not people who go off into a corner, but that are going to

contribute well to the development of good solid curriculum and pedagogy with their colleagues.

In other words, having specific curricular knowledge and experience is valuable. But, as each of the recruiters discussed, in terms of school well-being, having “the right” personality and dispositions to build collaborative, team-centered relationships (personal and professional) with people in and around the school is most important.

The cultural context. Another dimension of “the right fit” relates to how well/poorly a teacher is able to accept and adapt to the local culture where the school is located. For instance, in Allen’s case, having some sense that the school and local cultural context are “the right fit” for the teacher is key to both their performance and retention, because if the teacher is happy outside of school, they will likely be happier inside and tend to stay longer at the school. Since recruiters generally want teachers to renew at least their initial contracts, whether a teacher is happy, or at least able to cope with, the local ways of living is a significant consideration. Head-teacher Scott highlighted that while teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms is challenging in any context, doing so in a foreign-located international school offers another level of complexity. Teachers in his school, for example, must navigate the local Portuguese culture as well as over 40 nationalities and 25 mother tongues. Thus, for Scott, learning about their new environment, beyond the school, helps teachers in the classroom. He commented: “The desire to experience where you are helps you connect to kids in the classroom and makes you a more effective teacher.” Mary similarly calls on teachers to become more comfortable and knowledgeable in the classroom by adapting their teaching and lifestyle to local norms and practices, and to enjoy the intercultural experience.

The likeability factor. The final meaning of “the right fit” aligns with the less tangible qualities of the prospective international school teacher and the more subjective (and potentially less conscious)⁸ desires of the recruiter. Here we are talking about the “likeability” factor and (internalized) images of teachers as enthusiastic and passionate and being highly involved in the school and community; of course, these are linked into

8 We speculate that it is here that discriminatory preferences around race, ethnicity, and gender can surface, where a subjective “fit” takes precedence over more objective qualifications for the position.

circulating trends on “best practices.” This “fit” factor overlaps with the previous notions of being a team-player and flexible—as these attributes themselves can be embodied in highly diverse ways. Indeed, being flexible might mean for the recruiter that the teacher is going to compliantly follow administrative mandates and not be a squeaky wheel. Greg, for example, stated that (prospective) teachers

need to be aware that...these are the things that we do, this is why we do them, this is how we do them. Either you are on board or you are not on board. And people that are on board stay at our school.

Thus, flexibility, as we noted in citing Hirsh (2016), is multivalent and needs to be unpacked. It might mean figuring out how to adapt to the new setting in order to work toward realizing one’s educational values and aspirations; alternatively, it might mean giving up on one’s principles to support one’s superiors.

As stated, the findings of these first two sections align well with the studies presented in our literature review section. A novel feature lies in considering the perspectives of school recruiters, which have been largely absent from the literature, despite recruiters’ important role in hiring teachers and day-to-day leadership in the international schools. Moreover, presenting their perspectives with some degree of detail helps to ground and qualify the free-floating terms circulating in discourses of international education. Our discussion builds from these illuminations. In the final subsection of findings, we unpack how “pedagogical flexibility” has import for these experienced international school recruiters and we suggest that this finding is particularly significant for ITE.

Pedagogical Flexibility

The participants mentioned a number of common aspects or themes, often in relation to what they had already discussed in previous responses; notably, the importance of *pedagogical flexibility* emerged strongly in many of the responses. Of primary concern for most of the recruiters is for teachers to be familiar with, or open to, pedagogies and curriculum beyond local or regional education models, and especially to not interpret curricula as narrow prescriptions. Speaking as to how Western-trained educators perceive education, Lance said, “We speak about education as being regional...[in many other ways] we talk globally, but we don’t act globally in education, yet.” He explained:

A curriculum that's well written leaves room for interpretation and flexibility. And if the professor, the teacher, is capable of reading that and not being dogmatic to a curriculum, then you're going to have a rich experience [because] that curriculum is intended to give you a guideline, not a lock-step approach.

Lance's viewpoint is reinforced by Allen in the following anecdote about a math teacher:

I had a Grade 7 math teacher just recently teach our Grade 7 math and he taught it to the standards of the Ontario curriculum and every student got 95% and above... most of them got 99%...and the kids and their parents would tell me...they're wasting their time in there, they all know this already, they took it before...and it was true. The [teacher's] argument was, well in Ontario we have to stay within the curriculum.

To help avoid such fixed approaches or narrow interpretations, Greg suggests that teacher education should make "sure that people are exposed within their classes, the courses, to different models, to different ways of teaching." Thus, recruiters see such curricula rigidity as a significant barrier for teachers coming into the international school arena.

