



ITLS INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS FOR TOMORROW'S SCHOOL

SYSTEM CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERCULTURAL
SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Potentials of international teachers – experiences and examples

Abstract:

This collection brings together examples from practice. The quotes, which come from practical and research projects, illustrate the potentials and strengths, i.e. the "plus", that international teachers can bring to schools. Among other things, they show how international teachers can enrich schools: as masters of their subject and through new methods, through multilingualism and pluralisation of ideas of normality, through specific access to international pupils and their families and as a role model in the school of the migration society. We would be pleased if the examples contribute to the empowerment of international teachers and give impulses for their strength-oriented perception.

Note: For better readability, the language of the quotations has been smoothed in some places. Care has been taken to retain the content of the statements.

By Lilith Beaujean & Renate Schüssler, Bielefeld University

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Potentials of international teachers – collection of experiences and best practice examples

1 Beliefs & motivation for the teaching profession

“And if we do not just work for the money, if we do our job - if you do what you like, then you can be very creative. Then it is not just a job, at the end of the month I get money, no, that is my profession, that is my passion. And professional competence is also a must.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 1, lines (ll.) 653-657; translation by the authors*)

“This woman always has a smile on her face - no matter what, no matter what worries she had, she is always friendly. And the children have also picked up on that very quickly. She is so popular because she is so loving. You can really feel that her job is her vocation and that she loves the children and that she loves her job. She does it with a devotion that is really rare. I find that quite amazing about her.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 80-84; translation by the authors*)

2 Professional competencies

2.1 Ways of teaching

“My work as a language teacher is perhaps different from that of my teacher colleagues because teaching a language really requires a contact with a native speaker who adds value to the learning, which a Slovenian teacher cannot do. I am not disqualifying the work of my Slovenian colleagues at all. On the contrary, our work, our methods, our approaches are complementary.” (*Brumen et al., 2023*)

“For example, [...] it was about deepening fractions in a year 6 class and teacher 5 simply has good ideas on how he can visualise this on the board so that the students can follow the topic as easily as possible. Of course, I also have my own ideas, but the ideas that he showed on the board, I would not have thought of at first and I simply found them appealing. And I could see with enthusiasm that the students took it up well. So the creativity in dealing with content, which he simply presents in a different way, thus also gives me the opportunity to learn something new in principle.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 5, ll. 137-144; translation by the authors*)

“You always learn from other teachers. You always learn new methods and new ways of dealing with students. New experiences. You can still learn, but what concretely. For example, we have teachers from Turkey, we have teachers from Romania. We always learn something new from each other.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 5, ll. 557-560; translation by the authors*)

“Because I knew when I met teacher 2 for the first time that he had already gained experiences in country 1, my expectation was that he already knew how to design such a lesson, that he had the didactic basics and that he could be put in front of a class relatively quickly, accompanied by a teacher of course, and that he could try it out. And that happened relatively quickly, that he either supported or stood in front of a class himself.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 42-47; translation by the authors*)

“Explaining grammatical rules. For example, I explained present perfect in a simple way. I used the door as a prop. The students understood this tense quickly and I was praised by the head teacher.” (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Germany*)

2.2 Pedagogical expertise

“One thing too, one child, it was grade 9, he could not do French at all. He had to write a French class assignment and he had a lot of difficulties. Then the teacher, I was still on placement, asked me if I could help him. I said, yes, with pleasure. I helped him twice, for about two hours or so, and then he got a good grade. The teacher asked me what I did with the child. I said I just taught him. She said, how do you do it? I said I don't know, but when I do something, I do it with a bit of love.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 1, ll. 457-473; translation by the authors*)

2.3 Teacher behaviour

“Then we noticed, just from the observations, that the people with a refugee background, and here especially the women with a refugee background, show great patience and perhaps deal with the children in a completely different way, perhaps much more patiently, even though they are used to a completely different school system. But, as I said, they were curious and totally motivated.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, expert 2, ll. 34-39; translation by the authors*)

“My friendly communication with the students is appreciated by my colleagues. Although I still have difficulties with the language, I try to establish a warm and friendly form of communication.” (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Germany*)

2.4 Further competences & experiences

“I was asked to participate in a team on the school's policy plan. Meso level. During a professionalisation session, I was asked to give a workshop 'Theatre in class' for colleagues in Dutch as a foreign language, that was appreciation for my creative side.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Belgium; translation by the authors*)

“I think that is an important point in the teaching profession anyway, what experiences do you bring with you. That is this biographical aspect. And I notice that there too. And there are also different experiences related to the refugee background, so we do not talk about traumas, but that is totally noticeable, simply that all these aspects also play a role.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, expert 1, ll. 534-538; translations by the authors*)

3 Access to (international) students and families

3.1 Students in general

“The subject I teach, I have also learnt like the pupils I am currently teaching. So I teach with empathy and I am always closer to the pupils so that they are interested. And as a teacher from another country teaching them, they see me as a role model and I think that is also a source of motivation for students.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Germany; translation by the authors*)

