

# Teaching in Poland: an initial teacher education initiative to develop skills in meeting the needs of learners with English as an additional language

## Authors:

Dr Mary Stevenson\*, Helen Gadsby, Julie Collins and Maria Herrera

School of Teacher Education, Liverpool Hope University.

\*corresponding author Dr. Mary Stevenson, E: [stevem@hope.ac.uk](mailto:stevem@hope.ac.uk)

For author biographies see end of this article.

## ABSTRACT

In this paper we report on research arising from an innovative project in which secondary pre-service teacher trainees at an English university are offered an experience of teaching in Polish schools, through a collaborative arrangement between Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK and colleagues at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Poland. The project is an enhancement of the PGCE course and is offered to all trainees across nine subject disciplines. In 2017, the project involved 64 trainees and 6 staff from Liverpool Hope, students and staff from Nicolaus Copernicus University, and teachers and pupils in 12 schools in Torun.

The impetus for this project arose due to the requirement for teachers in England to be trained in techniques to teach speakers of languages other than English and the limited opportunities to put this into practice in the Merseyside area due to local demographics. The rationale for this approach is supported by Putnam and Borko (2000) (Situative Theory) and Dewey (1938) (active deliberate engagement with problematic situations for learning).

During the project, a carefully designed programme of planning, teaching, and evaluation provides a sophisticated and powerful pedagogical model. Trainee teachers work in small teams co-teaching in pairs, observed and supported by peers and a tutor. Teams meet on a daily basis to discuss and evaluate their teaching. Reflection is led by the trainees, with tutor support.

Our research indicates that benefits to trainees arise from having opportunities to:

- reflect upon and improve their teaching in a challenging but supportive context,
- observe peers teaching, and learn from each other both within and across subjects,
- teach whole classes of pupils whose first language is not English.

As a result of participation in the project, pre-service teachers' confidence and communication skills are enhanced, especially in relation to clarity of talk and instruction in the classroom.

# INTRODUCTION

The Poland project evolved out of a geography conference in Torun, Poland, where initial contacts were made, and has grown from just 12 secondary geography trainees in 2006 to a maximum of 79 trainees in 2015. In 2009, numbers increased due to the addition of science trainees, and in 2014 the enhancement was made available to the whole secondary PGCE cohort of 9 subjects (see Table 1). Outcomes of earlier visits are reported in Gadsby, Charzynsk and Stanczyk (2008), Gadsby and Bullivant (2011), and Gadsby and Rowe (2011). Findings indicate that participation in the Poland visit enabled trainee teachers to critically re-evaluate taken-for-granted pedagogical practices and to develop their intercultural awareness. Key themes emerged relating to their understanding of effective pedagogy, English as an Additional Language (EAL) teaching, and collaborative teaching. This paper builds upon this by reporting upon research carried out with the 2017 group of 64 trainees.



Table 1. Numbers Participating in the Poland Project Over Time  
(Table provided by Charzynsk, P. (2017))

## PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

A carefully designed structure of planning, teaching, and evaluation provides a pedagogical model which is sophisticated and powerful. The trainees spend one week in Torun and teach on three of the five days. They teach in subject pairs on a topic of their choice, in a different school each day. The pupils' age and level of English varies each day depending on the school. The lessons planned by trainees, therefore, have to be very adaptable. Trainees can only use the resources they take with them, and no ICT facilities are available; many schools only have blackboards. There is structured

preparation pre-project, including initial planning and detailed briefing of trainees, covering pedagogical issues and cultural awareness. Input on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle et al., 2009) is led by Modern Foreign Language (MFL) trainees, with guidance from MFL tutors. Trainees gain confidence in their lesson planning by working together and refining practice both in advance and over the 3 days in school.

Trainees are placed in the schools in cross subject teams with an accompanying Liverpool Hope tutor. This allows them to observe teaching outside their subject area, which helps them to develop their knowledge of a wide range of teaching strategies. While in the schools, the trainees also act as teaching assistants to each other, which enables them to learn how to deploy additional adults in their classroom. At the end of the day there is a feedback session where the trainees and tutor have a reflective developmental discussion of each lesson and make adaptations for the following day's teaching. Trainees write reflective commentaries in their pairs, which develop into a detailed reflection of their learning, and contribute to the final evidence base for their teaching qualification. Thus, a cumulative and supportive feedback and feed-forward process develops through the week. This process impacts on trainees, on the tutor team, and on trainee-tutor relationships, resulting in closer collaborative working after the project. The initial aims of the project were to enhance the trainee teachers' understanding and skills in teaching pupils with English as an additional language. As the project developed it became clear that, while supporting this aim, the impact on trainees was much more wide-reaching, as we report below.

