Teaching overseas to invigorate your teaching

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I’m on the faculty at Biola University, Department of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, teaching students in an MA and undergrad TESOL training program. In 2017 I took a sabbatical from that job and went to Tajikistan as a Fulbright scholar.
Tajikistan is the poorest of the post-Soviet –stans, a mountainous country in the center of Central Asia.
Outline

- What I learned/gained
- Opportunities

In my presentation this afternoon, I’ll be talking about two things—what I learned (which I hope will inspire you) and what opportunities you might find for doing something similar.
The first thing I gained was that SLA came alive. I studied SLA in graduate school, and I’ve taught SLA in Biola’s graduate program, but it’s different to experience it in a fresh way.

There are two working languages in Tajikistan: Tajik, which is a dialect of Persian but written with the Cyrillic alphabet, and Russian, a legacy from the country’s days as a region in the Soviet Union.
It was interesting being a multilingual country and hearing bilingual speakers code-switch. I know we hear it in California with people who can deftly mix Spanish and English or Vietnamese and English, but it was fun for me to hear Russian and Tajik too. It made my sociolinguistics studies come alive.
I had studied Russian in college, a long time ago, and I tried to revive it for day-to-day interaction. So another concept from my days studying SLA that began to come to life was the forgetting curve. Another one was fossilization. My Russian was bad!
I confess that I did not prioritize language learning the way I tell my students to do. I contented myself with what was really just playing around. I would read signs like Shaurma (OK, got that), Hot Dog (OK, that’s easy), and Sosiska b teste and try to guess the new word. Hmm….sausage in ___. What are sausages put inside? Could it be like a corn dog or pigs in a blanket? Teste might mean dough. How fun! I figured it out! But finding a language tutor and reviewing verbs of motion in Russian and practicing how to tell a story in Russian? No. Sadly I found myself too busy. I experienced what I tell ESL students—just because you live in a place where the language is all around doesn’t mean you don’t have to study.
Yes, I could use google translate and my buried-deep-in-my-brain bits of Russian and I could get things done. But my conversations were like this: Hair cut? Possible? Same, but shorter. Photo, please. For souvenir. How much? Thank you.

It made me conscious of the big difference between survival phrases and real conversation. Let’s help our students get beyond single word utterances! At the same time, vocabulary is immensely valuable for beginners in an target-language community.
I mentioned that I was trying to revive my Russian. But I was also interested in Tajik and it was fun to learn some things about it. For example, what would be /a/ in Farsi is often pronounced as /o/ in Tajik. They don’t say Tajik, they said Tojik. So another thing I was reminded of is that rules and patterns can be very helpful for learners, whether they are related to pronunciation, spelling, or grammar.
I also had vivid experience with the importance of knowing the meaning of a word before reading it. It’s not easy to read a new script, is it. But when I knew the word – Dushanbe—I could just glance it at read it—fast, the same way I do in English. But if it was a word I’d never heard of before, like this one, I had to sound it out letter by letter. T – a – glotal – r – i – x – u. Rapid and automatic word recognition and reading skills are very difficult without a foundation of meaningful language. A great SLA principle come to life.
And speaking of reading, I found I couldn’t even read the numerals a clerk wrote on my new local phone number contract.

I had to re-write the digits to make sure I could read it!
And when this note was stuck under our apartment door, I knew it was in Russian and I could figure out one word (Rudaki, the same of our street) but I couldn’t read the rest of the handwriting.

Do we have students who may be stuck with things like that in American English? Can they read our handwriting on the board, for example?
Another aspect of SLA that leapt from textbook knowledge to real-world experience was how much affective factors can affect language acquisition. CLICK For example, when I got sick (sorry if that photo of rough toilet paper is more than you wanted to know), I had no energy for language or culture; I could hardly get the bare minimum of my work done.

