WORLDWIDE EDUCATOR

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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What's Life like as an International Teacher?

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Azomco Think Global Podcast

[Intro Music]

Coach Yusef: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another episode of the Think Global podcast. I am your host, I'm Coach Yusef, and today we have a new guest with me. I'd like to shout out Blue Chips Media out of North Carolina for that dope introduction beat. Miss Adrienne Waller is with me today and we're going to discuss all about education and teaching internationally abroad.

Welcome to the show, Adrienne.

Adrienne: Hi, thanks for having me. I'm happy to be here.

Coach Yusef: Hey, Adrienne, last time I saw you were actually here in Qatar. But where are you at right now?

Adrienne: I'm in Kuwait, but since you last saw me, I also was in Shanghai, China. So COVID hit Shanghai, threw things off, I ended up losing my job and... you know, got back on my feet. And now here I am in Kuwait.

Coach Yusef: Well it might be a blessing in disguise? Because you never know how things would have ended up out there. So, you know, we are where we are because we're supposed to be there. That's my beliefs

Adrienne: Agreed.

Coach Yusef: But yeah, we'll get right into it. I know. I think I told you before, but I was actually in Kuwait before for four years. And how are you settled into Kuwait?

Adrienne: I'm adjusting. You know, it's difficult during COVID, you know, because there's a lot of restrictions. So a lot of the things you typically would do for fun here are either illegal or, you know, temporarily shut down, but slowly adjusting. The sisterhood has been really good, knowing... like having sorority sisters to kind of lean on... built community has been pretty awesome.

Coach Yusef: Cool. And how, just very quickly, just for my understanding, how does Kuwait compare to Qatar?

[Adrienne laughs]

Adrienne: Kuwait is slower. It feels like Qatar a few moons ago. And so they're not they're not exactly there. But I mean, the people are really friendly, you know, really in a like when you do start building community, there's really good people here. And I feel like most places are the people, you know, like you can have all the great things to go out and do and all of that. And yes, you want that, but in the end you need to have like a community. And I think community is so important. So I feel like I'm not there yet, but I am slowly building my Kuwait community and everything I've heard from people is like, it's some awesome people here. And a lot of the people I've met have been pretty awesome.

Coach Yusef: Cool, cool.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have my guest on Adrienne Waller and we're going to discuss about international education and teaching in international schools. So we're just going to dive right into it, Adrienne.

We like to start the show always with a little segment called that We call World Call. Okay. That's where we get our guests. 10 seconds to name off some of the countries that you've visited abroad.

Okay. So we are internation channel based podcast and we like to have a very wide diversity of countries and people speaking from different places across the world. But we would like to know where some of our guests have been. So just 10 seconds, I know you're probably going to feel a lot more than 10 seconds, Don't worry. All right. But let's get you on the “World Call”.

All right. 10 seconds. Starting now. Go.

Adrienne: Canada, South Africa, England, Indonesia. Thailand, China. Oh, goodness. Why can't I think Hungary, Czech Republic.

Coach Yusef: 10 seconds is over. That's very good. Good job. Well done. I mean, even the country that you just like, you didn't mention China, you didn't mention Qatar, you didn't mention Kuwait. So your list is very, very big. So congratulations on that. So why don't you just start by telling us, you know, your educational background and like, why did you start getting into teaching?

Adrienne: I'm originally from Michigan. I started my teaching career actually in Chicago. My father passed. So I moved back home and while I was back home, I met somebody who had done international teaching,

which was my instructional coach, and she talked to me about it and she was like, Oh, I met my husband and I went from Guatemala to the UAE. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Hmm. I never heard of it before. And I was like, Why not? You know, I was at a point in my career where I wanted a new challenge, and I thought being international would offer me a new challenge that I wouldn't get in the United States. So I hopped on Teach Away, started applying. Next thing you know, I said, I'm going to Qatar. My friends were like "Where?" and I was like "Yeah, I had never heard of it. There's some little country over in the Middle East", and I got on a plane and I did it, and I never really looked back. You know, I've really enjoyed it. I tell people... people are like, "Oh, well, how do you feel about it?" and I tell them, "Honestly, it's one of the best decisions I made in my whole life."

