

# AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO IDENTITY EDUCATION AMONGST CROSS- CULTURE KIDS IN LITHUANIAN SCHOOLS

**Ling Yi Chu**

*Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania*

**Abstract.** *While Lithuanian schools face an influx of repatriated pupils post-Brexit and due to the COVID 19 pandemic, there is still no clear framework to support schools in integrating the increasing Cross Culture Kids (CCKs) and its school community and beyond. This paper examines the application of autoethnography as a pedagogical strategy for school agents to foster identity narrative spaces in classrooms and as a research method for investigating identity formation in educational contexts nurturing cross-cultural competencies in Lithuanian classrooms. This piece is part of the preparation work conducted for the upcoming serial cultural dialogue workshops with CCKs between 15-18, which borrows from the TARMAC ‘multicultural story’ framework (Ward and Keck, 2021). While autoethnography engages individuals in cultural-analysis-style interpretations of self-reflection, this process importantly aids the location of selves in one’s own narratives by exploring the self-other, personal-political, and self-society didactic- for all the stakeholders in the dialogue- such as the workshop facilitators/researchers and the CCKs and its non-CCK counterparts. This leads to the implications of philosophical and practical education approaches exploring identity and intercultural communication in alternative and non-traditional forms (Wall, 2006). Overall, this paper contributes to the formation of cross-culture transitional care awareness and strategies implemented in Lithuanian schools.*

**Keywords:** *autoethnography, cross-culture kids, identity education.*

## **Introduction**

As student mobility becomes ever more common, schools are faced with reconsidering their role in identity curation as part of adolescent well-being, directly affecting student performance and learning outcomes (Mahoney & Barron, 2020). While Lithuanian schools started facing influxes of immigrant or returning emigrant children post-Brexit and due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the need for a cross-culture transitional care awareness, strategies, and curriculum is

current and urgent (Chu & Ziaunienė, 2021). In the Lithuanian context, the internationally mobile children as trans-narrative subjects surpassingly ones who create a multi-contextual narrative of identity (Garšvė & Mažeikienė, 2019) often find their voices unheard and denied differentiated cultural representation in their local schools due to the historical contexts of the National Revival movement since the 1990s. Changes have been called for with sensitivity, reflexivity and interdisciplinary collaboration (Bagdonaitė, 2020).

This paper is part of the preparation work conducted for the upcoming serial cultural dialogue workshops with CCK students between 15 and 18. These workshops will be implemented both as a *pedagogical strategy* (that equips participants with tools and framework to make sense of difficulties that comes along with mobility) and a *pedagogical intervention* combined with *participatory action research* (which aims for transformative co-creation of meaning, knowledge, and solution with the CCK students). This paper frames the autoethnographical reflection process that the author undertakes *prior* to working with the students. In order to truly return the spotlight to the experience of the CCK subjects, this reflective piece is conducted to acknowledge how the author's nomadic upbringing influences her interest and approach to the upcoming multicultural storytelling workshops and on the research area of identity education in general. By doing so, it is to prevent 'abusing' the subject due to a lack of awareness while perpetuating the so-called 'objectivity'. This documented transformative process has implications on how autoethnography is a powerful tool to impact teaching, learning, and pedagogical research that can contribute to the formation of cross-culture transitional care awareness and strategies implemented in Lithuanian schools.

## Literature Review

### Internationally Mobile Children in Crisis

The term *Cross-Culture Kids* (CCK) was introduced by Ruth E. Van Reken (2002) to reflect on the effects of globalisation and better include more faces of multiculturalism. "A CCK is a person who is living/has lived in – or meaningfully interacted with – two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during the first eighteen years of life" (Van Reken, [www.crossculturalkids.org](http://www.crossculturalkids.org)). This definition can grasp the "new normal" alongside the global decrease of truly monocultural communities. Traditional indicators used to define 'otherness' continue to break down, increasing personal identity questions. The expanded definition categories are indicated in Figure 1, which

frequently overlaps in both belonging and representation.