The photo on the right on the right is one that nearly got me arrested. The president of the country (photo on right, one of thousands of billboards with his image) has the roads cleared wherever he goes. When I took a photo of his motorcade, a police officer came right over and started yelling. The stress immediately made me go blank. The only Russian I remembered was, “I don’t know, I don’t know.” Furthermore, I couldn’t even figure out how to use my camera and delete the photos—which is why I still have one photo left after showing the policeman that’d I’d deleted them.

What’s going on in our students’ lives that might be making them forget what they know, skip class, or otherwise fail to live up to their potential?
In short, I refreshed my head knowledge of second language acquisition but I also increased in empathy for ESL and EFL learners. I hope that I am a more patient and understanding teacher. I hope I am a teacher who more clearly knows the value of learning strategies, good scaffolding, encouragement, and much more.
I worked very hard during my sabbatical—with my assigned university teachers who wanted to develop their capacity to teach academic writing, with another general TESOL methodology class, by travelling to regional cities for teacher workshops, and by assessing the English of various candidates for U.S. embassy programs. I grew professionally as I developed new workshops and tried to come up with new ways of teaching that fit their local context. There were days of hard work, stress, and professional stretching.
But I also found it to be a change of pace—and therefore, I experienced restful days as well. I enjoyed exploring markets, baking pies with fresh fruit for my students, time with my husband to go on hikes in the beautiful countryside, and much more.
I’ve told what I experienced. I hope that your appetite had been whetted for an international experience—perhaps to give you empathy and fresh insights for your students, perhaps to expand professional opportunities, or perhaps simply as a change of pace.

Are you ready?

- Empathy and fresh insights to help you teach and serve your students
- Professional challenges and growth (that might open up new avenues for work)
- A change of pace to prevent burnout
Let’s move to the second part of my presentation.

Invest in professional development

- U.S. government funded
- Other government funded
All of these: available to U.S. citizens in good health. All of these provide benefits such as airfare and a stipend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace Corps</td>
<td>Post BA</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Location not guaranteed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulbright ETA</td>
<td>Post BA</td>
<td>1 year +</td>
<td>Must apply to one country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Dept ELF</td>
<td>Post MA</td>
<td>1 year +</td>
<td>May indicate regional preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Dept EL Specialist</td>
<td>Post MA or PhD</td>
<td>Several weeks</td>
<td>Apply to pool, wait for invitation</td>
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Peace Corps – two years plus three months’ training
One of the biggest areas of service is education.
Average age 28.
7% are 50 or older
Education programs require a BA and a minimum GPA of 2.5

The Peace Corps website says that a competitive applicant will have some TESOL or Education training and at 3-6 months of English or foreign language tutoring, of students at least 12 years old, in a structured program, that provides training, and that involves at least 10 hours a month.
In the Peace Corps there are four main roles involving TESOL: Secondary Education English Teaching, Primary Education Teacher Training, Secondary Education English Teacher Training, University English Teaching. People with majors in education or TESOL or teaching experience will be placed accordingly. People with an MA TESOL may be placed in a university.
Peace Corps Response is a program for returned PC volunteers or professionals with at least ten years’ experience. The terms are 3-12 months.
Current examples:
- Teach EFL in Mexican universities, MATESOL, three years’ experience, intermediate Spanish
- English Teacher Trainer in Sierra Leone, relevant BA, MA preferred, two years’ experience, esp in underserved areas
The goal of the Fulbright program is to facilitate cultural exchange for the purposes of promoting mutual understanding. The English Teaching Assistant grantees are considered cultural ambassadors as well as teaching assistants. Classroom responsibilities vary greatly (Spain—run the Model UN program in bilingual secondary schools; Malaysia—help out in classrooms in rural schools, Tajikistan—teach your own classes at American Corners).

Grants are for one year, with the opportunity to renew.
Teaching assignments vary:
Primary, secondary, university, American Corners, teacher training colleges...
Language requirements vary.
- None required in Indonesia
- Preferred in Bulgaria
- Recommended in Oman
- Required in Latin America

Fulbright grants can be very competitive, but the competition changes from country to country and year to year:

*Examples:*
- Tajikistan: 1/2
- Morocco: 1/10
- Peru: 1/15
- Croatia: 1/29
Grant statement: why you are interested in TESOL, why you have chosen to apply to country X, what you will be able to bring a classroom there, ideas you have for teaching students from a different pedagogical tradition, and how you will engage with the host country community.