“They came to me and said "Teacher, you are a role model for us". I was satisfied when they said that. They said that another teacher told them what I had achieved in my life and they told me that they are also struggling in their classes and perhaps also going to achieve something in school or in life like their teacher. Then they told me that. The headmaster at the time also told me: "You are a very good role model for our students, especially for foreign students." That made me happy. I hope they appreciate me.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 2, ll. 547-553; translation by the authors*)

“I have also received questions from German students. They have heard some things from Turkish friends or Arabic friends and wanted to understand them and then had confidence in me, as their teacher, and have now come to me. “Because a foreign teacher can finally help us.” I thought that was great. “What does it mean, what is it like when someone does something that way?”, and I thought that was good too. It is a good opportunity for both sides, that teachers from other countries are also there and the students also see that I also have a friend who comes from country 1. I think they feel a bit safer then.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 2, ll. 645-651; translation by the authors*)

“And above all for the students, that they see someone who has now made it. She now speaks an excellent German. They see, aha, it works. They see someone who has already arrived. They see an anchor here at school. Especially for the language support classes (with newly arrived pupils), it is

an unbelievable gain that she is here. Because we were in the dark, working with these classes was also completely new for us." (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 210-215; translation by the authors*)

"Another point I would say is that we could be role models at school for the children or young people who come from educationally disadvantaged families." (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Germany*)

"As an international teacher, I feel that students can ask questions about different cultures or different ways of life more freely. For example, I often have many conversations about the difference in schools and education." (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Slovenia*)

3.2 International students (and families)

"I understand the refugee children better." (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Germany*)

"As an international teacher - and as a native language teacher, I am a role model for the international students who have the same cultural background, which encourages the students and gives them a certain confidence in their new home. I am also an 'intercultural bridge' between the students and their parents and the teachers." (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Germany; translation by the authors*)

"Ability to interact with foreign students and understand their needs and desires which has increased the importance of my work with my colleagues." (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Turkey*)

"Such teachers can of course also put themselves in the position of students. I think, more than someone who has had little experience of living abroad with such barriers as well." (*Hachmeister, 2022, expert 1, ll. 46-48; translation by the authors*)

"The situation is different in her language support classes, where she also addresses the issue [of her escape story] herself. Simply to build a bridge for these children. So in the language support classes, this is a topic, she deals with it very offensively." (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 328-330; translation by the authors*)

"Yes, absolutely, especially in the language support class it is a great benefit! Because we have students there, some of whom are very new in Germany. If they come from an Arabic background, they do not know how to write, nor do they know English that could be used to help them. She then translated and interpreted several times. It is also very nice for the children to have someone who understands them." (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 190-194; translation by the authors*)

“You notice that you have a diverse group of students, many with a migration background, although it is less in our town compared to other schools, I think, but of course we also have children with a migration background. But hardly any teachers. And I think that made it clear to me again how important it would actually be for many more people with a migration background to be able to go into the teaching profession, because I think they would have or do have a completely different approach to such students.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 305-311; translation by the authors*)

“And so it was just great for the students to see that there is someone with a migration background who functions completely normally as a teacher and who also has a role model function. There is someone who has his story and has made his way, why should not I be able to do that? And I believe that especially for the students from the international class, which no longer exists, but students with a migration background like him, he is a great role model.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 263-268; translation by the authors*)

“I can contribute to diversity and solidarity of school life being a role model for the students with migration background.” (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Germany*)

“I enjoy helping foreign students in the process of adaptation and therefore I gain new experiences and skills. It is very appreciated by the principle of the school, by students and their parents. They are very satisfied and thankful and that’s enough for me.” (*Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Slovenia*)

3.3 International families

“On the other hand, he is also a great enrichment for us, he lives here in town, he knows many Arabic families. And he also supports us in conflict situations with the families because he also speaks the language. But that only turned out to be a great advantage later on.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, head teacher 5, ll. 36-39; translation by the authors*)

“For example, many colleagues also have students with a migration background, the parents do not know German. Some of them come to me. A few days ago a colleague came to me: “I need help, do you have a little time?” I said, even if I did not have time, I would take it always, I always have time. Things like that, they are happy about a lot, that I am always there for everybody. I think that is nice.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 1, ll. 453-457; translation by the authors*)

“We have already had students with an Arabic background who somehow caused problems - where the parents did not speak German either - with the children it usually works. Most of the time it is the parents who are the problem when you have something to talk about. Then teacher 1 could translate. She speaks Arabic and Kurdish, so that was very helpful.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 207-210; translation by the authors*)

“I know that she is also involved in parent work in the language support class. She is also present at parents' evenings to translate. And I can imagine that this is helpful, that she is used there very, very well.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 266-268; translation by the authors*)

“And especially the parents were very happy because I think they were really interested in understanding what is actually going on here and above all to see that there is someone who seems to be trustworthy, because I think the hurdle is quite big to reveal oneself. I do not know the language, I do not know the culture and it was a great thing that he was there, because the whole thing took place in a very trustful environment.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 126-131; translation by the authors*)

