

From the Editors

As we write, there is an air of hopefulness that we may soon be able to gather in person as increasingly more people receive vaccines for the COVID-19 virus that has swept across the globe this past year. The pandemic disrupted many activities, including those associated with our overseas student teaching program. In the middle of the 2020 spring semester, student teachers in partner schools overseas ended their placements abruptly when international borders rapidly began to close.

The articles included in this *Field Notes* issue illustrate how the pandemic impacted those student teachers' perceptions as well as how the overseas experience helped shape their practice.

As you peruse the newsletter, you will learn about Bea Randolph's experience teaching high school mathematics at the American School of Barcelona in Spain and how she managed to continue teaching at the school virtually after returning home. You will also read about Caroline Ackerman's pre-pandemic experience student teaching in an elementary school on the South Island of New Zealand and her plans to teach there when the country's border opens again. Then you will get a glimpse of how overseas student teaching inspired Mary Allison Steel, a recent program completer, to seek a teaching position at our partner school in Stockholm, Sweden, where she is now thriving.

These articles illustrate the value of student teaching overseas as a vehicle for helping participants expand their global perspectives and design strategies that promote intercultural understanding on a global scale. We hope you will find the stories inspiring as you think about ways you can help your students expand their perspectives and learn to work with those who come from cultures and countries different from their own. We would appreciate having the benefit of your thoughts about this important topic, should you have time to share. We would also be happy to share with you more about how the overseas student teaching program, and other global initiatives, prepare our teacher candidates to address the needs of all students by creating bridges of understanding across cultures in ways that extend beyond our national borders.

May the year now unfolding be bright, providing opportunities for expanding our horizons!

Sharon & Mary

Unprecedented Times

Beatrice Randolph, Secondary Mathematics
Barcelona, Spain

"Unprecedented" seems to be the best word to describe what we all experienced in 2020. The word certainly applies to my student teaching experience in spring of that year. The semester started off as planned, and in January and February I was student teaching at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky. At the beginning of March, I began student teaching at the American School of Barcelona (ASB) in Spain as part of the Overseas Student Teaching program. This program requires a prerequisite course, a lengthy application process, and months of pre-planning, and I was absolutely ecstatic to be chosen for this opportunity.

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Secondary Math Education student teachers Gertie Sercus and Bea Randolph are pictured at Paul Laurence Dunbar High school. Read more inside about Bea's overseas experience in Barcelona, Spain.

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Within a few short weeks, I had bonded with my host family, my fellow teachers, and my students. The culture of ASB is one of collaboration and high academic achievement. Students and teachers alike are pushed to further their skills through trying new things and working together. I had the privilege of working with Steve Gnagni and Stacy Sommerfield, two of ASB's secondary math teachers. I felt challenged in the best possible way to change my teaching strategies to include more student engagement and group work. Every single teacher I interacted with was passionate about not just their subject matter but finding the best methods with which to teach that material. It was truly the most stimulating and dynamic work environment I have ever experienced.

On the morning of Thursday, March 12th, only two weeks after my arrival in Barcelona, I woke up to messages from the UK Education Abroad office, and my parents, relaying the announcement of a travel ban, and telling me I needed to return to the US within the next 48 hours. The response to COVID-19 had become increasingly more serious in Spain during my time there, and the school was planning to spend that Friday in a trial run of virtual learning with the students still at school. Teachers would prepare virtual lessons, and students would complete them at school, with the hope of troubleshooting any problems right then and there. The enormity of the pandemic was rapidly becoming apparent. I prepared a lesson on Thursday, taught it on Friday, and flew out of Barcelona in the afternoon. The definition of "normal" was shifting so fast it was hard to keep up.

Finding a flight was intense and difficult. Misinformation was circulating about whether the travel ban applied to US citizens, and thousands of travelers were booking flights and crashing travel websites. I managed to book a ticket with an overnight layover in Frankfurt, Germany, arriving in Detroit (the closest airport to my parents' house) by Friday afternoon. After many hours of travel, I arrived home safely, ready to quarantine for 14 days.

Having to change plans so quickly was a test of my adaptability, but it has been my experience that teachers are among the most nimble professionals. So, channeling my inner teacher, I accepted the situation in front of me and made the most of it. Saying goodbye to my students and coworkers, who I had met only two weeks earlier, was difficult. In such a short amount of time, they had welcomed me so warmly that I already felt at home. However, safety had to come first.