Candidates who have not resided or studied in the country to which they are applying for more than six months, not counting undergraduate study abroad are preferred. For most programs, applicants who have had extensive previous foreign experience in the host country are at a competitive disadvantage, but are still eligible to apply.

Fulbright Diversity Statement
'The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State strives to ensure that all programs conducted under its mandate reflect the diversity of the intended audiences. The Bureau aggressively seeks and actively encourages the involvement of U.S. and international participants from traditionally under-represented audiences in all its grants, programs and other activities. These audiences include, but are not limited to women, persons belonging to racial and ethnic minorities, persons living in underserved geographic locations, persons belonging to religious minorities, persons of lower socio-economic status and
ELF
• 10 month term
• MA TESOL or related degree, plus two (or three) years’ experience,
• Personal qualities of patience, determination, flexibility, teamwork, initiative, and a love of adventure
• Preferred: one year of teacher training experience, commitment to field of TESOL and professional involvement (e.g., conference presentation)
• Competition seems to depend on the year and the region
ELFs’ duties vary…
• Teach English to college students
• Teach English to professionals, e.g., journalists or lawyers
• Train teachers
• Engage in American Corner (or club) activities
• Participate in summer camps or outreach activities
• Present at conferences
• Do curriculum, materials, or test design
Time line for application: rolling applications starting in October through the spring. After being reviewed, successful applicants are matched with project in late spring or early summer. Orientation is in DC in August. Departure for the field is in early fall.

Application materials include two one-page lesson plans or teacher training modules.

Process: Applicants are identified as qualified or not. Georgetown identifies finalist candidates for specific US Embassy sponsored projects in various countries. A particular embassy makes the final decision who to invite.

There is a Saturday morning session about the ELF program.
The EL Specs program is another US State Department funded program. Specialists are experts brought in to a country to carry out a specific project designed by the embassy to further its public diplomacy goals (e.g., English Teacher Mentor program: training English teachers in Tajikistan).
English Language Specialist

• Two weeks to four months
• Process—apply for pool; wait for call.
• PhD or MA TESOL with desirable specialty
• Five or more years’ experience teacher training, teacher supervision
• Experience conducting workshops
• Commitment to field of TESOL (articles, books, conference presentations, professional service)
• Additional skills/ESP:
  The arts, Aviation, Business, Disabled learners, Engineering, English for academic purposes, Hospitality, Law / law enforcement / border guards, Literature, Medicine, Summer camps, Technology, Young learners...
Next I want to talk about programs that are funded by governments of a variety countries. Let me describe six that I’m familiar with.
Korea

- TALK program – for people with 2 years of college
- EPIK program – for people with a BA/BS
  - Maximum age: 62
  - The more TESOL training/experience, the higher the pay
  - Co-teaching with a Korean teacher or teaching conversation (more for teachers with MA)
  - Apply in Feb or Aug for a one-year term

https://www.epik.go.kr
Spain

• Qualifications
  – BA/BS or MA/MS
  – Know basic Spanish
  – 50 years or younger (most are 21-35)

• Duties
  – Assist teachers in K-12 classrooms

• Apply in Jan-April to work October – May
• Must cover airfare and first month’s expenses
• Google *spain auxiliar* (for the program site and other information)
France

• Qualifications
  – BA/BS
  – Speak French (BI, intermediate level)
  – Less than 35 years old

• Duties
  – Teach oral classes in K-12 schools

• Apply by Jan 15 to teach October 1 – April 30
• Must cover airfare and first month’s expenses

http://highereducation.frenchculture.org/teach-in-france
Georgia

- Qualifications
  - BA/BS in education-related field or BA/BS in any field plus teaching experience

- Duties
  - Assist local teachers, 25 hours/week, esp listening & speaking, grades 1-6