Darren argues that teacher education should be more multicultural, to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of society and the world. In parallel, Neil suggests that epistemic openness is also useful:

If we were to expose [teacher] candidates at a certain stage to really, really divergent thinking, whether it's framed as teaching strategies, methodologies, clinical systems, value sets, any one of the great challenges...the capacity to respect and understand that there are so many different approaches to the world.

In terms of promising activities for this approach to teacher education, Greg proposes that teacher educators

try to put [teacher candidates] in situations. Like...you are moving to Korea and this is what it is going to look like. This is what happens. How do you deal with it? Have them try and reflect on what they think they might do, and discuss it as a group...to hear what other people's reflections are on how they would approach something.

The key aspect is to have teachers reflect on and build capacity to engage in divergent ways of thinking about, and living in, the world.

Each interview also yielded a variety of unique pieces of advice for teacher education. These pieces of advice include the following: developing responsive pedagogies for ESL students; teacher candidates' self-reflection on their personal strengths and weaknesses, motivations, and values; development of a professional but flexible and international approach toward lesson planning and curricular design; and, the hiring and use of instructors that are knowledgeable about, and experienced in, *international* teaching. Further, Darren emphasized the need to promote "international mindedness" in teacher education to encourage greater open mindedness and adaptability in teacher candidates.

Finally, the recruiters were critical of conventional, dogmatic, or "provincial" approaches to teacher education in Canada and the United States in a context of intensifying globalization. A few recruiters also suggested that not enough is being done to promote, coordinate, and fund *international* teaching practicums. Alternatively, online discussions with teachers living and working in foreign countries was suggested to expose teacher candidates to authentic and current international teaching experiences, while giving them scenarios to reflect on what/how they might deal with real-world conditions. Strong emphasis was placed on teachers being able (and feeling free) to adapt curricula and their teaching style to satisfy the particular conditions of the schools and community where they find themselves.

Our empirical analysis suggests that "pedagogical flexibility," as discussed here, is a key desirable attribute for teachers heading out to a new or international context, which might be fostered in ITE. Flexibility, here, extends beyond Mikulec's (2014) notion of re-framing one's gestalt according to new data, and is particularly salient in thinking through the pedagogical dilemma emerging from Lagace and colleagues (2016). Somehow, as teacher candidates engage philosophies, models, and approaches to teaching, they need to learn how to distinguish between the higher pedagogical visions and values guiding and grounding their practices and the concrete models and techniques that are often the focus of teacher education and of beginning teachers. Given how different international contexts of schooling are, teacher candidates need to build up sound pedagogical principles that can be interpreted across diverse settings. This focus on principles or concepts is a challenge in teacher education, given student preferences for concrete techniques and strategies, and given how local experts might themselves lack international perspective.

ITE programs might work to create the conditions whereby students experientially face the pedagogical dilemma that “best practices” are context specific. From this realization they may have a stronger appetite for a more conceptual/theoretical grounding in pedagogy, which may not be directly *applicable*, but nonetheless much more transferable where teachers move beyond the local (to learn) to teach.

Discussion

As our findings illustrate, recruiters *do* believe that there are teacher qualities or capacities that are particularly useful for international school contexts. Three themes stand out for discussion: intercultural awareness, pedagogical flexibility, and, most site-specific, “the right fit.” In this discussion we highlight the key contributions, connect these themes to our examination of the literature, and consider implications for teacher education programs working to prepare their candidates for international school contexts.

The first contribution of our empirical study is that *recruiters*, as with other stakeholders studied in past research, highly value “intercultural awareness” in teachers. To thrive as a teacher in a foreign setting requires an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the intercultural aspects active in that location. In some respects, such awareness and sensitivity require an engagement in the international/intercultural context, given the intensity and transnational character of the experience provides the transformational imperative for intercultural understanding (Cushner, 2009; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Gilson & Martin, 2010; Santoro & Major, 2012). For this reason, it is not surprising that opportunities for international practica are a dominant form of ITE (Shaklee et al., 2015). And indeed, some of the recruiters emphasized the utility of such initiatives. More generally, the importance of (inter)cultural awareness as emphasized in all of the literature was verified in our small-scale study.

Mikulec’s (2014) dispositions for global engagement, and Snowball’s (2008) and Hirsh’s (2016) notions of effective traits/skills for international school teachers, correlate quite strongly with the stated expectations of the recruiters interviewed. Recruiters value teachers who, through self-awareness and self-reflection, demonstrate an open and non-judgemental cultural awareness. Teachers who want to know (more) about the

different culture(s) around them and who are adept at interpreting the various aspects of culture at play in their classroom and day-to-day life are particularly advantaged.

