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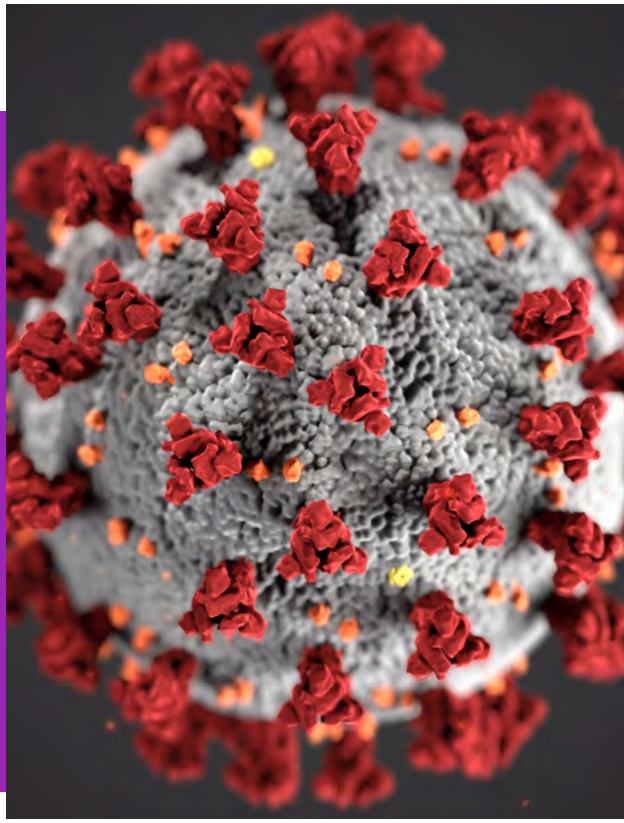


CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGE

Student Resilience in the English Classroom

By **Andrew McNally,** *The Affiliated Foreign Language School of SCNU, Guangzhou, China.*

I teach at a bilingual high school in Guangzhou. In southern China, a couple hours train ride from Hong Kong and Macau, Guangzhou is considered one of the four largest cities in the PRC. Like much of China, our break for Lunar New Year was extended by a few weeks due to the initial outbreak in Mainland China. Since then, our classes have been conducted online, via Zoom. Like many other expatriate teachers in China, I had left China over the break for Southeast Asia - before the full extent of the pandemic became clear. By the time I am writing this piece in mid-March, I have been in China for two weeks in anticipation of an April start date for brick-and-mortar classes.

As the pandemic, and the restrictions, spread to other countries and disrupt the routines of English classrooms in most of the world, it's safe to say that students are looking to their learning communities for a sense of stability and guidance.

It's not always easy to come to terms with how to provide such stability - in the absence of a classroom (or at least, a physical one). And especially given the frightening threats of disease and economic distress.

But teachers in China have been adapting. And if what's happening in my classroom is any hint of how students in the rest of the world will encounter the disruption of school routines, I'm hoping we'll see young people showing impressive resilience, when given the chance.

COMMUNITY PERSISTS, EVEN ONLINE

While online instruction can make some parts of instruction more challenging, it also opens new opportunities for collaborative learning. When it became clear that classes would begin being held online, I wrongly assumed - never having taught a fully-online course - that online learning makes the community and conversation crucial to a good English classroom impractical.

But I was wrong.

For classes like mine, comprising 100 percent ELs, online delivery has actually improved some students' participation and confidence. In my 9th grade class, for example, many students who feel less confident in their contribution have grown considerably in an online format, since they have the opportunity to participate and ask questions more easily in written and spoken form, since it multiplies the opportunities for teachers to use a variety of augmented inputs for language learning, and since learning from home can reduce some of the pressures associated with collaborating effectively in the classroom.

For teachers with curricular flexibility, project-based and inquiry-based learning methods can be especially effective for distance learning.

An upper level class that I teach has been putting together a digital rhetoric project in which students design a multimedia campaign promoting a social action.

Students are in the research phase of the project, but the topics are very timely and relevant: promoting mental health and effective study habits when experiencing the isolating effects of quarantine, or methods of improving listening skills for online learning.

There are no upsides or silver linings to an event as traumatic as this pandemic. But learning still takes place, including the learning of teachers. For me, that learning has been that while asking students to put away phones and laptops can make me feel that learning tech detracts from community, there are so many untapped and cool opportunities for ELs to build community and conversation through digital means.