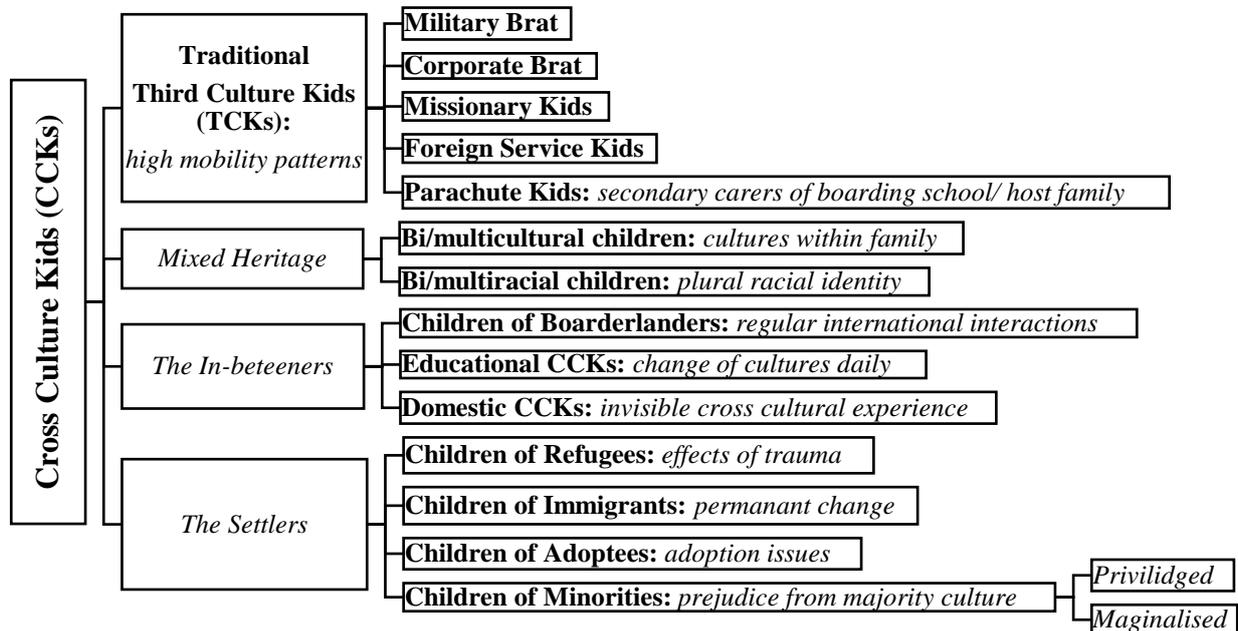


Figure 1 Cross-Culture Kids: Potential Commonalities and Differences

(adopted from Van Reken, 2002)

Alongside repeated relocation and transience comes significant personal and social difficulties that are often overlooked by its benefits to the *internationally mobile* (IM) families. Transience' is the constant status of 'transition', which is the change from one place, state, or condition to another (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) - or being constantly on the move. Hence, some see CCKs as victims of globalisation who is left to deal with the consequences of where culture and identity collide (Carter & McNulty, 2015). Scholarship has largely acknowledged that the needs of CCKs differ from their non-expatriate counterparts. Literature of TCK that investigates emotional and relational issues as implications of living an IM lifestyle covers four main areas: 1. identity, 2. sense of belonging, 3. grief & transition, and, 4. coping strategies. This population has been pointed out as a group needing significant attention as students may appear to be functioning smoothly and coping with relocation on the surface when, in reality, unresolved grieving is a prevalent issue for IM children (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2017). Their so-called 'border narrative discourse' (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008) may subsequently challenge their academic and social well-being with long-lasting effects into adulthood, such as behaviour problems, relational problems, mental health disorders, and many other issues later in their lives (Wells, 2018). Killguss (2008) found that many TCKs suffer from “authenticity anxiety”, and not being

able to have solid definitions of one's identity can cause IM children problems later on in life. It is especially true as these children are considered alien and abnormal in monocultural societies. On the other hand, the common bond with fellow CCKs allows the space to explore their identity formation with other peers with similar experiences. Rather than being cultural marginal - not being a part of any particular culture- they could be viewed as separate individuals, being members of the third culture while blending in with other cultures (Hatch, 2011).