Returning to the US from Europe was a surreal experience at first, not least because of the jetlag. The average person in Spain had already realized COVID-19 was impacting their community and had accepted the idea that social distancing orders were fast approaching. In the US, many universities were releasing students for spring break. The vast majority of K-12 schools were still open. The average American was not thinking of COVID-19 as being in their back yard yet. Within my first week of being home, however, universities and schools transitioned to virtual school, and states began imposing "stay at home" orders.



Beatrice Randolph admired Antoni Gaudí's Dragon Gate, one of many works around Barcelona designed by the renowned Catalan architect.

I was initially worried about how my student teaching would be impacted by being stuck at home. However, proving once again how supportive they are, the teachers in Spain agreed to continue mentoring me during this experience. Mr. Gnagni was wonderful about embracing virtual learning! Our school gave everyone a few days off to allow teachers time to prepare virtual content, but then we jumped into virtual instruction headfirst. We communicated via Zoom, email, WhatsApp, and Google Hangouts as we designed lessons, shared ideas between teachers, and kept up with our students.

Using a mix of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, we tried to model healthy responses to the COVID-19 situation. Through the end of our spring semester, people in Spain were confined to their homes except to access food or healthcare. Our students found ways to stay engaged and keep their spirits high, including showing up

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to Google Meet classes wearing silly wigs and telling jokes via the chat. The teachers and staff did a fantastic job of maintaining a sense of community during quarantine, too. I was invited to a weekly happy hour with trivia and lots of laughs. Even though we were not in the same place, they found ways to make me feel included.

I was initially hesitant to commit to attending the school's synchronous class sessions due to the time difference, but I realized that (1) I wanted that personal, face-to-face connection with my students, and (2) nothing was tying me to Eastern Standard Time, since I spent all my time at home anyway. My students got a kick out of asking me what time it was for me with our first period starting at 3:10 a.m. EST. The students were fantastic! They genuinely wanted to learn, tried their best to focus on the task at hand, and acted more maturely than many adults have in the face of this unprecedented situation. Their smiles, dedication, and effort made it all worth it.

This experience taught me how to have grace under pressure and remain calm while navigating uncharted personal and professional territory. Steve Gnagni is an amazing teacher, so working with him--despite being on different continents--was a privilege. He shared many teaching resources and tips, yet he also admitted when he was unsure how best to proceed. In those situations, he treated me as a true co-teacher and asked for my input. Ironically, I may not have experienced that level of professional collaboration from a traditional in-person student teaching experience.

Throughout this unprecedented time I was also interviewing for graduate assistantships and deciding where to pursue a master's degree in higher education. Even though I am not currently working as a teacher, the adaptability and virtual communication skills I learned while teaching remotely have served me well in my graduate courses. Since college students were K-12 students in the not-so-distant past, I find myself using my knowledge as a high school educator on a daily basis. Experiencing both overseas and virtual student teaching during a pandemic expanded my view of who students are, what teaching can look like, and how humans can adapt within trying circumstances.

COVID-19 is something I definitely didn't see coming, and we are still discovering its long term effects on everyday life. I've tried to embrace the positive outcomes alongside the negatives. As a student teacher, I gained experience in a much wider variety of teaching strategies than I would have in a traditional, face-to-face model. Student teachers, K-12 teachers, university-level educators, curriculum designers, and education policymakers are all engaging in rich conversations as we attempt to provide meaningful learning experiences for our students. We're finding innovative ways to address physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as academic achievement. I've never been more proud to call myself an educator!

A Tribute to Three Stewards of our Educator Preparation Program

We want to take this opportunity to honor three esteemed colleagues, who have each devoted more than three decades of service to our college:

Senior Associate Dean Rosetta Sandidge began her tenure at UK as a research assistant in the Center for Professional Development in the early 1980's. She has led our accreditation efforts for more than two decades. During that time, she has served twice as Interim Dean of the College of Education. Dr. Sandidge has worked tirelessly, and successfully, to highlight the multifaceted ways our programs prepare high quality educators.



Professor Mary Shake joined our faculty in 1985, and during her 36 years of service at UK, she has served in several roles. Dr. Shake was Interim Chair of the Department of Curriculum & Instruction for two years. She also served several terms as Program Faculty Chair for Elementary Education and Co-chair of the Middle School Education Program Faculty, and she was the department's Director of Graduate Studies for more than two decades.



Academic Administrative Coordinator Julie Cleary has been a key member of our Office of Clinical Practices team for more than three decades. She has "worn several hats" over the years, including budget officer, KTIP coordinator, and advisor for our Overseas Student Teaching program. Mrs. Cleary has been an ardent supporter of our programs and a caring guide for our students.