- Apply early (latest, July 1) to teach Sept 15 – June 15

- Benefits
  - Round-trip airfare, stipend, live with host family

http://www.tlg.gov.ge/
Japan

- Qualifications
  - BA/BS
  - Be interested in Japan
- Duties: Assistant Language Teachers
  - Work with local teachers in K-12 schools for 35 hours/week
- Apply in Oct-Nov, interview at Japanese embassy in Jan-Feb, start work in July-August
- Benefits
  - Round-trip airfare, salary
  
  https://jetprogramusa.org/
Hong Kong

• Programs
  – NET scheme – primary schools
  – Enhanced NET scheme – secondary schools
  – Two years

• Qualifications
  – BA/BS: preference for Education, English, and TESOL majors
  – Teachers with a relevant MA will work in high schools

• Apply by January to begin work Aug 15. Process includes an interview and written test. Competitive.

• Good salary
Besides the government programs, you may want to research opportunities to be hired directly by a school in a part of the world you’re interested in.

Direct institution hires

• Paid and volunteer positions
• Schools of all types – pre-school to university and beyond
• Looking for airfare and salary? Explore countries with strong economies; stay at least a year
• Lots of different job/service websites
Now let me present a checklist you might go through before making such a move. The first question relates to your goals.

Checklist

• Why international experience?
  – Position yourself for a job at home
  – Take a break/get refreshed
  – Position yourself for a promotion
  – Return to a place from your past
  – Engage in service
  – Your reasons ______________________
Some opportunities mean that you’ll leave family behind, but others provide opportunities for them to go with you. If you teach at an international school, for example, your kids might get free tuition and you may want them to have that experience. For some Fulbright grants, there is provision for dependents. This first photo shows my then third grader and kindergartner with me in Turkmenistan—where I had a Fulbright grant training teachers for a semester. The second photo show my husband Lee, who came with me to Tajikistan last spring since he also got a sabbatical from his work. He was able to have meaningful opportunities volunteering. Other spouses who accompany grantees work remotely. There are lots of websites that help prepare families to go overseas, so I’ll let you explore you that on your own.
One big question is to ask yourself how much time you’ll have. It could be that you could travel for a summer with no problem at all—just tell your coordinator you’re not going to be available to teach summer school this year. You may be someone lucky whose boss would allow you to take a semester or even a year off for a sabbatical and then return to the same job. It could be that you’re in between jobs or you’re hoping to do something new and you think time overseas would help you move toward a particular goal. In that case you might have one, two or three years to invest.
A big question for many people is where to go. (1) For some people, time overseas is a chance to strengthen a language studied long ago or a chance to explore one’s family history. (2) Some people say, “I’ve always dreamed about going to Indonesia or Morocco or wherever.” (3) Some teachers are motivated by need. They want to serve students or teachers who might otherwise not have good resources. (4) Some pragmatic people simply look for openings. These pragmatists may look for a place where salaries are good. Their pragmatism might also be related to openings where the competition isn’t so stiff. For example, one out of two Fulbright ETA applicants to Malaysia got a grant last year, but only one out of five got one for Thailand.
The process to get from where you are now to a place of international teaching will vary depending on many factors. Here are a few things to put on your to-do list. (1) One is to check your finances and decide whether you need a paid position or can afford to volunteer. (2) Another is to decide which program or option you want to go forward with. Engage in due diligence to find out whether it’s a good option. (3) Once you’ve decided on a program you will give you an idea of deadlines and whether you need to start planning a month in advance or a whole year. (4) Once those things are in place, there are many specific preparation steps. I’ve just listed a few examples here.

Checklist

- **Process** – what will it take to get there?
  - Finances
  - Which program/school/option:
    - Evaluate
  - Deadlines
  - Preparation
    - Examples:
      - Ask more questions: be sure
      - Get a house-sitter
      - Get immunizations
      - Get a head start on language
      - Gather resources
      - Pack
Slides will be uploaded on the CATESOL conference site

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