STUDENT VOICES STAY STRONG.

Some of my students talk about the apathy and ennui that creep into the weeks and weeks of quarantine. But I notice otherwise in their reading and writing. For sure, they want to be sitting next to their friends, together. At school. And they're not.

But many of them are rediscovering untapped fire in reading and their own writing voices.

When my students met for the first time online, I asked each of them to tell everyone how they were feeling. Many reported feeling excited to re-connect with other students, many reported feeling bored with the experience of isolation. I'm guessing most felt both.

But a number of students said that while they felt bored at first, they quickly started enjoying one aspect of the isolation: the chance, for once in the longest time, to just lie in bed all day and read a book they had wanted to read in a long time, to truly enjoy something without worrying about their next assignment or what they had to study next.

In the U.S. Literatures and Cultures course that I teach, students have stunned me by how successful they have been at adapting and interpreting modernist poetic forms we're studying for their own expressive purposes. For one online assignment, students were asked to take some of the shared characteristics of the modernist poets students were reading and use those characteristics to develop poems about their own lives. Not unlike many modernists of the twentieth century, these students created some stunning poetic vignettes, reflections of what it means to experience life as a form of isolation.

One student produced what I interpreted to be an incredible reflection on loneliness, written in a distinctly imagist idiom:

The lights in the playground
are still on
The frolicking crowds have gone
I sit on a swing
Swinging my feet
Watching that stubborn moth
Hovering in the aperture

Some pieces were more literal but no less powerful, stressing not only the fear of the virus and the isolation that it produces, but the hope for something better and the importance of community action in the face of such a threat:

what is happening
the disease is everywhere
the ice is melting
the fire is still burning
but the sun still rising like before
the flowers are blooming
don't say what the world can do for us,
but what we can do for the world.

And many found humor and some healthy positivity in the experience:

Dream,
To dream of oneself.
Wake up,
Still dreaming.
What makes me so intoxicated?
Oh It turned out to be my comfortable bed.
Here is the place I am staying now,
I spent most of the holiday stay with it.
Because it makes me feel relaxed!
And I like my bed cuz it gives me strength.

There's no sugar-coating the situation that these, and so many other students, will experience. All students are, to varying degrees, upset about the disruption to their lives. A few students clearly prefer to avoid talking about the disruption. But more than a few seem to be seeking the chance to dissect, explore, and understand the complexities of their experiences. Although the months ahead will consist of different routines for millions of students, we can be confident that English classrooms will be a consistent place for them to conduct just such exploration.

Andrew McNally *is an English teacher at The Affiliated Foreign Language School of SCNU.*

Update on the new Language A: Language and Literature guide

By **Brad Philpot,** *Philpot Education, Zaandam, The Netherlands*

In February 2019 the IB published a new guide on Language A: Language and Literature for the Diploma Programme, and in October of 2019 an even newer version replaced this document. As IB teachers know, changes to the guide come with changes to assessment and methods of course delivery. So what are the major changes and how can teachers adapt their teaching methods to ensure for successful results?

First of all, gone are the days of 'parts' that correspond to assessment components. Instead the IB has provided teachers and students with 3 'areas of exploration' (AOEs) which are essentially 3 sets of questions for engaging with literary works and non-literary bodies of work (BOWs). Students are expected to record their engagement with these works in a learner portfolio, showing connections to various fields of inquiry and seven concepts. Furthermore, the portfolio is a place for students to develop the skills that are needed for paper 1, paper 2, the individual oral and (for higher level students) the higher level essay.

At SL Paper 1 is an analysis of a single, unseen, non-literary text in 15 minutes.

At HL, Paper 1 consists of two separate analyses of both non-literary texts from the same exam booklet in 2 hours and 15 minutes. Paper 2, shared by SL and HL students of Literature and Language and Literature, consists of 4 unseen questions that ask students to compare and contrast 2 literary works. The HL Essay is a 1,200-1,500-word essay in which students explore a 'line of inquiry' of choice, in relation to a BOW or literary work. The individual oral is a 10-minute talk, followed by a 5-minute discussion, in which students explore an extract from a non-literary BOW, the BOW, an extract from a literary work, the literary work and a common 'global issue'. The assessment criteria for all 4 components are similar, asking students to show: A) understanding and interpretation, B) analysis and evaluation, C) organization and D) effective use of language.