### **Lithuania and IM Schooling**

Foucault (1972) identified schools as an institution of social control that socialises its agents and influences self-concepts, emotions, attitudes, and behaviour with "the purpose... to transmit culture, the process by which the culture of a society is passed on to its children... Individuals learn their culture; acquire knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms" (Saldana, 2013). When TCKs are tossed into such an institution, their new combination of realities manifests in "the sense of rootlessness and a lack of full ownership in any one culture they inhabit, despite retaining relationship to all" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). With global mobility becoming a predictable part of youths' life and career planning and evolution (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010), schools must support children in preparing for such future possibilities by rethinking in-school support systems and teachers' professional development. However, the Lithuanian context is unique when speaking about IM schooling. Historically, Lithuanian emigration was amongst the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2015) until 2018, when the number of foreigners who immigrated to Lithuania was higher than those who had migrated out for the first time since the 1991 restoration of independence. This number has increased by 1.4 times in 2019 (Statistics Lithuania, 2020). Immigration into Lithuania comprises 83% of re-migrants of returning Lithuanians, and 17% of immigrants into Lithuania is without Lithuanian background. Between 2005 and 2015, the ratio of children (under 18 years old) who emigrated from and to Lithuania averaged 3.5 to 1. The children who immigrated to Lithuania mainly fall under the CCK subgroups (Fig. 1) of *Traditional third culture kids*, *bi/multicultural children*, *immigrants*, and *domestic CCKs*, including *ethnic minorities* (such as Pole, Russians, Belarusian and Jews) (Eurydice, 2021). Lithuanian officials recognise that children who experience direct migration face many challenges that affect their consistent learning and development (Eurydice, 2019). However, a lack of a national pedagogical framework for language and social adaptations and the general lack of social and emotional support in schools for non-Lithuanian speakers has also been identified (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 2019).

## Methodology

This paper is part of the preparation work conducted for the upcoming serial multicultural dialogue workshops with ten CCKs aged 15 to 18 from a major Lithuanian city, and borrows from the TARMAC ‘multicultural story’ framework (Ward & Keck, 2021). TARMAC is a guided framework that aid discussion and exploration with individuals who have experienced multiple cultures growing up. The collaborative process of making sense of the multicultural participants’ identity formation prompts deep reflection and understanding that hinders growth in self-recognition, relationships, belonging, and loss. The ten-sessions framework covers topics such as: Defining home and creating the experience of home, CCK strengths and resources, building relationships across cultures, experiences of cultural identity, cross-culture transition paradoxes, responding to transition, narrating cross-culture stories, and celebrating change. The framework has been applied on two bases: a pedagogical strategy and a pedagogical intervention.

Firstly, TARMAC has been applied as a pedagogical strategy involving the autoethnography strand of narrative inquiry. Autoethnography is “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (Chang, 2008). It “uses personal experience (“auto”) to describe and interpret (“graphy”) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (“ethno”)” (Adams et al., 2017, p.1). This ten-week TARMAC programme allows for the CCK participants to: ‘*Hold their story*’ (narrating the past through story writing, sharing, telling, and understanding to comprehend how their multicultural past has shaped them), ‘*Find their Vocabulary*’ (identifying present dynamics by normalising their distinct experiences- not as ‘flawed’ but as ‘different’- and creating framework to make sense of current situations), and ‘*Imagine their Future*’ (strengthening the sense of self-identity and confidence by taking ownership of ones’ stories and awareness of ones’ making aids the envisioning of the future with insight and intentionality). As autoethnography is an intersecting autobiography and ethnography approach, where we call on memory in writing about ourselves (Goodall, 2001), this application is based on the belief that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations. They engage in rigorous self-reflection, or “reflexivity”, to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self vs others, self vs societal, and personal vs political. The provision of such a safe reflective space for CCKs is, therefore, the researcher’s attempt to combine pedagogical action with research.

Secondly, the TARMAC project is a *pedagogical intervention* combined with *participatory action research* (PAR). TARMAC is a pedagogical intervention as it gives voice to the much-hidden CCK stories in Lithuania. Through the CCK participants assembling text that creates evocative representation, it gives the audience, or the cultural outsiders, this front-row seat feeling of a CCK insider's experience (Ellis, 2004, 2016). Coming from the CCKs themselves, it is “written by people who, in essence, are imagining only themselves: in relation to the subject in hand” (Gornick, 2002). It is the CCK stories told by them, about them. Each is unique, important, and without right or wrong. By giving space to the CCKs’ narrative voices, the storytelling process is empowering through the normalisation of the perceived othering and alienation.