A second key contribution of this study is the finding that “pedagogical flexibility,” as a non-parochial approach to understanding curriculum and teaching approaches appears significantly in the recruiters’ narratives about desirable and undesirable practices of international school teachers. International school recruiters and IS researchers would agree, for example, that international school teachers ought to be both flexible decision makers and culturally adaptable to differentiate instruction along the lines of cultural diversity represented in their classrooms (Shaklee et al., 2015; Hirsh, 2016). However, beyond culturally differentiated responses to students, teachers (as discussed by participants Lance and Allen) must also be ready and willing to adapt their teaching and learning plans according to local conditions and expectations in the school. Admittedly, dispositions of curiosity and tolerance for ambiguity (Mikulec, 2014) come in handy when suspending judgement around new or different teaching habits and expectations (deemed necessary by the recruiters in this study) and adapting one’s teaching approach and style accordingly. Being less dogmatic and more open to new/different ways of teaching and learning seems a pragmatic approach, given the relative autonomy and uniqueness of international schools located in different cities around the world. Thus, international school teaching requires a degree of epistemic openness towards schooling, teaching, and learning. That is, it requires a capacity to engage *divergent ways of thinking* regarding education, its uses, and methods as embedded in larger social structures and across diverse societies. This more open way of thinking, and thinking about teaching, can be fostered in an ITE built around developing pedagogical flexibility.

The third key contribution of this study is revealed by the *double* meaning of “fit” as recruiters attempt to hire teachers who will thrive in their schools—the pragmatic “win-win” enactment of fit, as well as the potential way in which fit becomes a proxy for valuing certain social differences and/or personal characteristics over others. Deciding whether a prospective teacher will “fit in” with the staff, students, families, and community of their school is a ubiquitous concern for international school recruiters. On one hand, this concern is justified for the well-being of both the school and the prospective teacher. Some recruiters prefer teachers with training and/or experience in a school’s chosen pedagogical/curricular approach, in order to enhance teacher collaboration and enact a more consistent pedagogical approach and student experience across subject areas and

grade levels. Other recruiters look for teachers who are sufficiently open and flexible to adapt and learn as they enter the school culture. Further, a teacher's ability to navigate the local cultural context can dramatically affect how they function and are accepted as part of the school and school community. Finally, when recruiters gauge that "something extra" (e.g., motivations, emotional intelligence, likeability...) they enter a more subjective level where characteristics not necessarily tied into teaching performance may (inadvertently) appear as forms of discrimination based on race or nationality, among other social differences. These may surface not only in terms of recruiter bias, but also in relation to normative (read: parochial) discourses prevailing in the wider school community. Our speculations here warrant further research.

Admittedly this small-scale study only begins to fill the research gap in the intersections of ITE and the international school sector, by analyzing perspectives of a small number of experienced international school recruiters. Deeper (ethnographic) examination of the qualities of "adaptability" and cultural sensitivity, particularly "on the ground" in sites of international schooling, would enrich the discourse and provide more robust grounds for informing teacher education to prepare teacher candidates for international school contexts. Further, we suggest that such examination needs to frame desirable teacher capacities and qualities critically and mindful of pedagogical purposes—"fit" must go beyond "fitting in," so to speak. Thus, teacher candidates need support in unpacking the use and meaning of such terms as "adaptability," beyond the job search, to understand their use in navigating the complex landscapes of international schools, whilst honouring (and further developing) their core values and professional ethics.

Finally, the importance of pedagogical flexibility in interpreting and translating curriculum cannot be overstated. Given the fetishization of "best practices" in an increasingly interconnected world, such flexibility is important in contexts beyond international schooling. Nevertheless, recruiters have identified the problem of teachers inflexibly bringing local methods or models from home to their teaching in international school settings. To prepare teachers beyond "the local," we infer here that teacher education needs to focus more on pedagogical debates, purposes, and guidelines over fixed "methods," as if these methods can be straightforwardly applied in different contexts. Thus, teacher candidates need to develop the capacities to translate and flexibly apply pedagogies toward realizing their key pedagogical purposes (for example supporting students' conceptual learning) that they can justify and suture to the school's larger mission. "Best practices,"

then, are context-specific practices that are created in the context of one's teaching environment according to their guiding pedagogical principles, and not fixed methods to be applied across contexts. Thus, teacher education ought to teach specific methods and models and "local" approaches *without elevating them to universals*. We are left with the insight that Mikulec's (2014) dispositions (curiosity, tolerating ambiguity), among other traits deemed vital for international schoolteachers, are also vital to the *experience* of teacher education itself. Therefore, *how* teacher candidates *engage* in their ITE is at least as important as the content they study.

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