

Challenges Faced by Internationally Educated Teachers

Language can sometimes be a barrier to full participation

Maggie – an IETC

And before I came to OISE, I worried about my language barrier and the culture because for Chinese people sometimes we don't have many problems with reading, and we have a problem with speaking. So I think as a teacher if I cannot speak fluently, how could I teach students? That's my big concern before I came to OISE. After I came to OISE, my concern came true and the situation sometimes were worse. For example, I met difficulties most ESL students have in their schools; sometimes people or classmates don't want to be my partner. I can understand because people care about their marks and it's natural for people to find a strong partner because they work at the job and the assignments done easily and quickly. However, sometimes it made me feel bad.

Tara – an IETC

The day I got my admission I was extremely happy but at the same time I was worried because I knew that my language is going to be a barrier for me, and when I started my classes I realized that I was right and language was a barrier for me.

Limited fluency can impact a teacher's self-confidence and ability to manage a classroom.

Maggie – an IETC

Before I came to OISE, I was very concerned about my English proficiency, specially my spoken English. My concern was that without fluent English, so that means if I can't speak English very fluently, how could I manage the classroom? I know that classroom management is a complex issue even for experienced teachers, so for me, I am an internationally educated teacher candidate and I am a new teacher. I was about that how could I manage the classroom in a proper way to deal with the students? So that's the big concern for me.

Sergio – an IETC

Maybe something I could say about concerns during the program was classroom management. Before starting the program, I didn't think much about it. This is still something that I need to work on. I think I am doing fine but it's like a long process.

IETCs' knowledge of written English can be another source of concern

Maggie – an IETC

And I also worried about my writing; so I thought that, I am thinking that I am not going to be a professional writer, write in the perfect English. I mean that if I write something on the blackboard, I want it perfect without any grammar mistakes. I think as a teacher it's very important to be perfect in everything but I know my English is not ready for me to be perfect in everything, that's another my concern.

IETCs' level of English proficiency may affect their self-image and self-confidence

Tara – an IETC

So the first day in our humanities classes when students started to talk and contribute to the class, I felt really bad because I realized that comparing to them my vocabulary is very small. I speak in very simple sentences and I cannot be as complicated or as sophisticated as others. So at the bottom of my heart I felt like an idiot because I felt I'm illiterate, I'm not good enough to contribute and share my ideas in the class. So I have many ideas, I knew what I want to say but because my sentences were not as complicated as others I was not willing to share.

IETCs' ongoing personal efforts combined with support from others can lead to improvement

Maggie – an IETC

And finally, I think as an ESL learner, I still feel my English is not good enough. I need to improve, I know, but I think for personal efforts and societal input are very necessary in improving one learner's English.

IETCs' knowledge of context-specific language will improve with feedback from colleagues

Kate Moore - Former Facilitator/Counsellor at Skills for Change (A Partner in *Teach in Ontario* initiative)

... also addressing things like language. So, often the IETs come in from societies where one only talks in the male gender if talking in terms of an example, "Well, he would do this, he would do that." And so making sure that they are using inclusive language and again just doing the teachable moments all the time to get them used to that.

IETCs' accent can sometimes be a barrier in interactions with students, colleagues and parents

Tara – an IETC

And of course, I wanted to be a teacher, so I was not sure how I am going to do in a classroom setting as a teacher who speaks English with an accent, and maybe sometimes I had this feeling that maybe I will have some problems with the students, they will make fun of me, or I may have even problems with the associate teachers or with the parents. There were all my concerns before starting this program.

Group work and presentation skills can also cause concerns

Katherine – an IETC

So my concerns that arose were with the whole bunch of group work and presentations that we had to do. It's really different if you are presenting to people who speak the same accent and understand you as opposed to speaking to a whole bunch of native English speakers. So that was part of my concern.

Culture shock is a challenge to overcome

Clyde – an IETC

Maybe they might have had a little language problem or cultural or culture shock problem. Maybe they didn't want to admit this but there were some people who confided in me and said they cried tears, you know, for different reasons: some being cultural, not being accustomed to Canadian classroom or how it operates, being frustrated.

IETCs' needs may be different from those of Canadian-educated teachers

Jinah Kim - Education Officer - Ontario Ministry of Education

... but there were a few who were internationally educated or trained, and their needs were a little bit different than the Canadian-trained INTs. There was that cultural aspect that you've been talking about, Lynn. They said their top priorities were classroom management 'cause that's was different and has nothing to do with subject-matter, classroom management, special ed., because a lot of times where there were trained special ed. kids weren't integrated into a regular classroom as well as the way we assess and evaluate here in Ontario. So they were looking into those kinds of things.

