

Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

Key points

- Placements are often the most exciting part of a course or training programme, so make the most of the opportunities provided and become immersed in your placements!
- There are many people involved in a placement, and all will have different expectations and concerns which you need to be aware of.
- Traditional, alternative and international placements will bring their own diverse expectations and potential concerns.
- Understanding the expectations and concerns of others, as well as your own, will be a significant factor in the success of your placements.

Chapter 1

Case Study

Case Study: Sally – Traditional

Sally wrote about her expectations and initial concerns after her first visit to a school where she was about to undertake a 4-week placement in a year five class:

Before commencing the placement I was a little apprehensive and wondered what value the placement would be, given that I had already developed a strong preference for teaching within Key Stage 1. For logistical reasons the children were grouped in ability groups by the school. It became clear that the children knew their 'rank' within the class in terms of academic achievement and ability. I quickly realized that overcoming the perceptions the children already held of themselves as learners and of their ability to achieve was going to be a significant challenge.

Another challenge I identified was the need to resist the temptation to 'teach to the test'. The school was under pressure to improve its annual Standard Assessment Task (SATs) results and it was evident that the staff felt this pressure. I also observed the impact that this pressure had on the staff and their teaching styles and general approach to learning when mixed with the hectic demands of day-to-day life in school. In my experience it made many of the staff, inadvertently in most cases, narrow the curriculum and 'teach to the test'. This was a philosophy that I had always strongly disagreed with and yet I did not want to be responsible for the children not achieving the desired results.

Consider:

- How could Sally have prepared for the change from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?
- What strategies have you seen employed in school, or read about, to ensure breadth and balance is occurring in an overcrowded curriculum?

Case Study: David – Foundation Unit

David was placed in the Foundation Stage Unit of a Primary school for his final placement. The Unit included all of the nursery and reception aged children, and a number of key adults.

The Unit had three class teachers and three teaching assistants, some of whom job shared throughout the week. There was also an autistic child who received full time one to one support when at school. During the six weeks at school I was responsible for registering the twenty children in 'blue group'.

The school was in a predominantly white middle class suburb and had been labelled as an 'outstanding school' during its last OFSTED inspection. Previously the Foundation Setting had consisted of two Reception classes and a Nursery, but had been made into an integrated Foundation Stage Unit. I was at the school during the second half of the autumn term.

My initial thoughts were those of apprehension, as I was joining a team that worked very well together with a clear understanding and expectations of one another. I would need to find my own role and place within this already established team. This was made more difficult, as at face value I could not distinguish between class teachers and teaching assistants. Everybody seemed to do as much as the next person, from leading activities to tidying up and making the tea. What was at first frustrating for me to try to decipher, was actually what made the team and Unit so successful.

The other potential challenge was that I would be entering an all female team. However this would not be a new situation, as having worked part-time in Early Years settings, this was something I had come to expect. The initial surprise and excitement I was usually greeted with, when arriving at a setting, then gave way to a minefield of role identity within the setting. What could be deemed as stereotypical, I spent most of the first week outside, gardening and building. I therefore consciously made an effort to spend an equal amount of time inside and outside during the following weeks. Going into a female dominated teaching profession is always going to prove very educational for both my colleagues and myself. After the first two weeks, however, I felt part of the team. Admittedly, I didn't know exactly what part, but a part.

Consider:

- Are there particular skills that you have that will help you to develop a role within the setting you will be working in – such as playing an instrument, being artistic, being able to speak different languages?
- What do you think some of the challenges might be when you begin your placement? How can you prepare for these?

Case Study: Sally – Special school

Sally outlined her thoughts after a first visit to a Special school for a placement:

On entering the setting I was struck by a number of concerns. I was shocked by the severity of some of the children's needs and was particularly apprehensive about how I was to facilitate learning for children who could not, for a variety of reasons, access the curriculum as every child I had taught previously had. I was very apprehensive that the four week placement would not be long enough to learn all of the new teaching skills that I needed in order to ensure that the students were benefiting from my sessions.

During my visit days I was given information on each child within the Unit. After reading this it became clear that a number of students could exhibit very challenging behaviours and that these behaviours could often be so distracting or disturbing that their peers responded with similar undesirable behaviours on scales I had not previously witnessed. Clearly managing behaviour was going to be a significant challenge on this placement. Another challenge that I identified was going to be addressing the massive variation in attainment levels between the pupils in the class.

Consider:

- How could Sally find further information about the specific needs, disabilities, conditions and so on, for the children in the class?
- From observations, reading and research can you identify behaviour management strategies that might be useful when undertaking a placement in a Special school?