Coach Yusef: That's excellent. Good on you for that. And so you were actually teaching in Chicago or...

Adrienne: Yeah, I taught in Chicago and I taught in Detroit as well before I moved abroad to Qatar.

Coach Yusef: Wow. Well, public schools in the inner city or...?

Adrienne: Some both in the inner city and Chicago was a public school in Detroit. It was a charter school. So I've had quite a range, you know, internationally, I've taught at private schools, so I've taught at private, charter, public...

Coach Yusef: Wow. So how would you compare the schools like... back home to like... to the school that you're working at in Kuwait? Like, what are some of the challenges working in some of these school environments? What are the differences? Obviously, there's language barriers because the kids are coming from different languages and English and then also probably cultural barriers, especially working in the Middle East.

Adrienne: So I like to tell people like kids are kids. And so like if you kind of go into believing that kids are kids, the basis of the classroom is really the same and it's not that different now, of course. Yes, there's I mean, we have silver pieces of tape covering things up. You know, a gymnast, their arms are covered. This would not be appropriate. What I'm wearing now. So you have to be conscious of that, even certain terminology that's just not acceptable. There's a whole censorship that happens, which is more extensive here than it was even in Doha. So that was a shift. Like their censorship is, is next level.

Like you get ministry print outs of what pages are censored, how they're censored, and you need to follow that to the letter. Of course, if you have any ELL experience coming abroad will be a much easier transition for you than if you haven't. But overall, although people really complain about, like, behavior and things like that, I think if you've taught in the inner city, like not just if you've taught, but if you taught like those kids, those kids who will push the buttons, yeah... Coming out here is actually a relief. You know, like they're more spoiled than they are, you know, rude... completely. You know, it's not... you're not going to have a whole lot of fighting, you're not going to have a lot of people cussing people out. You know, you will have some insubordination. A lot of kids not doing their work.

But overall, I believe kids want to learn. And if you can tap into what motivates them, what they're missing traditionally, where they're coming from, you'll be alright. But that's how I feel.

Coach Yusef: Yeah, absolutely. I agree. That's really well said. One of the biggest challenges I've dealt with teaching internationally and I never taught in the States before, but I notice a little bit of a different dynamic when it comes to public schools and taxes and stuff. Is that the fact that these schools over here are privately owned? Right. And they're essentially they're a business.

So it's the bottom line. They want enrollment and they need more kids that come in order to facilitate the school's operations. And because of that, sometimes the education takes a backseat to actually all the business stuff. Right. And we don't have to talk about the school that you're at before. But previous schools [clears throat while saying “Edison”] that the management was like very bad about that. Right.

And it's sometimes like, you know, you just passing kids through that are reading on a really, really low level and there's no kind of intervention because they know they'll pass on to the next year and then keep on paying that tuition, paying that tuition, paying that tuition. Are those some of the same challenges that you found as well when it comes to management and just profit driven schools?

Adrienne: I definitely think profit driven schools have a different angle. And at the same time, there are sometimes, if they're run well, other things that you get that you wouldn't get. So I try to always glass half-full type of thing, like, in some cases being at the private school, you don't have to worry for resources. You know, sometimes.

Coach Yusef: Sometimes.

[Both chuckle]

Adrienne: You know what. But yeah, I definitely do think that there is a one... So let's backtrack a little bit. Special education is not really a thing internationally as much as it is in like your Western countries. So not just the United States, but even like Australia, England, you know, all these like more Western places, like, special education is very different when you're talking about international and private schools.

And even my comparison to public and charter schools, like special education doesn't have the same weight once you get out of the public school system. So that in general is already putting you a little bit behind. And then the same as for ELL services and things like that. So you're already starting like, you know, ten meters back and then you add in the profits over everything mentality about things that certain things start getting overlooked or pushed on or moved to the side.

But sometimes it's the educators too, you know, it's like, are you demanding more of the kid? A lot of educators who are international aren't trained in skills to meet kids who have different needs. And so that adds yet another layer that in the U.S. there's an expectation of intervention you do in your classroom before it ever gets outsourced.