Furthermore, TARMAC is an application of PAR as it challenges the traditional view of the researcher as the dominant producer of knowledge in the research process, “operating in an autocratic relationship, and that one single reality exists which can be observed measured” (Jacobs, 2016) - and within the field of education, research is conducted *with* the students, not *on* the students. By combining theory with practice, action with reflection, participants and researchers align their understanding and lingua to co-construct solutions toward mutually concerning issues. Responding to Dewey’s (1997) reminder that an educator has more to learn than to teach, TARMAC as a PAR project relies on respecting all research participants' voices and knowledge, leading to group collaborative participation and construction of knowledge. As a facilitator to the CCK’s narrative inquiry journey, the researcher needs to be cautious of one’s projection of own stories dominating discussions and taking over control of the direction of the supposedly co-generation of knowledge and solutions.

Therefore, for PAR to be a tool that calls for a transformative rather than informative intervention (Baldwin, 2012), the role of the researcher requires careful positioning prior to the co-creating process to ensure that TARMAC remains a space free from hierarchical imbalances between the research/facilitator and the CCK participants/students. As part of the preparation, the author takes this opportunity to rethink and make sense of her own negotiation of the self-defined roles of a former TCK, a transitional care programme facilitator, and an educational researcher. This hinders the necessity of this autoethnographic piece- not aiming to show “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006), but as the researcher’s attempt to set grounds for transparency and a continuation of informed reflexivity throughout the project of working with CCKs. By doing so, it is to prevent ‘abusing’ the subject due to a lack of awareness while perpetuating

the so-called ‘objectivity’. Responding to Blanchett’s (2006) reminder on the negative influence of educational research caused by the response biases of educators potentially negatively influence student performance and aptitude, how the author’s own CCK upbringing influences one’s research interest and approach has to be acknowledged in order to aid the re-spotlighting of the CCK subjects. Also, taking on Luttrell’s (2000) concept of ‘good enough methods’, the researcher’s autoethnography has been applied with the intention of “seeking to understand and appreciate difference and accept errors often made because of their blind spots and intense involvement”. This also has implications for the aftermath on training for future cross-culture transition care programme facilitators to prepare for supporting CCKs and initiate intercultural conversations with their non-CCK subjects/ students. Overall, implementing TARMAC as an intervention project with Lithuanian CCKs contributes to forming cross-culture transitional care awareness and strategies that can be implemented in Lithuanian schools.

In contrast, this paper helps to locate the researcher in the CCK dialogue as the author transitions from a former CCK to a cross-culture transition care curriculum facilitator and pedagogical researcher. The writing of autoethnographical texts is "a continuation of fieldwork rather than a transparent record of past experiences, leading to the production of a historically, politically, and personally situated representation of human life. As ‘no subject can be a fully self-identified, fully aware, or fully intentional author because unconscious desire makes fully intentional subjectivity impossible" (Luttrell, 2000), and it is this openness towards rejecting the need for an absolute objective truth that makes this piece distinctive. For this purpose, the following section on data and its analysis will be narrated in the first-person perspective.

## **Research Results**

### **Autoethnographic text No. 1: “A sensation of home”**

“Having grown up between three countries (Taiwan, Thailand, the UK), four educational systems (Taiwanese, Thai, British, American), six schools (public, private, international, boarding), and countless apartments and houses... I have currently having spent an accumulated two-third of my life living overseas. If I am to meet someone for the first time, I will introduce myself as: Taiwanese (14 years total), Thai (10 years total), and some kind of European (10 years and counting). This is not entirely right, nor is it entirely wrong. To me, it is not the question of where are your parents from, what passport do you hold, or where do

you feel for more. The answer to a question that seems straightforward is, in fact, very tricky for me to answer.