With this new guide, the IB has created opportunities for students and teachers to explore texts in meaningful ways. For further understanding of this guide, check out 'English A: Language and Literature for the IB Diploma' by Brad Philpot (Cambridge University Press) or Philpot Education's Support Site for English A: Language and Literature.

Brad Philpot *has written the new IB English Language and Literature coursebook published by Cambridge University Press.*

AP Literature and Composition: Style Matters

By **Chris Shugrue,** *Shepaug Valley High School, Washington, Connecticut*

Advanced Placement Literature and Composition is a college level course focused on matters of literary style. At the beginning of the course 'style' is often limited to the author's style. The tone, diction and syntax of the great authors, poets and artists are the 'matters' in the course. The course develops as the gift of constant conversation about intriguing literary "style matters" draws us through the power of a text's mechanics to conjure the personal and universal themes. Young minds begin to recognize and identify the strength of Joseph Conrad's storytelling, the severity of Emily Dickinson's poetry and the graceful brutality in Toni Morrison's dreams. Students grow in their recognition of the literary craft and art that inspires the imagination. Slow and steady analysis and interpretation through each student's "mind's eye" grows into a capacity to categorize, synthesize and apply the themes put forth by the literary greats.

Seeing more in a text, speaking to the whole of the text, weaving through a complex story invites students to begin to write out their conversations with the literature. Student's compositions are truly where "style matters". The composition component of the course is the voices of bright minds speaking through their personal style and building dreams and goals that truly matter to their future and to the future of the human race.

There is an exam administered around the world at the end of the course but the worth of AP Literature and Composition truly begins when each student, confident in their unique style and their awareness of what truly matters, goes off to change the world. This course is about building a future where leaders are bright, reflective and compassionate. ■

Chris Shugrue *has taught AP English Literature and Composition for 25 years and she has taught English in Connecticut for 45 years.*

The NET Scheme in Hong Kong

Fostering Learning Communities among International Educators

By **Stephen Cooley,** *Regional NET Coordinator, Hong Kong*

In August 2000, I came to Hong Kong from New York as an English teacher employed under the Enhanced Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme in Secondary Schools. I arrived here with my wife Kaori, who is originally from Japan, and our two-year-old daughter Lisa. My intention at the time was to stay in Hong Kong for two years, certainly no more than four, as Lisa would then be old enough for primary school. The NET Scheme offers two-year contracts renewable until retirement age, but that seemed like a very long way off at the time. Twenty years later (and much closer to retirement age), Kaori and I are still living in Hong Kong, although Lisa is now in her final year at university in New York. This is quite a common story among the people we know, from various backgrounds and walks of life, who have chosen Hong Kong as their home away from home.

The Enhanced NET Scheme in Hong Kong was in its infancy when I first arrived in 2000. It was launched in August 1998, about one year after the handover of Hong Kong to China. The aims of the Scheme were to support the professional development of English language teachers and enhance the quality of secondary English language education by providing funding for one NET in every public-sector secondary school. In the early years, the expectation commonly shared among local schools was that NETs would function as "agents of change"; the reality was that many NETs experienced culture shock working in an unfamiliar educational context and language environment. In its infancy, the Enhanced NET Scheme had mixed results at best.

In 2002, the NET Scheme in Primary Schools was launched, and in the same year the NET Section of the Education Bureau was established to steer and facilitate the implementation of the NET Scheme in Hong Kong schools. As the professional arm of the NET Scheme, the NET Section provides professional support for schools, helping to maximise the benefits and potential of the NET Scheme and to facilitate the implementation of the English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide in Hong Kong.

I have grown both personally and professionally with the NET Scheme in Hong Kong, first as a NET employed at a secondary school for eight years, and more recently as a school support officer at the NET Section, where I have been working since 2008. The NET Section is truly a dynamic and multicultural place to work, a place where "Fostering Learning Communities among International Educators" is the vision "for how to sustain and rejuvenate the Scheme as a key measure to support English language education in local schools," according to Mr Joe Leung, Chief Curriculum Development Officer and Head of the NET Section. Mr Leung believes that it is "the synergy built within the community of professionals under the NET Scheme" that empowers all of us, including NET Section officers, NETs in schools, local English

> As we employ a "train-the-trainer" model, the competitions also foster professional development for participating teachers.

teachers, and our professional partners in the community, "to promote innovation and awaken possibilities." Mr Leung emphasises that by working towards "shared goals", we can support and inspire one another "to contribute to the community as international educators".