I've noticed that when I've met teachers from other countries, that's not always the mentality. And so if you don't have that mentality that I have to do certain things in my classroom before it even gets to like intervention, special education referral type of thing, then that also is going to make it seem like the school's not holding up their end of the bargain either.

Coach Yusef: Yeah, that's very interesting. It's really interesting and it's a good perspective too, to think about. You mentioned about teachers coming from international backgrounds. One of the good things that I have experience with teaching in international schools are your colleagues, right, because they are coming around from all over the world and it just makes your job interesting because there's a lot of international awareness.

You go out, you have lunches, you learn about other cultures you might travel back to, you have friends that go to travel back to their countries and you guys get to spend some time about. Can you talk about, a little bit about some of the... not so much specific

colleagues, but just overall, how has teaching with people from various backgrounds enhanced you as a person and as a teacher?

Adrienne: I mean, they challenge our thinking, right? You know, because there's definitely an American pedagogy, right? There are certain things that are very American. And I don't think I realized it until I taught at the school where we met, which was a British school, and I was like, whoa, this is this is a whole... and it's not like I'm like, Yay, British school, but I do have an appreciation for things that they do well, and I have a better appreciation for the things that we do well. And that comes both in like the actual prescribed curriculum, but also sitting and talking to colleagues and hearing like my South African friends tell me about what does teacher training look like in South Africa? What does teaching in South Africa look like in comparison to the United States, in comparison to Australia, in comparison... like and so you get all of these different ideas and you're starting to slap strategies. Oh, well, when we were there we did A, B and C, and I'm like, Oh, I never even thought about that. Or we tried these different things in, you know, it's just been so amazing to share with others, even if it's just sitting in the teacher's lounge and kind of shooting the breeze. You don't even realize how much you're taking in from those people. In one year abroad, you travel a lot. But even if you're one of those people who comes abroad and they stack all their money and go nowhere, which was not me just being in the room with the school where, you know, schools normally are quoting how many nationalities are represented in, you know, it's very easy to have, you know, 15 to 30 nationalities represented between students and teaching staff.

And that's just amazing. Like, how often can you say, oh, I talked with somebody and start listing off like - literally your world call could end up being just who have you taught with? Not even where have you been? Just like who have you been in contact with? You know, like it's just a gift.

Coach Yusef: Absolutely. I agree. I was so valuable. You know, you learn so much from just experience and conversation and dialogue. You mentioned something about the English - the UK curriculum and American curriculum. I completed a master's in education, secondary education, and I was really, really fortunate enough to go through a program, a teaching program. And I believe me, I came from a professional background in sport, so it's like completely united and never in a million years when I thought that I would be become a teacher, let alone be in higher education and completing in the Masters in it.

But I'm so grateful that I did. The course was basically catered towards teachers who are already teaching abroad. So they had like satellite campuses all around the world. You could go there and it'd be really intense for, you know, one month, you have like two modules to complete bam, bam, bam, 15 days in a row you have, you know, a course of papers that you have to complete and presentations all within like two weeks. It was really, really intense. But I learned from a lot of different people who were in the program who were basically just teachers, you know, been teaching for five, ten years already, and they wanted to get a master's or certification in order to get a higher pay salary.

But one of the professors who taught the curriculum theory really, really changed my mind about how I view education as a whole - and basically it was two things, really. Number one, her background was, she was from Baltimore, Maryland, and she grew up in the midst of it, right. And she's obviously an African-American woman. And all the previous teachers were very... how can I say this? Not, they were diverse, they weren't, you know, necessarily black or white, but there were more, let's say, politically correct... And Dr. Brenda Leake, I'll never forget her. She was like full on, like a go-getter. You know, I would almost, not to say ghetto, but, you know, she was she was rough around the edges, right? She's a PH.D, got a doctorate, a Ph.D. in education, and she was the professor of the class. She put up a documentary called “Schooling the World”. I don't know if you ever heard of it or seen it. Well, if you haven't write that down and watch it. And basically it was a documentary about the essence of it. What was the purpose of education? What are we, what it would be, who we provided education for. All right. And then it went into the outcomes of different curriculum, right. How the curriculum can achieve certain goals or certain outcomes that are wanted based upon the curriculum. So when you look at the British curriculum and you look at the American curriculum, we look at I.B. curriculum, Australian curriculum, there are certain outcomes for that, right?