*How do I choose? Why do I have to choose? Why can there only be one anyway?*

The bright side of this is that I have three new years celebrations per year! There is one on the Roman Catholic Calendar (Most Western countries), one for the Lunar Calendar (Chinese), and one for the Buddhist Calendar (Thai). On the calendar here, my 3 New Year festivals are on the 1st of Jan, mid-Feb and mid-April. This is probably one good thing about moving several times. Living my life in Europe, I make sure that I remember and am keen to, if not celebrate, acknowledge all three of them. It is not important what people should do these days, and whether I get to take part as well. What is important to me are the different meanings behind the reasons why people celebrate on these days of the year. I feel more strongly about the Chinese and Thai New Year. Maybe it is due to the fact that I know why these days are celebrated, and I find myself agreeing with the reasons why they do it. Nevertheless, it is a good thing because I can feel three times a year intense levels of greetings, blessings, well beings and good intentions. I sent greeting cards to my friends and relatives in Taiwan in Feb. I pray for the people I know in Thailand in April. I gather up with people I feel close to in the UK on the last day of Dec.

*Why do I have to choose? I can be any of them and all of them if only I try to understand and appreciate what people from different parts of the world do to show 'thank you.'*

Speaking of the holiday season, as it has always been a time of intense longing for the familiarity of home, I now think of it as a sensation of home, how I remembered it as a child. It is where warm coloured light gets lit as the sun sets, where the calling of mothers while they collect their kids from the playground echoes from outside the window, and the air smells like sun-dried clean laundry. Another home would feel like a warm summer breeze that smells like a mixture of freshly mowed lawn and the humidity just before rain; it sounds like dogs barking from far away and vague playing of Thai folk music from the nearby evening markets. But most importantly, the feeling of home is the feeling of security and belonging, knowing that I am safe, that I am accepted for who I am, and where I have value and have a voice.”

**Analysis of text No. 1:** *“Homecoming as ‘becoming’”*

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) suggested that the question of ‘Where is home’ is not the same as ‘Where are you from’ for most TCKs, as the sense of ‘at-homeness’ can differ, depending on what the question maker defines home in an

emotional or physical sense. Just like for most TCKs, to me, home is defined by relationships, and 'home' connotes an emotional place- somewhere you truly belong. When the physical concept of 'home' is irretrievably gone for me, 'going home' becomes impossible as I now belong to "everywhere and nowhere" (ibid: 126). I, therefore, realise what Cockburn (2002) suggested could have important implications for me: "TCKs have a greater need to develop identity and a concept of 'home' within their families and through relationships". Stumbling through the road of a highly mobile life, I am aware that my intention for introducing TARMAC to my CCK students is to help them make sense of their cross-culture transition, as I would have hoped for earlier on in life. As I processed what I had to navigate through alone, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, I hope that the reflexivity obtained and practised along this curriculum can become useful life skills for my students. They can take something with them and apply it in all of their future endeavours, alongside their 'making of the home' wherever their location and infused culture. This assumes that the concept of home is neither the point of departure nor the destination. It is a state of mind that can be settled into. This idea of a 'journey' stems from Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) concept of 'rhizome as an a-centred multiplicity' as a way to approach the understanding of personal identity as a rootless process, without a clear beginning and end without logic. It focuses on the 'in-between' and allows us to question hierarchical organisation, focusing on 'what can become of it and suggest ways of rehabilitating thoughts as a creative and dynamic enterprise. As more non-binary intercultural encounters prompt new intercultural identities, living in-between cultures means being exposed to unified meaning, definition, and organisation. TARMAC is exactly the journey to finding the self as 'nomadic subjects' (Braidotti, 2011) to make sense of the process of "finding rich meanings and identities in unexpected arrangements of the self" (Ros i Solé et al., 2020). This journey for the CCKs, I hope, would create intercultural contacts, creates new ways of attaching and detaching, and function as new 'lines of becoming' (Hiller, 2017), which allow the re-seeing and interpreting of the self. Through creating intercultural 'contact zones' (Pratt, 1991) such as TARMAC, I hope for intercultural frictions to be reflected upon critically and (re)applied productively in the daily life of myself and my subjects.