Orientation to the Canadian culture and educational system is essential to the success of IETs

Jinah Kim – Education Officer – Ontario Ministry of Education

And one of the things they specifically asked for, the IETs, was an orientation, not necessarily what everyone else gets but an orientation to the culture, to the cultural aspect of Ontario and that could look very different depending where you are. Toronto is very different, than you know Sault Sainte Marie or Muskoka or the east or the west, so we heard that very clearly.

IETCs should become familiarized with Canadian communication styles

Katherine – an IETC

Communication in Western cultures is that, I think you said that too, that people jump right in and it's interrupting one another and just being assertive and talking and everybody is talking and contributing all at the same time.

Systemic barriers faced by IETCs can sometimes seem insurmountable

Katherine – an IETC

When I came here to Canada, the whole system itself, the government system, the political system didn't even recognize my degree. So that does make me doubt my academic credentials, so I had to go to two years of university here when I was already considered a university graduate back home. So I definitely had doubts about my academic preparation for the OISE program. And considering how competitive OISE is, so I knew I was competing against the crème de la crème. So those were my concerns, I was intimidated academically and I would say, I was also intimidated socially because English, even though we spoke English back home in the Philippines, I still had to take the TOEFL exam. So there was still that whole connotation that my English wasn't good enough and that there must be something wrong with my accent and all that kind of stuff. So English, I never thought about myself as having English as a second language but here I was considered an ESL person and I had to take an exam. And so it wasn't, so aside from thinking of English as a second culture, there is the added barrier of you as an ESL speaker and you had to speak very carefully because people might not understand you. So I was intimidated academically, culturally, socially.

Mentors can make a difference

And so I came to the program. When I came to OISE, I wasn't sure if I would be able to handle the load but I was really lucky because I had a mentor who was also a teacher.

A lack of experience teaching a certain age group can also present a challenge

Sergio – an IETC

I thought that if I passed the English exam, I would have enough of the language to understand and to go well with all the different requisites here. My big concern was actually dealing with high school students because I don't have much experience with them in my own country. I taught in the university, I was a teaching assistant for many years but that was relating with young adults rather than with kids in their teens, so that was my big concern before entering here.

Knowledge of the Canadian educational system is important

Tara – an IETC

As Maggie mentioned, it's very important to know the Canadian education system. Maybe it seems funny for you, but I didn't know what's a homeroom because I didn't know what does it mean. We don't have anything like a homeroom, when it comes to our education system.

Differences between the home country and Canada can present new challenges for IETs

Clyde – an IETC

So when I came to Canada in October 2004, it was something of a cultural shock for me because when I thought I was exposed to lots of ethnicities or races, when I looked around me, even this room right now, there're must be maybe different 40-50 ethnicities in this single room. So I didn't have a small inkling or small little view of what Toronto really was. In many ways it was a culture shock for me much as so going into a classroom, talking about ESL, talking about behavioural kids. My school life really, never really had students labelled or identified as behavioural or whatever. It's either you made it or you didn't. So in many ways, the Canadian educational system is so much different from many others, especially in Guyana. One thing we do there, we dress in uniform, so but I don't understand why in Canada you don't, maybe like winter and all that. So it was, there were so many things I had to learn. There was a culture too of language, the way we speak. I never thought I have an accent 'til I got here.

Knowledge of pop culture can contribute to more effective teaching

Antoinette Gagné – Academic Advisor for the ACSC

The knowledge and understanding of the Canadian school system and also pop culture that exists for young people in Canada, that is as much a barrier for internationally educated teachers for whom English has been the medium of instruction. There are many parts of the world where in fact English is the language that's used every day but where the norms, both in school and outside of the school, are very different. And we are finding there's a dual challenge. So in the support we offer we try to mesh those two elements and that's why even the title of our centre is the Academic and Cultural Support Centre.

Getting volunteer teaching experience can be a challenge

Tara – an IETC

When we came to this country not knowing anyone, so I didn't have any friends who were teachers, so I could ask them if I can volunteer in the school. So what I did is I went to my local school and asked them if I can volunteer there. I showed them my credentials and they easily said no. They didn't want me to be a volunteer there, so I didn't know exactly how to get that volunteer experience, or that experience you need to apply for Teachers' College here.