So say for instance, one outcome might be for the, the people, that your students or your schools, your education system to become good citizens, right? Or more critical thinkers, more like entrepreneur savvy, or more owners, provide more ownership, or might just be like follow the rules, right? Like follow the rules and check the boxes to make sure which is going to come out to an outcome that's going to be more like workers, right? You're going to produce workers.

So my question to you is very, very difficult. My question is: what do you think our purpose, the purpose of education is? What are we providing these students with? What are we preparing them for?

Adrienne: I like to think no matter what age or grade, you're working with students, you're preparing them for life and it's you're also preparing them for life you don't know, right? Like the life you're preparing them for is not here right now, right? It's not what we're in now. It's not today. You're in. It's not even tomorrow. You know, this is if you're teaching first grade, you're preparing them for a future that's maybe 15 years away, because, you know, if they go to college or even a training program, like there's this big distance. So you're preparing them for a future that's unknown. And that's how I like to think of education. And so interesting enough, I was in conversation with some colleagues today and we were talking about how often teachers don't always know how the skills they're teaching apply to life. And when you start getting into like higher math and science, sometimes you it starts to be difficult because, I mean, let's be honest, if you're not teaching high school math and science, how much of that do you remember if you're not a scientist, if you're not a statistician and those type of things, But one of my colleagues noted that there are so many cross curricular skills that you learn in that process, like how to use deductive reasoning, how to analyze, how to test the theories, you know, like how to not just, okay, this has happened.

Like, you know, I naturally will control something, control a variable to see like, oh, is this really new, to even in social settings, right? Okay. If I don't like the smallest thing, I stop calling him. Will he call me? You know, like that's a scientific experiment. I mean, it's very low level, but that type of thinking, those skills you need forever in life, right?

You know, being able to think about “how do you manage things?” There's only so much... and if you have limited resources, how does that impact your decisions, and how are your decisions different, and the person you're interacting with, how are their decisions different? And now, how can you look at it from their perspective and your perspective?

So although if you look back at it, the classes themselves, you know, if you look at standard, you know, 10.1 of this or whatever, maybe the standard itself doesn't, but that line of thinking should be preparing you for how do you interact with people, how do you build a business, how do you interview for things like... I have fifth graders

and I would give them jobs, like, you know, you have classroom jobs in elementary school. I had a job application and when they turned them in, I numbered them in the order that they were turned in because there's priority always given to people who submit things first. Right. But if you submitted it first, and you had a bad application, you may not get the job.

But that's a skill that I was teaching them in fifth grade, and I would lay them off if they weren't doing a good job. They wouldn't get paid that month if they, you know, got fired. Like, these are real life things that become transferable, they should be, you know, using it, teaching kids how to be in a group, how to work as a team, how to resolve conflict, and not just me telling you... okay, you come to me with a problem, “Miss, Waller, What do I do?” “Well, what do you think you should do? What are different ways you can solve that?”

Because there's, like, an infinite, many ways. Okay? If you do that, what's going to happen? Well, what if you do this? What else could happen? You know, how do you read a text to understand it? How do you know when you're not understanding what you're reading? What resources are there to help you? Like, this is what school is about and standards are a way to help us get there.

But in the end, we're trying to prepare students for a world we didn't know. Like when you and I were in middle school, did you think the world would be the way it is now? Did you think we would be doing this?

Coach Yusef: I couldn’t even imagine, no.

Adrienne: Right. But our teachers were doing things then to get us ready for today, you know. And so that's how I think of education. It's like a preparation for a future we don’t know.

Coach Yusef: Yeah, very well said. Very well said.