**Autoethnographic text No. 2:** *"What colour is a chameleon?"*

"I am always the new one and the foreigner. The superpower that I have obtained through this is being exceptionally good at making myself invisible. From the way I dress to how I express myself... like a chameleon, hypersensitive and hyper-adaptive. In cases where my difference cannot be hidden, my default

accommodating tendency makes me a favourable being as either an easygoing team player or a forever empathetic friend. However, I am usually accepted as part of the pack, and my survival mechanism sees this as success. It in fact, doesn't bother me that much when being placed under the category of 'the foreigner' or 'užsienietis' in the Lithuanian language, which literally translates to *from the other side of the wall*. This is, however, not the case when I am in a room full of my compatriots. I fall into a state of anxiety and uncertainty, with all my radars malfunctioning, my powers confiscated, social boundaries blurred, lacking cultural references and unable to laugh at the jokes. However, when I am in a room of people from everywhere, I feel like a fish in water, where there is no one set of things that I am 'supposed' to know, and I can be who I am, my original colour, and not needing to figure out which colour to change into in order not to stand out."

**Analysis of text No. 2: "Rootlessness based on 'sameness'"**

As do most CCKs, I share this common experience of a struggle in identity when encountering situations of 'returning home'. Although the process of returning home has been seen as a way out from being an 'adapted foreigner', many go straight into being 'hidden immigrants' in their own land. This is definitely my case, and I believe, it affects my students equally. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) suggested that it is largely due to TCKs' expectations of 'sameness' on their re-encountering of their homeland. However, these expectations toward people who look like themselves to also think like themselves can be very disappointing when not the case. It can be especially true for returning Lithuanian immigrants as CCK subjects of TARMAC. In the context of my CCK participants, the concept of the collective 'sameness' is heavily reinforced as the continuation of the National Revival Movement in the 1990s, where special attention was focused on the protection and emphasis of a one-dimensional nation identity (Garšvė & Mažeikiene, 2019)- with an educational focus on language, heritage and citizenship, and no focus on ethnicity. Garšvė, Mažeikiene, & Ruškus (2018) explain the lack of governmental action as Lithuania still faces challenges with migration issues as the historically constructed national identity does not allow schools as an agent of socialization to provide space for identity negotiations. These barriers largely limit the possibility of addressing the emerging diversification of identities to prevent intercultural tensions in schools and society. In our local context and considering the living everyday experience of my CCK participants, there is an emphasis on maintaining certain oppositions and binaries (local vs foreign student, integrated vs not-integrated foreigner students, the CCK vs non-CCK counterparts). It is important for the created TARMAC 'contact

zones' to align with Deleuze's concept of 'difference' which gives rise to a multiplicity that is non-hierarchical. This difference manifests itself in the linguistic and the many semiotic expressions through which identity is performed. This programmed conformity must be challenged during the TARMAC journey while maintaining a neutral voice, a critical eye, and a productive inceptive. Unlike 'sameness', the difference is not a static and fixed dead-end. Rather, it is full of possibilities and provides us with many identity repertoires.

### **Conclusion**

As part of a PAR infused pedagogical intervention, this article prompts autoethnography as a pedagogy strategy that invites both academic supervisors and students to write themselves into research, making the reading-writing relations of knowledge production more transparent and personal (Game, 1991). Autoethnography is applied as 'situated learning' (Armstrong, 2008), where the process of problematising the power relations that shape their own identity and understanding of the world and their awareness of how power is exercised concerning individuals' performance of identity. Personal identity and representations in the form of stories are explored as 'routes' rather than 'roots' (Friedman, 2002). Personal 'taken for granted assumptions' need to be reflected extensively upon to align with the increasingly transnational world and borderless identities. It can be argued that autoethnography has the potential to revolutionise both teaching and learning, and educational research as a means of questioning ourselves in relation to the pupils and classrooms, the social and political contexts that we study, as "autoethnography has transformed the way we approach ourselves and our research; it is now time we let it change how we teach" (Barr, 2019). It is important that the same transparency and reflexivity can be extended to have implications on teacher (or facilitators) training when it comes to facilitating intercultural dialogues and investigations. This is especially relevant with Lithuanian schools' urgent need to form cross-culture transitional care awareness and construct strategies that can be implemented immediately-keeping student well-being at utmost importance.

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