## **WIDER IMPACT**

An important feature of the project is that, over time, several of members the Liverpool Hope secondary tutor team have accompanied the trainees at least once. This has allowed for significant collaboration between and across subject specialisms. It has led to a shared understanding of different teaching pedagogies and different approaches to giving feedback as well as active developmental discussions around structure and content of the course and trainee progress.

Many of the Polish schools involved in the project have been doing so for 10 years. The Polish pupils and teachers have the benefit of participation in creative approaches to learning, which are often different from traditional Polish approaches to pedagogy. This offers an enhanced and stimulating experience. In particular, Polish teachers are interested in developing strategies for active learning, which is a well-developed pedagogy in England. Collaborative working with Polish colleagues at Nicolaus Copernicus University creates space for tutors to discuss teacher education in an international context, including the role of international league tables and the impact of different pedagogies and policies in other European countries. English and Polish university students have the benefit of meeting and working collaboratively and sharing good practice.

Further links were developed when a maths tutor from the university ran a workshop at a maths conference for teachers organised by one of the participating Polish schools. Further, in 2017 an ERASMUS agreement was signed between the two universities to enable future collaborative work.

## EXTERNAL ENDORSEMENTS

The project was praised by OFSTED in their inspection of Initial Teacher Education at Liverpool Hope University:

An increasingly effective strand of training is developing trainees' skills and strategies for teaching pupils for whom English is an additional language. For example, science and geography students spend a week in Poland, teaching in Polish schools. (OFSTED, 2012a, p.17)

The project has also been highly rated by external examiners:

'EAL placements and teaching opportunities in Poland were rated very highly by the students'

'Course strengths: EAL provision – the Poland trip and EAL placements'

(Gault, 2010)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND SUPPORTING EAL LEARNERS

The continued movement of people around the world due to globalization and free movement within the European Union has changed the landscape of classrooms in the United Kingdom. Social, political and economic factors have made UK schools rich culturally and linguistically. The Department for Education (DfE) and the National Council for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) acknowledge the need for all trainee teachers and existing in-service teachers to be prepared for teaching pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) (Department for Education, 2013).

It is an essential requirement for trainee teachers, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and in-service teachers to grow in confidence when adapting their teaching to respond to the needs of all pupils, including those with EAL (Bourne and Flewitt, 2002). Teaching Standard 5 asserts teachers should know how to:

T5: Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them (DfE 2013, p.12).

The ever-growing multicultural classroom in the UK requires teachers to be responsive to themes such as bilingualism, second-language-acquisition research and the integration of pupils from diverse social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds and traditions. Training teachers for diversity explicitly forms part of the Teachers' Standards (Butcher et al., 2007). The managing of teaching of EAL is seen 'as a generalist skill desired of all teachers' rather than just a skill for language specialists (Creese 2004, p. 190).

It is important to distinguish between different groups of pupils whose mother tongue is not English. The acronym EAL is widely used in many contexts. In UK classrooms and according to OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), an EAL pupil refers to a learner whose first language is not English. It is

recognised that pupils may speak several languages in addition to English and that English could be their third, fourth or even fifth language. The term ESL is used for English as a Second Language speakers such as those whose mother tongue is Welsh or Gaelic who have English second language for communication. The term EFL denotes English as a Foreign Language and applies to students learning English but living abroad (OFSTED, 2012b).

The Poland enhancement initially aimed to develop trainees' EAL skills in accordance with the Teachers' Standards set by the DfE. However, it soon became apparent that this experience enabled trainee teachers to broaden their adaptability across many areas of their professional practice (Mahan and Strachowski, 1992). We find that the Poland experience provides trainees with skills that will enable them to understand and acknowledge the interaction between language, culture and practice, and consequently be more confident when dealing with EAL pupils in today's UK classroom (Roose, 2001).