We deeply appreciate the dedication these stewards have shown throughout their tenure. Countless students have been the beneficiaries of their efforts, as have we. We wish them many wonderful adventures as they journey onward!

My Second Home Across the World

Caroline Ackerman, Elementary & Special Education
Greendale, New Zealand

A little over a year ago I was sitting in the middle of the road in Greendale, New Zealand, fending off the slight evening chill with a cup of tea, as my host mom and I watched the family cow graze on the neighbor's lawn. My suitcase sat inside, stuffed to the brim and painstakingly zipped with the help of my host sisters sitting on top of it. This was somewhat of a ritual for us—an evening chat over a cup of tea, the only disturbance being the occasional tractor, sending us dashing to corral the sheep on the roadside. Within a few days, I would board a flight out of Christchurch, leaving my home of four months to return to the US in time for Christmas. Our topic of that particular night: how terribly I wished I were not leaving, and my grand plan to return.

It's hard to believe how much has changed since then. The concept of international travel feels a million years away, a sort of bad joke you'd tell your friends over a Zoom game night: "Hey, want to fly to Paris next week? I'll book the tickets, you book the nasopharyngeal swabs." In the year since my return to the US, the entire world—which I was just beginning to explore—ground to a halt, along with my plans to become a globetrotting, paradigm-shifting educator. All of us have suffered a loss of one kind or another—physical, emotional, financial, aspirational—and my dreams seem less tangible now than they did while I was sitting on a tarmac in the New Zealand countryside. So much is unknown. To take a risk like that now calls for a greater feat of adaptation than ever before. Luckily, New Zealand taught me how to adapt like no other experience before it could have.

I arrived in Greendale on a chilly, but clear, August day. As we drove from the airport, my host dad pointed out cloud formations and explained how they indicated the patterns of the changing wind. I had expected to feel afraid, or at least anxious—after all, I was 8,500 miles from home, bumping along in a stranger's car over roughly paved rural roads dotted with fields of sheep and snowcapped mountains—but in truth I felt exhilarated. I had been afforded an enormous privilege: the opportunity to immerse myself in a cultural education to become a globally minded citizen and educator. I knew, even then, that the next sixteen weeks had the potential to shape my career and, in a grander sense, my whole life.

Three days after my arrival, I stood in front of my new students at Kirwee Model School. Thirty students, ranging in age from nine to eleven, blinked at me eagerly from the rug as I introduced myself. Across the open classroom, I could hear another class beginning as I noted the absence of cinderblock walls that were so ubiquitous in the schools I had attended in my own youth. The students were eager and full of untamed curiosity, and I quickly fell in love with the experiential and play-based learning that the school

emphasized: Students explored engineering principles as they built structures out of old tires and pallets during morning tea time; they learned measurement and temperature conversions as they baked in the school kitchen; and they spent 20 minutes working in groups each morning to design "give back" projects to improve the community around them. It was a truly holistic approach to education, and I savored the freedom it granted me.

I began to experiment with interweaving cultural experiences and play into my lessons. Students spent writing class creating folk songs based on New Zealand mythology, math class finding the areas and perimeters of the netball court and sandbox, and physical education learning about American baseball. Students developed teamwork and perseverance skills on a week-long camping excursion (during which it snowed, and my students serenaded me with Christmas songs despite the fact that a Kiwi Christmas is decidedly sunny), and they held spirited mini-debates about historical issues and figures during our social studies class. In a younger classroom, they read about celebrations in different cultures, prepared rangoli and bibimbap, and created a Kiwi cookbook of their own favorite, uniquely New Zealand recipes.

While I enjoyed honing my academic influence at the school, I soon discovered another passion. My second classroom placement at Kirwee consisted of seventy students in grades K-2, and it quickly became clear that several students were navigating behavioral challenges without a clear support system. The small, rural nature of the school, compounded with New Zealand's preference of specialized schools for students with intellectual or behavioral disabilities, meant that a true behavioral curriculum had not been established. I conferenced with the three team teachers and identified a small group of students who would benefit most from targeted, structured work in social skills—my Kindness Crew.



As a special education major, I had worked with social skills curricula before, and I felt confident I could cobble together a program suited to the needs of my students. I drew from Leah Kuypers' "Zones of Regulation," creating a wall of red, yellow, green, and blue "zone" feelings. Over the next five weeks, I met with the Crew each morning. We began by naming the feeling we would discuss that day and reading a book about that feeling. Students would share their own experiences with that emotion, with an emphasis on their sensory observations. I asked them to consider how their bodies feel when they are angry, sad, or excited. We examined what our faces may look like during a particular feeling, using a mirror and taking pictures to better understand how we can identify feelings in others. We discussed strategies for coping with "hard" feelings, practiced them through acting them out, and finally hung our feeling of the day in its zone on the wall. It was the shortest part of my day, but by far the most meaningful.