At the NET Section, the programmes that we design and the events that we organise for primary and secondary English teachers and students have led to significant pedagogical innovations in Hong Kong schools. For instance, the literacy programmes developed by the Advisory Teaching Team (ATT), along with the professional support provided, have had a major impact on the way that foundational literacy is taught in primary schools. The Collaborative Research and Development "Seed" Projects developed by the ATT for primary schools and the Regional NET Coordinating Team for secondary schools, in areas such as Learning English through Play, Coding to Learn, Designing Text Sets, Multimodal Literacy, Reading across the Curriculum, and Critical Literacy, among others, foster the professional development of teachers and promote pedagogical innovations in schools.

The professional development programmes and other networking activities organised by the NET Section, often in collaboration with international school educators, speakers from local NGOs, or other professional partners in the community, achieve similar pedagogical objectives.

Among the greatest achievements of the NET Section are the competitions that we have developed over the years for primary and secondary schools in areas such as short story writing, drama, puppetry, film-making and public speaking. The competitions provide students with opportunities to collaborate with their peers and develop their ability to use English creatively beyond the classroom. As we employ a "train-the-trainer" model, the competitions also foster professional development for participating teachers.

The NET Section collaborates with a wide range of partners in our competitions. For example, in the Speak Up - Act Out! and Stories on Stage drama competitions, we call on international school educators, semi-professional actors and published authors to assist with adjudication. In the Filmit student film competition, we collaborate with the European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao and Radio Television Hong Kong, as well as with international schools that offer courses in film studies. With support from our partners, an awards ceremony modelled on the Academy Awards is held every year in July to celebrate student achievement in film-making and drama.

The ultimate objective of the NET Section in support of the NET Scheme in schools is to disseminate good practices, innovative teaching methods and teacher-created resource materials, and we do that by encouraging professional networking among the English teachers we support. It is truly a rewarding experience to be a part of the NET Section, fostering learning communities among international educators through school support, "Seed" projects, professional development programmes, competitions and other networking activities.

This academic year has been particularly challenging for schools in Hong Kong. As I write, classes are suspended over health and safety concerns related to the novel coronavirus. I believe that the people of Hong Kong will persevere, as they have persevered so often before in troubled times. In the long term, I believe Hong Kong will remain a vibrant city in Asia with a strong international community. That is my hope for Hong Kong, my beloved home away from home.

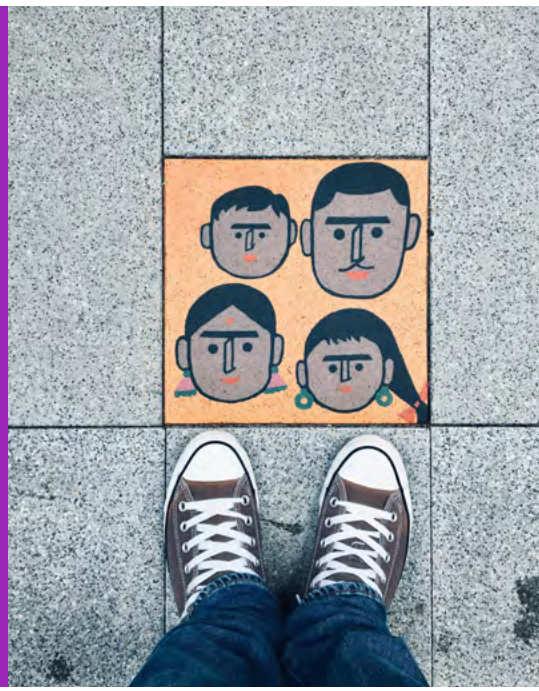
For more information about the NET Scheme in Hong Kong and NET Section programmes and events, visit the NET Scheme

Stephen Cooley *joined the NET Scheme in 2000. He is currently serving as a Regional NET Coordinator in the NET Section of the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, supporting the implementation of the Scheme in secondary schools.*

e-Platform: https://nets.edb.hkedcity.net/

If you are interested in applying for a position in the NET Scheme, visit the Education Bureau website: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/resource-support/net/index.html

Teaching Academic Writing to ESL Learners in a Japanese University



By **R. Paul Lege, PhD,** *Nagoya University, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya, Japan*

Over the last nineteen years, I have taught academic writing to ESL students in several Japanese colleges. For the past eight years, I have been a writing instructor for the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University and would simply like to describe my experience during this period. I would recommend that anyone unfamiliar with the challenges in teaching writing to ESL students should read both Belcher and Baine (1995) and Ferris and Hedgcock (2014). While these texts are important, they do not quite address the unique environmental conditions in which I teach. The major challenge, for me, has involved designing a writing curriculum that addressed some of the misconceptions that both ESL students and ESL faculty maintain in an environment where English is not the primary language.