This short academic sojourn (temporary stay abroad for a specific purpose such as academic study, Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001) leads to numerous practices for meaningful and transformative learning which are connected to Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and transformative learning theory (TLT) (see Figure 1). The relevance of ELT in the Poland sojourn refers to what Kolb describes as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Passarelli and Kolb (2012) noted that ELT '...provides a model for educational interventions in study abroad because of its holistic approach to human adaptation through the transformation of experience into knowledge' (p. 138).

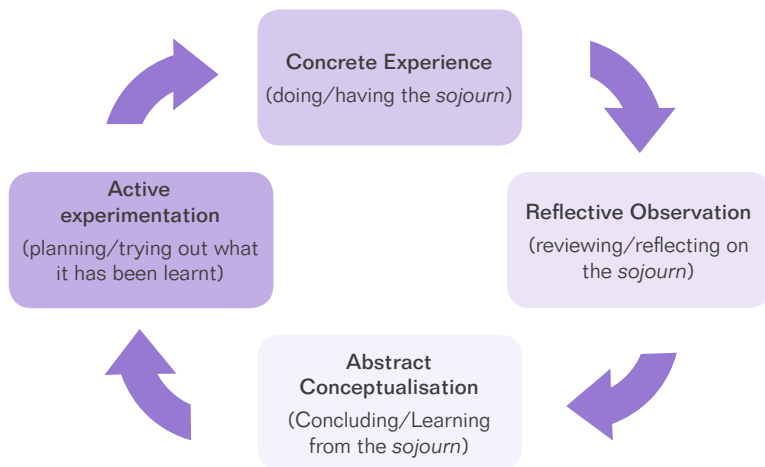


Figure 1: Adapted from Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984, p. 38)

Following Kolb's model, the concrete experience or task undertaken by the trainees is to teach lessons to Polish pupils through the medium of English. This involves a dual educational focus: teaching content to pupils who have English as an additional language. This educational approach is linked to what Coyle et al (2010) defined as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL is considered as: '...an

educational approach in which various language supportive methodologies are used which leads to a dual-focused form of instruction where attention is given to both to the language and the content' (Coyle et al, 2010, p. 3).

Reflecting on and discussing the strategies used facilitates the conceptualisation of the learning and teaching process in the unknown situation (Polish sojourn). This learning process must involve the development of learners' cognitive skills, as the acquired language learning strategies must be used to manage the new language and content. Equally, trainees have to master the metacognitive skills of planning, delivering, monitoring and evaluating the learning that takes place. Thus, Bruner's theory of instruction and his idea of 'scaffolding' (Bruner, 1983) is relevant in facilitating the learning of EAL and the subject content.

A synergy develops between learning content and language. This is the process where 'learners use the new language to acquire new knowledge and skills and as they do so they make progress in both language and subject area content' (Coyle et al, 2009, p. 4). Coyle et al (2010) state that to carry out a successful CLIL the 4Cs framework needs to be applied: subject matter (Content), language learning and language using (Communication), learning and thinking (Cognition) and intercultural understanding of the world we live in (Culture) (see Figure 2).

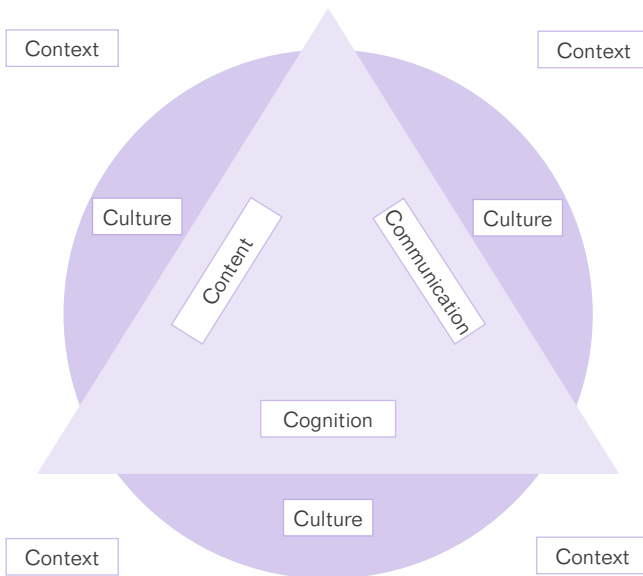


Figure 2: 4C's Framework for Successful CLIL, Coyle et al (2010:41)

The outcome for trainee teachers in understanding and experimenting with this teaching approach is to be able to close the gap that exists when dealing with EAL pupils. The CLIL approach will connect what the learner can currently do and the expectations for his/her ability. Therefore, CLIL offers suitable cognitive challenge to pupils at an accessible linguistic level.

