

**An International Student Teaching Model for CTE Preservice Teachers**

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### **Introduction/need for innovation or idea**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in the United States face a critical teacher shortage driven by burnout, workload demands, limited support, and alternative career opportunities (Wood et al., 2024). In October 2024, approximately 23% of CTE teaching positions were unfilled or staffed by individuals not fully certified (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). At the same time, employers increasingly require globally competent workers, creating a growing need for educators prepared to teach within culturally diverse and internationally connected workforce systems. However, traditional student teaching models in the U.S. rarely include international teaching experiences, as placements are typically limited to local schools near the university.

To address both teacher preparation needs and global competency development, [University]'s Italian Student Teaching Program developed an innovative, integrated international student teaching model embedded within the traditional student teaching semester. This approach provides pre-service teachers with an opportunity to teach in both U.S. and Italian secondary CTE settings, strengthening instructional adaptability, cultural awareness, and professional identity while also supporting reciprocal engagement with Italian students, educators, and school communities.

### **How it works/methodology/program phases/steps**

The Italian Student Teaching Program uses a two-phase student teaching structure. Pre-service teachers complete an initial placement of 10-weeks in the U.S. in a secondary CTE classroom, followed by an additional 5-week placement in an Italian upper secondary school. There are eight different Italian schools in the network. Some of the schools allow for two student teachers, while others accommodate one. Placements are coordinated through partnerships between university faculty and Italian CTE-focused schools, ensuring alignment with certification areas including Agricultural, Business, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Technology and Engineering Education.

Italian classrooms often emphasize lecture-based instruction, providing a distinct instructional context that requires student teachers to adapt their teaching strategies, instructional approaches, and classroom management practices to meet diverse student needs. This contrast in pedagogical styles creates opportunities for student teachers to introduce new, engaging, and student-centered teaching strategies that enriches learning for Italian teachers and students alike. The program includes university faculty visits for one week midway through the program. While in Italy, faculty visit each school and student teacher and also participate in a teacher conference as keynote presenters, where they facilitate professional development workshops for Italian educators focused on instructional engagement and student-centered strategies. This structure strengthens reciprocity and supports sustained collaboration between institutions.

### **Results to date/implications**

Since program implementation in Spring 2023, participation and partnerships have expanded substantially. The inaugural cohort included six pre-service teachers placed across six

Italian partner schools, primarily in Agricultural Education. In Spring 2026, the program included nine pre-service teachers placed in eight different Italian secondary schools throughout Northern Italy, with participants now representing multiple CTE certification areas.

Student teacher reflections, faculty observations, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews suggest consistent positive outcomes, including increased cultural awareness, strengthened teacher identity, improved instructional adaptability, enhanced relational classroom management skills, and greater empathy toward language learners. Participants also report increased confidence and professional growth after teaching across two education systems. Italian teachers and administrators report professional benefits through cross-cultural collaboration and exposure to student-centered teaching strategies. Italian students benefit through increased conversational English practice required to graduate, cross-cultural interaction, and broader awareness of international opportunities. Continued partnerships with Italian schools, teachers, administrators, and host families indicate strong program sustainability, with additional schools expressing interest in participation. These outcomes suggest that embedding an international placement within the traditional student teaching experience may be a scalable and impactful strategy for developing competent CTE educators.

### **Future plans/advice to others**

Future program development will emphasize scalability, sustainability, and systematic evaluation. Planned improvements include expanded partnerships with Italian schools to increase the number of placement sites available, increased inclusion of CTE content areas, and the development of formal assessment tools such as pre- and post-placement surveys to document stakeholder satisfaction and program outcomes. Additional program supports will include structured pre-departure training focused on cultural norms, school expectations, curriculum development, and language preparation, as well as formal mentor teacher guidance for Italian host educators. We plan to continue this program into the future.

Institutions seeking to replicate this model should begin with one stable international partnership, establish clear expectations, maintain consistent communication, and designate a primary contact at each partner school. Matching student teachers to placements based on certification area and personal readiness is essential. Faculty involvement through regular check-ins, on-site evaluations, and ongoing communication strengthens accountability and success. While challenges such as language barriers, scheduling conflicts, and travel logistics exist, proactive planning and relationship-building can mitigate barriers and support sustainability.

### **Costs/resources needed**

Program costs remain relatively low. Student teachers pay a \$500 program fee and register for a study abroad course for student teaching abroad. The tuition associated with the study abroad student teaching supports faculty travel and accommodations for in-person evaluations. The program fee provides a stipend to host families. Housing costs are minimized through partnerships with Italian host families who provide lodging and meals. Host families are compensated \$100 USD per week. Student teachers are primarily responsible for airfare and personal travel expenses (e.g., weekend excursions). Overall, the program demonstrates that meaningful international student teaching experiences can be implemented with limited financial burden while maintaining high-impact outcomes for participants and host institutions.

## References

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