Due to declining population and global competitiveness, many universities in Japan have had to develop "English track" programs to stay alive. Thus, students from abroad can come to Japan and obtain a degree from some institutions that offer both an English and Japanese track of study. Over 80% of the students in our program have been recruited from abroad (China, SE Asia and Central Asia) and most select the English track. While highly motivated and knowledgeable in their fields, most have little or no English writing experience and are expected to complete a thesis and dissertation in two or three years depending upon scholarship restrictions. Furthermore, most of these students will be lucky to receive between 20 and 60 hours of writing instruction during their college experience, which fails to meet their individual needs.

In terms of the actual writing task, a huge distinction exists between an L1 and an ESL student with respect to their developmental writing skills. The difference is analogous to the idea whereby two people are expected to play the same compositional piece on a piano and one has 12-16 years of practice while the other has had only 20-60 hours of preparation. Regardless of their actual experience, the ESL student will need serious work and assistance at all levels of writing (form, function and elaboration) relative to that of the L1 student. As a result, teaching in this area can be far more time consuming and labor intensive, which is one reason why many language educators (in Japan, at least) prefer teaching classes that focus on oral and listening skills.

Meanwhile, much of the pedagogical literature on the teaching of writing to the ESL student focuses on them immersed in an environment where English is the primary language. One of the unique aspects to my job is the fact that the ESL student must work with a content-based faculty member whose own English skills may be limited. In my teaching environment, English represents a third language that is used between a non-Japanese student and a Japanese faculty member, each of whom have picked up unusual habits or usage that appear incoherent or unintelligible to the other.

> The experience has been insightful in terms of seeing how different cultural groups approach writing.

This hybrid or "localized" usage of the language (Japan-lish versus Viet-lish, for example) can lead to confusion when explaining writing concerns.

In addition, some of the faculty continue to believe that student writing deficiency can be addressed with grammar repair (that is, fixing it based on the faculty's own version or understanding of grammar) rather than teaching an understanding of the process of writing. As such, without negotiation between the writing instructor and faculty, this can inevitably result in some real headaches for the students. Eight years ago, for example, there were no agreed upon guidelines within the faculty as to what a thesis or dissertation should even look like, and as a result, the meaning in the final texts was often lost. The development of guidelines helped the student, faculty and writing instructor have some basis for understanding what would be expected in terms of style, organization and direction of their final texts. Headaches remain but are less severe.

Though incremental, relative to what is going on in the West, such progress has been made due to both internal and external factors. Externally, the advent and investment in writing centers has played a role in Japan (and our university) in looking at writing as more than a matter of grammar correction. Furthermore, younger Japanese scholars with advanced degrees from overseas (USA, UK etc) were returning with an understanding of what was meant by the process of writing (something that is only beginning to catch on even in the teaching of Japanese writing). Internally, such individuals were instrumental in helping me negotiate our future guidelines but also in rebuilding the classroom approach so that students could develop their writing skills. Thus, I was able to expand the amount of experiential time devoted to writing by using flip class techniques and a hybrid online course that enabled us to work not just on matters of form and function but elaboration.

While much more needs to be done, student and faculty surveys have indicated that some advances have been made in the overall comprehension of the final texts but also in terms of understanding the importance of the process in writing. For me personally, despite the challenges and frustrations, it has been a very rewarding cultural experience to be part of a small change at our university and to see students take increasing pride in their work. Students desire to be understood and feel great accomplishment in being able to write out their ideas in another language. Lastly, the experience has been insightful in terms of seeing how different cultural groups approach writing (in both their own language and in a second language); this is an area that I hope to do more research.

Dr. R. Paul Lege *has written on issues in the humanities and information science while teaching academic writing both online and in regular classes for the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University.*

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Teaching English to Future International Football Stars

By Julie Noble , Director at Tigerfish sl, London, United Kingdom

I have been teaching English as a foreign language in London for 10 years. As well as teaching school-age students and business professionals, I work closely with professional footballers and their coaches.