## METHODOLOGY

During a whole cohort lecture, all secondary trainee teachers were invited to complete a short questionnaire about their prior knowledge, experience and confidence in teaching EAL pupils. Responses were obtained via a Likert scale. Seventy-three completed questionnaires were returned, including 37 from trainees who were going to take part in the Poland visit and 36 from trainees who were not going to take part in the visit. Quantitative data was obtained from this data-set, then analysed and summarised.

Subsequently, on the last day of the Poland visit, all trainees were invited to complete a second questionnaire. Sixty completed questionnaires were returned. Both quantitative (Likert scale) and qualitative data was obtained. Quantitative data was analysed and summarised as percentage scores. Qualitative questions were coded and analysed.

Ethical clearance had been obtained in advance via the usual university channels. Attention was given to mitigate any possible effects of power relations within tutor-student relationships. Research information and consent forms were provided with the questionnaires. It was made clear to trainees that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and they were free to withdraw at any stage.

An important limitation of the data collection was that questions probed trainees' perceptions of their knowledge, experience and learning. We did not attempt to measure or validate this independently in this study.

## RESULTS

### PRE-TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

The following results were obtained from an analysis of the pre-training questionnaire, which asked trainees to rate their confidence in teaching EAL pupils before their Poland experience on a 3-level scale (very confident, confident, not confident at all):

- 56% of the whole group (n=73) and 60% of the prospective Poland group (n=37) indicated that they were not confident at all in the use of key pedagogies in meeting the needs of EAL pupils.
- 53% of the whole group and 59% of the Poland group indicated that they were not confident at all in addressing the needs of EAL pupils generally.
- 60% of the whole group and 65% of the Poland group indicated that they were not confident at all in planning lessons to include EAL pupils.

These responses indicate that at this early stage in the course, the majority of trainees lacked confidence in these areas. It is interesting to note that responses from the group who had chosen to take part in the Poland trip rated their confidence levels lower than the cohort as a whole.

### POST-TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

The first question invited trainees to rate their confidence in teaching EAL pupils both before and after their Poland experience, on a 5-level scale (very high, high, medium, low, very low). Ninety-three percent of trainees reported an increase in confidence, with 79% increasing by 1 or 2 levels, and a further 15% increasing by 3 or 4 levels. The mean gain in confidence was 1.7 levels.

The second question probed more general areas of teaching skills and invited trainees to rate their skills enhancement across a range of areas on a 4-level scale (greatly enhanced, significantly enhanced, enhanced a little, not enhanced at all). Table 2 shows the percentage of trainees who reported their teaching skills 'greatly' or 'significantly' enhanced in each area.

Teaching skill	%
Ability to adapt lessons	89
Team teaching skills	70
Peer observation skills	82
Non-verbal communication skills	58
Range of EAL strategies	83
Ability to demonstrate enthusiasm for subject	71
Ability to reflect in action /during teaching	78
Ability to reflect on action / after teaching	87

Table 2: Percentage of Trainees Reporting Greatly or Significantly Enhance Confidence (n=60)

These results show clearly the positive impact of the Poland experience across a wide range of

### QUALITATIVE DATA

In the qualitative section, open questions probed: 1) the wider skills and understanding gained by trainees as a result of the Poland experience, and 2) how trainees perceived their experience in Poland would impact upon their future practice as teachers. A total of 179 comments were analysed.

A significant number of trainees specifically commented on an increase/enhancement in their knowledge, skills and confidence in meeting the needs of EAL learners. This was in addition to their reporting on it in the quantitative section. However, what was more notable in the qualitative participant responses was the extent of *wider* knowledge and skills development that was reported. It was very clear that the experience of team teaching in this very different context had impacted trainees' knowledge and skills across a broad range of areas. Key themes that emerged from the data were: adaptability, clarity of verbal communication, non-verbal communication strategies, reflection, cross-subject development, and EAL skills. Below are example comments related to each of these themes, which were extracted from the data.