[Break]
Ladies and gentlemen, we have Adrienne Waller with me today. We're discussing international teaching and education. Make sure that you visit our website azomco.com and you can shop for some merchandise like this cool hat and these baller bracelets and we have lots of different t-shirts as well. Follow us on social media. Make sure you hit the subscribe button down below to get subscriptions and notifications straight to your inbox.

Coach Yusef: So we covered a lot today. Adrienne, can you talk about, like, some of the benefits of teaching Internationally? Obviously, you're traveling, we're in a new place that's outside of where we grew up. So there's all this excitement, and it's always challenging and stuff. But can you talk about maybe some of that? I mean, we got lots and lots of time for holidays and summer vacation that we can do pretty much and you still get paid... and so what other opportunities and what are the good things about teaching abroad?

Adrienne: So the first thing of course for me was travel. Like, I wanted to see the world. But what most people don't realize, and I talk about it on my podcast actually, is that not only was I able, in my years in Qatar, my three years in Qatar, not only was I able to get to think 25 or so different countries while being there, maybe 20, (I don't know, I kind of lost count, but let's just go with 20). I got to 20 countries. I also paid off all my student loan debt. I paid off my car, I paid off what I owed for grad school. I paid off a medical bill, a credit card and... did I say my car? But like I got all of this debt cleared up... in the U.S. to do that, I still wouldn't have gotten it done in three years.

Coach Yusef: Yeah, you're just...

Adrienne: and I surely wouldn't have gone anywhere. Yeah. You know, I felt like... and then I was running ragged. So the next thing is, like that work - life balance. I did all of those things while not taking a whole heck of a lot home. You know what I mean? I could leave a lot of work at work. In the U.S. that's virtually impossible.I was going in on Saturdays. I was there early. I was leaving late, you know, making phone calls, and it still never felt like enough.

And now, I really feel like I'm able to do it. And then I met some of the most amazing people, just people who I can't imagine life without now, like legitimately. And I'm not even talking... like, just friends, like people who if they hit me up and were like, Adrienne, I need a place to stay wherever I am in the world, they have a place, you know what I mean? And I feel the same way about them. It's just, it's just priceless.

And the other thing is I'm a better me, right? Who I was when I got on that plane, August 2016, is definitely not who I am now. Even me wearing my hair natural, and I haven't straightened my hair in over a year, that's a journey of being abroad. Like, being abroad helped me with that. I started my own website. I started a podcast, things I wouldn't have even had the mental capacity to think about because I was just trying to get through every day back home. And now I'm

able to dream big, right? I'm able to think big and push myself in ways, you know, I didn't think possible. Losing... how I lost my job and bounced back, I don't know if 2015 Adrienne would have been nearly as resilient.

Coach Yusef: Mmm. A lot of personal growth.

Congratulations, man. I mean, you're really, really have your business and you're moving in the right direction. May God continue to bless you. Yeah, that's really, really inspiring.

So if somebody I mean, you mentioned a lot of really cool things, and if somebody listened to this podcast right now, and they say, “Hey, man, Adrienne's really inspired me and I want to get into teaching internationally.” What advice could you give them or what are some really pragmatic things that we can just start, for somebody to do to put themselves in a position to get a job overseas? I mean, you mentioned teachaway.com, what outside certifications, or what does somebody need on a very basic level, just to get their foot in the door?

Adrienne: So it depends on what country you want to go to. So that's one thing, so there are two schools of thought. If you want to be able to go anywhere, you need to make sure you have your teaching license in whatever country you're from. So wherever you're from, whatever their teaching license is, active, and you know, whatnot.

So that's the first thing, if you want. But if you don't, if you're not as restrictive, and you're like, I haven't done it and I'm ready to go, there are places you can go. So China has quite a few teaching centers that will be a foot in the door where you can start there. They don't pay as well, but your work life balance is a lot better and it's a foot in the door. And then from there, some places will help you get your certification so you can go that route. Your Far East Asian countries are a lot more flexible. So like, not just China, but China, Korea, Vietnam, those type of countries, the Philippines. You can kind of get in as like an ESL teacher and things like that and start until you get your teaching license.