The sportspeople I work with are in many ways a unique group (I also teach French and Spanish to professional sportspeople), in that they often don't have a choice as to which country their sport will take them to; they don't necessarily have a strong language base or cultural awareness of the country they have been sent to. And indeed, often, but not always, they have had a less 'formal' or 'structured' education.

Some of the players will come to London with partners and family, so often I will work with the whole family; as well as learning the language, I help them to adapt to their new environment - everyday things like, where to do the weekly grocery shop, how to navigate public transport, paying bills, visiting local schools for their children. For many, this is the first time they have lived in another country away from family and friends and so at the beginning there is a certain amount of me simply being a good listener and someone to talk to.

As is to be expected, I come across lots of different levels and abilities - some are very keen learners, some not so keen! There are those who actively want to have lessons and take exams, others only have lessons and take the exams because their managers or the Football Association insists that they do! Also, different nationalities pose different linguistic and learning approaches and challenges and therefore each lesson has to be tailored to meet the needs of the individual learner.

Julie Noble *is an independent language consultant and has been teaching English, French and Spanish in the UK and Spain since 2007. Noble has an MA in Modern Languages from Oxford University.*

Empathy, Literature, and the Global Citizen

By **Eir-Anne Edgar,** *Norwegian University of Science and Technology Trondheim, Norway*

In the roles of educator and reader, there is a Venn diagram of overlapping desires that emerges. In teaching literature, we want students to read and understand the perspectives of those who they might perceive as being different from them. We want students to learn about and consider the experiences of writers from faraway places and even time periods.

We want students to experience what it is like to be drawn into a story and to be compelled to act or to think differently about the world around them as a result of reading. In order to present students with literature that provokes them into conversation, I think of them not simply as English students, but as developing global citizens.

In this overview, I discuss how teachers can develop empathy in students through reading and writing about literature, which contributes to their development as citizens in a global community.

By choosing texts that trigger empathic reactions, English teachers can promote good global citizenship skills such as participating in community efforts and promoting social justice initiatives.

One of my primary goals in my English classrooms has been to think about my students as global citizens and to consider my role in preparing them to be citizens of the world. What is English language arts learning? Is it merely proficiency with reading, writing, and conversational skills? Or is it something else?

The Ideas for Global Citizenship website states: "Global Citizenship is a way of living that recognizes our world is an increasingly complex web of connections and interdependencies. One in which our choices and actions may have repercussions for people and communities locally, nationally or internationally" ("Global Citizenship").

To develop students for citizenship in our teaching involves learning about community in all its varied forms. Additionally, the position of "citizen" ought to be engaged with and challenged by these questions:

(1) What rights and privileges do citizens receive?

(2) How do you exercise them?

(3) Who is excluded?

(4) Why?

(5) What happens to non-citizens?

By viewing students as future global citizens, my goal has been to get students engaged in reading and writing about literature that serves multiple purposes. My courses include texts that explore, challenge, and raise questions. I invite students to think about characters' experiences in relation to their own. I employ a variety of historical contexts (through lectures, listening to music and looking at visual art from the time period, discussing legal policies from the era, and so forth) so that students can consider the context that may have influenced the text.

Students can see the texts as providing an important and valuable perspective, even (or especially) as the text might work as a counter-narrative to more familiar and mainstream narratives. Texts that call on students to empathize with characters have the strongest effect of creating engaged readers, sparking conversation, and perhaps even getting students to consider their actions beyond the literature, and beyond the walls the of the classroom.

Teachers can connect social issues such as oppression and prejudice and themes from literature to contemporary social problems such as police violence and immigration and ask students to think critically about the impact that their choices and actions have on others. Global citizenship requires that individuals see the diversity and complexity of different subject positions in the world, and their development of empathy helps to foster consideration of the impact they have on the larger global community.

The complete version of Eir-Anne Edgar's article was published in the English Journal in January 2020.

Eir-Anne Edgar *is an associate professor of literature in English at Norwegian University of Science and Technology.*

English Teacher International Job Forecast

By **Peter Smyth,** *Search Associates*
Surrey, United Kingdom

The secret is out and international schools around the world now offer real and compelling opportunities for teachers to move overseas and teach. ISCResearch estimates there to be more than 10,000 international schools around the world with that number set to increase in the next decade. Yet, competition for English teacher jobs has also increased and it can be hard to secure a position in certain countries and schools.