**Adaptability:** The most commonly cited development was in adaptability. There were 45 comments relating to this.

*I have improved my ability to adapt lessons during teaching.*

*It has given me a great ability to adapt lessons as and when necessary...thinking on the spot of different strategies to get pupils to understand.*

*When lessons need to be adapted I will be more confident with this.*

*Being able to adapt and change quickly working with others team teaching.*

*My skills as a teacher have broadened in having been forced to move away from teaching with powerpoints.*

**Clarity of Verbal Communication/Instructions /Vocabulary:** There were 38 comments relating to improvement in clarity of verbal communications.

*I am aware that I need to speak slower.*

*I have learned about scaffolding for language not just subject content.*

*The need to reinforce key words and explain tasks clearly.*

*Simplification of vocabulary.*

*I have taken away useful hints and tips that I have learnt from peers, e.g. hand gestures and how to chunk information and explain things in easy to understand pieces.*

**Use of Non-Verbal Communication Strategies:** There were 9 responses relating to the use of non-verbal communication.

*I now have more ideas of how to explain key terms visually.*

*Incorporate more body language.*

*Recognised the importance of non-verbal communication.*

**Reflection:** There were 10 responses relating to development of capacity to reflect upon teaching (own and others').

*How to observe lessons and key things to look for.*

*Ability to adapt and reflect on lessons/activities.*

*My reflective practice skills have been greatly enhanced, and through observing/being observed by my peers, my ability to adapt and improve lessons has developed.*

**Cross-Subject, Learned New Strategies:** There were 7 responses about learning new teaching strategies from teachers of subjects other than own.

*I have learnt a lot from watching other subjects and how they approached teaching in an EAL setting, such as envoy tasks and using visuals on the board*

*I have developed my teamwork skills and I think team teaching is rewarding and a lot of fun*

*The ability to observe different lessons from multiple subjects is a really good aspect of the trip*

**EAL Skills:** There were 16 responses that focussed specifically on improved EAL skills.

*It has given me a lot more confidence in teaching EAL pupils back at home*

*If future practice includes working with EAL pupils, I feel much more confident in this aspect and will be able to address the issue better*

*Use of EAL activities such as non-verbal communication, use of images and getting pupils to repeat words*

*I had not had any real EAL experience in my first placement. I feel confident working with EAL in my next school*

Additionally, there were comments relating to other general areas of development, including planning, differentiation, scaffolding, use of interactive teaching approaches.

## DISCUSSION

Much of trainee teachers' development during their professional training course is in the form of experiential learning in the school context (practicum). Trainees have to develop proficiency in the 'plan, teach, reflect, adapt' cycle. Time spent away from the classroom (e.g. in meetings with school colleagues or in university seminars) provides opportunities for structured and meaningful reflection upon classroom experience which is difficult to achieve in the busy teaching 'moment'.

A short, focused international experience such as the Poland sojourn amplifies this effect due to the new, unfamiliar nature of the context. Additionally, the carefully planned model in which structured reflection is built into the pattern of the day ensures that maximum benefits can be attained. There are few opportunities in the PGCE course for the trainees to observe their peers teaching and give feedback, so this is a strength of the project as it encourages them to articulate to each other what good practice looks like.

Our data reveals that via the Poland sojourn, trainees' learning is enhanced and their knowledge developed through the transformation of their practical experience of planning, teaching and reflection in schools (Kolb, 1984, Passarelli and Kolb, 2012). They emerge with improved knowledge and greater confidence in meeting the needs of EAL pupils (Roose, 2001).

At the end of the academic year, the team carried out interviews with trainees from the Poland trip. This was an opportunity for trainees to discuss if/how they had used the skills they developed during the Poland enhancement, in their teaching since that time. Analysis of this case study data will form the next strand of our research. We see this as an ongoing project and hope to continue to develop the research, aiming both to improve our own team practice and to disseminate within the wider ITE community.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Mary Stevenson** began her career as a secondary mathematics teacher, and was head of department in two schools. Since moving to Liverpool Hope, she has taught on a variety of mathematics and mathematics education courses. As Coordinator of Secondary Mathematics Education, she leads and teaches on the PGCE Mathematics course, the Mathematics Enhancement Course, and a CPD programme for serving

mathematics teachers. Mary's research interests are the nature of subject knowledge for teaching, and the impact of overseas experience upon teachers' professional skills. She is involved in the running of a small educational charity, and this work has taken her to various locations in India.