As the weeks flew by, and the date on my return ticket approached, I came to the realization that I was not ready to leave. I had already grown roots there, forming friendships and bonds which I knew would last a lifetime.

Moreover, I had spent every weekend since my arrival exploring those twin islands that dot the Pacific, mesmerized by the lush greenery, sparkling cyan rivers, and sunbaked beaches. I bungee jumped from the Kawarau Bridge, kayaked in the mist of Milford Sound, and caught rugby games in local pubs surrounded by friends from the University of Canterbury. I had never been so challenged, or felt so full of life, and it was a feeling I was not ready to lose.

One day, a few weeks before I was to return home, I sat at a playground picnic table following my final teaching observation. My university supervisor, Lynda Boyd, sat beside me. As she prepared to make the half-hour drive back to Christchurch, she asked if there was anything she could help with, and the hope I'd been quietly nurturing burst forth: What would happen, theoretically, if I chose to return? Lynda was encouraging and supportive. She had seen students do it before, she said, and surely with my special education background I could find a position at any of the specialized schools that dot the Canterbury region. In fact, she shared, a friend of hers would be starting a new school in 2021 and would be thrilled to have a special education teacher on board, if I were interested. She encouraged me to reach out once I returned home, assuring me that it was not as far-fetched as I had feared. It was with that assurance in mind that I hugged my wonderful host family, co-teachers, and friends goodbye.



On my last night, my host parents gifted me a necklace bearing the word "Aroha," the Maori word for "love," a reminder of my second home across the world and the days I spent enveloped in their gracious hospitality. I held it as we drove to the airport, my sadness at leaving tempered by the assurance that it was not a true goodbye.

Now, a year after my departure, I still await that reunion. I am incredibly lucky—I have a wonderful position teaching middle school special education, with kind, determined students and capable, welcoming colleagues. I have spent my first year as an educator learning to navigate teaching virtually, in-person, then virtually again, practicing the adaptability that I honed while living a world away. My plans to return are no longer finite in any sense, but they are enduring. It's unclear just when New Zealand will reopen its borders and allow international travel to resume, or when I will be able to return without fear of infecting those who I love there. In the meantime, I rely on FaceTime and social media to bridge the distance, fasten my Aroha necklace under my ID badge each morning, and hold tightly to the knowledge that the best experiences come when we must learn to adapt.





A Reflection on Teaching Overseas

Mary Allison Steel, Elementary Education
Valencia, Spain

My interest in student teaching overseas began the day I walked through Taylor Education Building and discovered a beautiful board displaying *Field Notes* newsletter, with stories by teacher candidates who had completed their student teaching abroad. Despite trepidation over the thought of leaving my familiar surroundings, the stories sparked my curiosity and interest.

Before I knew it, I was heading to Valencia, Spain, where I would teach 27 ESL Spanish-speaking students the basic rudiments of English at the American School of Valencia. While student teaching at the school, I learned firsthand how the teachers there cultivated creativity and promoted learning in ways that celebrated all cultures.

Living in the city of Valencia also proved educative and eye-opening. I learned how blind we Americans can be to how differently those in other countries live. My experience left me with no doubt that I wanted to continue immersing myself in different cultures by teaching abroad after graduation.

Soon after completing my degree, I accepted a teaching position at Internationella Engelska Skolan (IES) in Stockholm, Sweden. Teaching at IES has been the most enriching experience of my life. I teach 107 ESL students—most of whom are refugee students from other countries around the world, and I love my job! I will be forever grateful to those who coordinate the Overseas Student Teaching program at the University of Kentucky.

Mark Your Calendar!

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| January 8
2:00 pm | University Supervisors' meeting via Zoom |
| January 11 | First day of student teaching placements |
| January 11
2:00 pm | ST Orientation via Zoom |
| March 8 | Dual placement student teachers begin 2nd half placements |
| March 23
3:30-6:00 pm | Education Career Fair
Virtual, via Handshake |
| May 13 | Last day of UK's Spring 2021 semester |



Elementary Education majors Kaylie Zander, Emma Schulman, Sophie Robic, and Mary Allison Steel completed their student teaching in Valencia, Spain.