What types of English jobs exist? ESOL, EAL, CELTA, TEFL, IB, A-level, iGCSE, and many more acronyms abound. There are so many facets to teaching English in an international school that potential candidates need to consider to make sure they are applying for the right position. For example, does the job match their certification and their experience? There is little point in needlessly spending time applying for jobs that one is not qualified to do in a respective country.

Certification is key (for a vast majority of positions) in terms of what roles an English teacher can and should be applying for around the world. Many countries will simply not grant a visa if the candidate is not certified to teach the subject he or she is applying. It's also worth noting that some countries have age restrictions. Even if a teacher is qualified to teach the subject they may, unfortunately, be too old in terms of the country's visa requirements.

Experience is also a key component to accurately match a candidate with a school. English teachers should apply for positions that match their existing skillset. International schools, like their host country counterparts, are reluctant to take on teachers that have little experience teaching the content they are expected to instruct future students that first day in the classroom. There is no harm in being honest with recruiters about goals and ambitions, such as what the candidate might like to teach, but candidates should be clear about what they can and cannot do in the classroom based on their current level of experience.

There is also no harm in taking a sideways or backward step professionally in the first teaching overseas position. The first time living and working out of a teacher's home country is an immensely rewarding; yet equally challenging experience. There will be times a teacher will be grateful that he or she is not the department head/ chair/ grade level lead/ curriculum coordinator etc. so that he or she can enjoy and deal with the experiences of a new country.

There are amazing schools in amazing places and, perhaps, one of the best pieces of advice I have seen is to be open to where to go for work. When prospective English teacher job candidates start to focus on one particular region or a specific school, they instantly miss out on hundreds of other great opportunities. For many, teaching in international schools is a lifestyle. Many move from one school to another every two to five years: this decision made as a carefully calibrated career choice. International English teachers want to experience a breadth of new professional opportunities as often as every two to five years. The choice to work overseas offers a wealth of career opportunity to teach the literature they love in a multicultural setting that is always evolving and expanding for the candidate open to new experience.

Peter Smyth *is a Senior Associate at Search Associates UK South including the areas of London, the South East, the South West, the East of England, and the West Midlands in the United Kingdom. He has taught in international schools in the US, Middle East, Panama and started his teaching journey in the UK*

Update on the new Language A: Literature guide

By Stephanie Feo-Hughes, TASIS The American School in England Surrey, United Kingdom

As part of its ongoing commitment to developing an "education for a better world," the IB has made some significant changes to its Language A courses, with the first examinations on the new syllabus scheduled to take place in 2021. This year, first-year IB Diploma candidates have embarked on the new Language A: Literature course with a greater focus on engaging with literary works through different lenses and areas of exploration.

One of the first changes to the new IB Literature course can be found in the prescribed reading list. This updated list includes a broader range of authors from different periods and places, allowing students to balance their study of canonical texts with less commonly studied works. The IB's commitment to teaching works in translation remains a key feature of the course. In fact, the new syllabus allows for more seamless integration of works in translation, as these texts are now taught through different areas of exploration across the two years, rather than contained to one unit.

Connections and comparisons between literary texts across cultures are further emphasised in the study of global issues that form the basis of the new Individual Oral. Students study literary texts within the context of larger global issues, which can be linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals or identified through fields of inquiry including: "Culture, identity and community," "Beliefs, values and education," "Politics, power and justice," "Art, creativity and imagination," or "Science, technology and the natural world." As part of their Individual Oral, students then show their understanding of different literary features in excerpts of the texts they study enhance our understanding or awareness of these issues.

Students also develop their critical thinking and writing skills in preparation for written assessments such as the Paper 1 analysis of an "unseen" literary passage, the Paper 2 comparative essay on two texts, and the Higher Level essay on a literary work. Throughout the course, students reflect upon their learning and writing process through the Learner Portfolio, which provides a space for them to explore ideas, develop skills, and establish connections between their learning and the wider community. The Learner Portfolio also serves as a valuable tool to practice and track students' approaches to learning.

The new course guide outlines the criteria for assessment and provides teachers with ideas for implementing the Learner Portfolio. The more flexible syllabus allows teachers to integrate texts across wide areas of exploration and offers many opportunities for students to develop a sense of international-mindedness through their study of literature and the wider world. Helpful resources and samples of student work can be found under the course documents and teacher support materials on My IB.

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