“Parents with a migrant background, they feel more comfortable with me (especially if they suspect that other teachers discriminate against them). [...] Children are happy when they see that there is something in common between their teacher and them (or their family), e.g. culture, language etc.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Sweden; translation by the authors*)

4 Intercultural knowledge

“I can deal better with other cultures.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Germany; translation by the authors*)

“Teacher 2, however, brought in a great combination and that was his language. First of all, it was great that there were young students with an Arabic or Kurdish background who actually had a role model, who went to him, sought dialogue, that is, there was suddenly an intercultural competence that has been really good for the school.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 106-110; translation by the authors*)

“And with him, the migration background is also a strength, because he brings with him an intercultural competence that the school did not have before. We hardly have any teachers with a migrant background, I do not know of anyone right now.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 256-259; translation by the authors*)

“And since this year we have two language support classes at our school, which of course also consist of many different children, including refugees. From Syria, Eastern European countries, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Iran, Iraq [...] I think that these classes have it much easier at our school because teacher 1 was already there. Because it is simply not so usual that refugees are at our school and are part of our everyday school life. And if a teacher is also part of it, then that is something else too. There are not so many barriers. There are not the other students and there are us, but it goes right through all hierarchies, I would say. I think that paved the way for the language support classes.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 102-110; translation by the authors*)

5 Multilingualism

“And partly also for students who know German, but have difficulties in some cases - that is, they are motivated, but have difficulties understanding things, that they could always go to him and say: Here, please explain it to me again, maybe in Arabic or Kurdish. I do not understand the homework or what was asked of me. So the shortest way, that students always approached him and asked: “Can you explain this to me in my national language, so that I understand it” (*Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 2, ll. 131-137; translation by the authors*)

“But many asked me if I come from France [*laughs*]. Yes, maybe until now they/ I do not know, but I have not experienced anything like that/ but they have respect, I think, for the language I speak. The students like that very much. Whenever I have a substitute lesson, the students say things like: “can you teach us a little Arabic or Kurdish or write our name on the arm in Arabic?” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 1, ll. 610-614; translation by the author*)

“In our centre I give Dutch courses for non-native speakers. In my country of origin, I taught English courses. Because of my background, but also because I had to learn the language (Dutch) at an older age, I can often recognise and identify the difficulties that our course participants experience on their learning (and integration) path. This enables me to respond appropriately to the needs and difficulties.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Belgium; translation by the authors*)

“So preparing lessons, supervision, interpreting. Many colleagues come to me now and say that we have Arabic-speaking or Kurdish families. So I am Kurdish myself, my mother tongue is Kurdish. I then translate German-Kurdish, German-Arabic and so much tutoring as well. So there are Germans and foreigners who speak Arabic or Kurdish. If they do not understand something about my maths, physics or other subjects, I am happy to help them. That is extra. I do this voluntarily at school, these are my tasks at school.” (*Hachmeister, 2022, teacher 2, ll. 115-121; translation by the authors*)

“Well, I am a Portuguese teacher of English in Belgium, the Flemish side and because I am so keen on learning other languages, I spent some time with students who speak Turkish, Albanian, Arabic or Romanian at home, talking about their languages in comparison to English.” (*ITTS-survey, 2021, teacher in Belgium*)

6 Pluralisation of ideas of normality in schools

“My vision of life in Slovenia is different from that of my Slovenian colleagues because I chose to live here and I have to make an effort to adapt myself to the habits that are not mine. For them, every situation is ‘normal’ and ‘logical’. But what is normal and logical is not the same for everyone. For me, the classes are rather homogeneous in contrast to those in my country. As a result, Slovenian students and teachers all think more or less the same and do not see other cultures. For example, if we had students of different origins, different religions in the same class (at least half of them), we would treat the question of identity differently (a theme for the language class to deal with).”
(Brumen et al., 2023)

“But then I quickly realised that this is actually very much, how shall I say, interculturally enriching for me. And then I realised that the teachers also have a lot of other questions about culture, this culture, this system and so on, and then I simply realised that this is a very interesting area where you can also think about a lot of things that you sometimes simply accept. It just illuminates a lot.”
(Hachmeister, 2022, expert 1, ll. 23-27; translation by the authors)

“I benefit above all from the fact that I am sometimes shown a slightly different view of things and that I am not always stuck in my usual role. That the international teacher gives me the opportunity, because he accompanies me almost every day, to have a change of perspective and thus to reflect on my own role and in principle to develop myself and not only to bring him forward.” *(Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 5, ll. 129-135; translation by the authors)*

7 Personal competences

“The ability and willingness to make something out of nothing, at low cost. I created my own practice from zero, to looking professional.” *(Brandhorst et al., 2023, teacher in Poland)*

"How she struggles to get a foothold here. I also found it very enriching to work with her. What this family has taken on and still does. She has also done incredibly much for integration at our school, without doing much. Simply due to the fact that she is there." *(Hachmeister, 2022, mentor 1, ll. 91-94; translation by the authors)*

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