Case Study: Adelle – America

Adelle was looking forward to an international placement in America.

When given the school details my initial instinct was to 'Google' them, and then when looking at the statistics and information many thoughts and questions popped into my head. Would the Hispanic community speak English as a first language or Spanish? Would the children be aware of where I came from, all the way across the Atlantic Ocean? Also, how economically deprived were the children? These questions and thoughts would only to be answered when we got there and met the children in person. One major challenge that was identified was how much did the children know about the wider world and was this with an American perspective on their thoughts and ideas.

Consider:

- How would you find out about the country, location and setting for your placement?
- How would you try to ensure that your pre-conceived ideas did not have a negative impact on your preparation, or the placement itself?

Case Study: David – Japan

David outlined his international placement, in Japan:

The bulk of my placement in Japan was to be in a local, government run elementary school. Children begin elementary school when they are six years old and progress through grades one to six before entering junior high. There were three classes in each year group, comprising of between thirty and forty children. Each classroom physically mirrored the next and there were no classroom assistants. The school also had two special needs classes which were separated into physical and mental disability, but these often joined together for activities and lessons. The special needs classes were small and of mixed age ranges but children would return to their year group for particular lessons and activities.

I was also fortunate to be invited to several other educational institutions. I visited one nursery school, two kindergartens, two elementary schools, two junior high schools and one senior high school. I attended university lectures at undergraduate and postgraduate level. All university lectures were in English and when visiting other institutions there was always someone who could translate, so questions could be asked by both the visiting and visited. It is worth noting that nursery schools are seen as less academic and serve those mothers who wish to return to work early, whereas kindergartens are more academic with children beginning at a slightly older age. The experience of visiting such a variety of institutions gave me a very brief overview of the system as a whole. I was able to see the different stages that a child/teenager progresses through and the development of different pedagogical approaches throughout the system.

The placement was to be a minimum of twenty days but we were given the whole of the spring term to complete it. This meant I spent just over three months in Japan. For the duration of the time, my own aim was to absorb as much culture and language as possible, as this was needed for me to fully benefit from the placement itself. The initial language barrier was a concern, but I often had translators on hand to assist with any questions and answers. Indeed, the language barrier highlighted many alternative means of communication that are often available, but often overlooked and underutilised.

My initial reactions were of excitement at the opportunity to experience another education system. This opportunity, at such an early stage in my teaching career would also have great benefits for my professional development; especially when applying for jobs eighteen months later. I knew the experience would also make me step outside of a culture and education system that I had been part of all my life. I recognized that through doing this placement there would be both rewards and challenges. My major concern was about communication as I spoke very little Japanese and the majority of the Japanese people I would meet spoke very little English.

Consider:

- If you decide to undertake an international placement in a non-English speaking country or location, how could you prepare for this?
- Are there resources that you could utilize, or develop, that might aid effective communication in the placement?

Case Study: Carolyn – Art Gallery

I picked an art gallery in the Lake District, for no other reason than it wasn't too far away and I quite like art. I spoke to the Education Officer on the phone who agreed to a meeting and the rest, as they say, is history. The host decided I wasn't too much of a liability and agreed to take me for a three-week placement in the Summer Term. My first visit to the gallery enlightened me to the fact I would be spending three weeks in a beautiful Georgian building, surrounded by stunning paintings and sculptures, with the rolling hills of the Lake District as a backdrop. On top of that, the gallery had a workshop where activities with local school groups took place – local '*middle-class*' school groups. This wasn't what you would call a '*socially deprived area*'. You couldn't actually fail this placement they said. Apparently they wanted us to just enjoy the experience and learn as much as possible from the setting. I was feeling pretty smug with myself and looking forward to a . . . well . . . a doddle of a placement. Hell on earth would now be heaven on earth for three easy-weeks of arty fun, without the worry of possible failure. Hurrah!

Those were my initial thoughts . . . unsurprisingly they didn't last very long! Yes, this was a different kind of placement but it was still a teaching practice which meant there were still many challenges looming ahead regarding the usual suspects – planning, behaviour management and assessment. The difference in setting didn't matter one bit, these issues would still have to be addressed. On top of this, there was the added challenge of attempting to teach in a non-school

setting, with none of the usual school resources and lesson structures that I was familiar with. Questions immediately began to run around my head. What would I be teaching? Would there be proper lessons? How would I teach? What would I teach with? Would I have a classroom?

Consider:

- How might Carolyn begin to address some of her questions and concerns?
- What other challenges might there be if you undertook a placement in an alternative setting?