**Helen Gadsby** is a senior professional tutor working in the faculty of education. Helen is the course leader for PGCE Secondary Geography and also teaches on the BA QTS primary courses and across the masters provision. Helen is currently in the final stages of her PhD at UCL looking at fostering reflective practice in secondary PGCE students. Helen's research interests are reflective practice, teacher pedagogy, mentor development and sustainable development.

**Julie Collins** has a background in secondary school Science teaching, as a head of Biology and is now a Senior Professional Tutor in Science Education. Since moving to Liverpool Hope University she has taken on leadership of the Secondary Sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Biology) PGCEs and regularly teaches on primary teacher training courses.

**Maria Herrera** began her career in Spain as a Secondary Modern Languages teacher. She moved to the UK in 1989 and worked in a range of Wirral and Knowsley secondary schools, both in a pastoral role and as Head of Spanish. She also worked with primary schools introducing and developing primary languages. Maria joined Liverpool Hope in 2001. She has been involved in a Comenius 2.1 project, working in partnership with the Universities of Venice, Krakow, Sevilla, and Berlin with a research focus on developing training materials for Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in primary ITE. She has also been engaged in a Comenius Regio Partnerships with Castilla y León and Sefton Local Authority, to support the learning of English and Spanish as Foreign Languages in the schools of Castilla y León and Sefton.

## REFERENCES

- Bourne, J. and Flewitt, R. S. (2002) *Teaching pupils from diverse backgrounds: what do trainee teachers need to know?* Southampton: University of Southampton.
- Butcher, J., Sinka, I. and Troman, G. (2007) Exploring diversity: Teacher education policy and bilingualism. *Research Papers in Education*, 22(4), 483–501.
- Bruner, J. (1983) *Child's Talk: Learning to Use the Language*, Oxford: OUP.
- Coyle D, Holmes B. and King, L. (2009) *Towards an integrated curriculum – CLIL National Statement and Guidelines*. London: The Languages Company.
- Coyle D., Hood P. and Marsh, D. (2010) *CLIL Content and Language Integrated Learning*. Cambridge, CUP.
- Creese, A. (2004) Bilingual teachers in mainstream secondary school classrooms: Using Turkish for curriculum learning. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 7(2&3), 189–203.
- Department for Education (2011) *Teachers Standards*. Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/301107/Teachers\\_\\_Standards.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301107/Teachers__Standards.pdf) [accessed 15 June 2016].
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan Co.

Gadsby, H., Charzynski, P., Stanczyk, R. (2008) Europeanisation of teacher training curricula in new migration times. In: Donert, K. and Wall, G. eds *Future prospects in Geography, HERODOT Conference Proceedings*. Liverpool Hope University Press

Gadsby, H. and Bullivant A. (2011) *Embedding global learning in teacher education*. 27-29 January. Learning and Teacher Network Conference: Berlin.

Gadsby, H. and Rowe J. (2011) *The transformational impact of a school based international placement on the professional learning and identity of student teachers in England*. 14-16 September. ECER Conference: Berlin.

Gault, A. (2010) External Examiner's report on PGCE Secondary course at Liverpool Hope University (unpublished)

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Mahan, J.M. and Stachowski, L. L. (1992) Self-reported reshaping effects of foreign student teaching upon young teachers. *Education*, 112(2), 329-362.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills (2012a) *Liverpool Hope University Partnership Initial Teacher Education Inspection Report*. London: OfSTED.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills (2012b) *English as an additional language: Briefing for section 5 Inspection*. London: OfSTED.

Passarelli, A. M., and Kolb, D. A. (2012). Using experiential learning theory to promote student learning and development in programs of education abroad. In: Vande Berg, M, Paige, R. M. and Hemming Lou, K. eds. *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. pp. 137-161.

Putnam, R. T. and Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15.

Roose, D. (2001) White teachers' learning about diversity and 'Otherness': The effects of undergraduate international internships on subsequent teaching practices. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 34(1), 43-49.

Ward, C., S. Bochner, and A. Furnham (2001) *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. 2nd ed. Hove: Routledge.