If you want to be competitive and be able, like the Middle East market is pretty much all certifications, like you need to basically be a certified teacher in most of the Middle East. If you just want to live like a comfortable life and you don't worry as much about money, Central and South America are options as well. Australia's process and New Zealand's process is quite lengthy, so if you know you want

to go to those countries, start early, like really early. That process is essentially, if you put everything into it, it's probably about 12 months. They tell you to at least account for six, but with COVID and everything going on, I would say mentally prepare yourself for 12 months and know that most countries that are south of the equator work January to December, so their school contracts are a little bit different. So whereas north of, you know, above the equator, we normally work September until, you know, June-ish time, so like August-September until May-June-ish.

I also put together and I'll share this link with you... I put together a list of recruiting sites and things like that, that people can use to kind of figure it out. I would say if you're going to go the free route (you're not going to pay for a service), you're not going to pay for things like ISS or Search Associates which are your premier recruiting agencies. I would say invest at least in International School Review, where you can read about what these schools are like, because you have some renegade schools at best, and like, you can end up... and I'm still... I feel very fortunate my first school was not the best of, you know, destinations, but it got me here, you know what I mean? So, like, I am very appreciative of even what that experience was, but it's not for the faint of heart.

I would say pack a lot of patience. Like you need a new type of patience if you're going to do this abroad. If you are looking to just relocate and transplant everything from your current life over except get the benefits, that's not going to happen. It doesn't matter where you go. There's a there's a cost to everything, right? You know, like in the Middle East, you give up a little bit of freedom to make some more coin and to be able to see the world, same in China. So you can't just transfer your American life, your British life, your Australian life to a new place. You have to go and accept this new place for what it is. If you're not ready to accept new places for what they are, you may not be ready to be, you know, abroad long term.

And I would say invest a little bit of money, like put a little bit aside. If you're living paycheck to paycheck, do your best. I would say to put about $2,000 aside just to know that you can get all your documents attested. Some schools will pay for it, but a lot won't. You know some schools you have to pay for your flight up front, some will pay for it for you. It really depends. But if you can just set aside about $2,000 to make sure you can ship what you want, get on the plane, whatever, as a minimum that you're okay, like, throwing away, but essentially, you won't be. You'll probably get most of that money back if you're...

Coach Yusef: It's an investment, isn't it? It's an investment. You invest that, and you'll get back more on the back end. Yeah.

Adrienne: Right, right. So those are some of the tips I would give. I did do a podcast episode all on expat life and teaching abroad, so I'll send a link to that episode, but also a link to the resources so that if people do want to kind of investigate it, it gives voices, a lot of different voices about how to prepare yourself, you know, what the challenges are. But the amazing gift that you're given by becoming an expat educator.

Coach Yusef: Wow, that's really, really good advice. And again, very, very inspirational. We will put all, both of those links in the description below. Make sure that you subscribe to this channel and Adrienne, you also have a website that you have some of this information on as well. Do you want to share with the audience there, your website?

Adrienne: Right. So a couple of years ago I started a website called WorldwideEducator.org, and it has lots of resources on everything, from like, there's a lot of information, so you want to know about getting higher order thinking going in your classroom, there's information there, PowerPoint resources. But then there's also blog posts about things like, how do you survive that first year? What do you do in a toxic situation? So there's tons of information there. It also has links to my podcast and to other interviews that I've done, because I really love doing this.. This is really my heart, its like working with teachers and whether those are teachers in the U.S. or a parent, teachers or whoever it is. So WorldwideEducator.org, check it out. Lots of resources there.

Coach Yusef: Thank you so much. Make sure you check out those - her website and all and we'll put the descriptions and those links in the description below. And my guest was very, very inspirational and had insightful information. And we can go on and on forever, but we're going to have to cut this podcast here. Thank you so much for coming on the show, Miss Adrienne, and I hope to see you again soon. Wherever in the world we might be.

Adrienne: All right. Thanks for having me and best wishes.

Coach Yusef: Thank you.

Adrienne: All right, Bye bye.

Coach Yusef: Bye.