

Chapter 3

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Key points

- Preparation is essential for success.
- Find out as much as you can about the school, setting, location and country before you start the placement.
- Contact tutors, students and teachers who have visited or worked in the school, setting, location and country before and can provide invaluable advice, guidance and support.
- There are many ethical issues involved in working with children and students, which need to be carefully considered before, during and after your placement.
- Ensure that you follow health and safety advice, to ensure that you have the best chance of an enjoyable and problem free experience.
- Arrange travel well in advance, with a reputable ATOL and ABTA bonded company.
- Review accommodation choices, and make an informed decision based on your particular circumstances.

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Case Study

Case Study: Carolyn – Rural School

In my fourth year of teacher training, the University placed me in a rural primary school for my final block placement. The school was situated in the North West of England and served a small, close-knit village community. The school was small (only four classes) and thus had mixed-aged classes, where children spent 2 years in each class. Class 1 was for Nursery/Reception aged children, Class 2 was for Year 1/2, Class 3 was for Year 3/4, and Class 4 was for Year 5/6. I spent 8 weeks teaching Class 3, with children ranging from age 7 to 9. My class was full of white, middle class children – an unusual experience for me after spending much of my training teaching in multicultural, multiethnic and socioeconomically deprived areas. I had also never taught in a school that had been judged ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted: this one had.

The University expected a lot from us on this placement, we had to prove we were ready for the teaching profession. I knew I had to perform well; this was the last hurdle before I qualified. If I did well I would graduate and be on my way to teaching my own class in September. If I didn’t do so well, I would have to repeat the year. Seeing as so much hinged on whether I passed this placement, I was determined to do a good job. The fact that I was placed in what you would probably call a ‘nice’ school did ease my anxiety, but I was still aware I was expected to teach as good as a professional to pass. In addition, this was the first time the University would be grading my performance, and being the ambitious person that I am, I desperately wanted to be graded as a First.

So as I embarked on my 8 weeks of teaching in a rural school, I didn’t initially think there would be many challenges getting in my way. After all, this was a ‘nice’ country school. I just had to teach my little socks off and everything would go swimmingly. However, I learnt from this placement that every school, in fact every class, has their own plethora of issues that as a teacher you need to accommodate and plan for. It isn’t about you just teaching a class, it’s about accommodating every individual in that class.

As a starting point I quickly identified the following challenges I would have to meet:

Planning and teaching for a mixed-age class;
teaching in an inclusive way which would cater for the needs of two children with hearing impairments;
managing the behaviour of two age groups within one class;
learning how to operate as a school within a community and how to get involved with members of it.

Consider:

- How could Carolyn begin to address the four challenges that she set herself at the beginning of the placement?
- When you have confirmed your placement what will be some of the challenges that you set for yourself?

Case Study: Carolyn – Art Gallery

As the panic set in it was clear that the first thing I had to do was establish placement objectives for myself and the host. I did this by having a lengthy discussion with the education officer at the gallery about exactly what each of us wanted to gain from the placement. We hoped this would ensure that my time spent at the gallery would be focused and successful from the outset, with positive outcomes for myself as a student teacher and the gallery as an alternative educational setting.

We established the following objectives for the host:

To develop stronger links with the formal educational world;
To find out about current issues and needs for schools, teachers and pupils;
To improve provision at the gallery for schools.

We agreed on the following objectives for me:

To gain confidence in using outside resources (i.e., the gallery) to enhance children's learning;
To develop art subject knowledge and how to use it to enhance other curriculum subjects;
To increase the use of creativity in teaching;
To increase cross curricular links in planning and teaching.

Once the placement objectives had been established I felt more confident about what I wanted to achieve during the placement. In turn, this kick started the planning process, since I was now focused on examining, exploring and exploiting cross-curricular, creative approaches to teaching by utilising the resources in this setting. I began by assisting the education officer with the school workshops the gallery already had in place. This taught me how learning experiences for all ages and abilities could be created around pieces of artwork in the gallery. It enlightened me to the learning power held in pieces of real-life art work – children from early years through to Key Stage 3 appeared to find the paintings and sculptures completely engaging and compelling. This was the most important thing I learnt about planning, that it should be focused around something visual in order to engage the interest of the learners and it should incorporate practical, kinaesthetic elements which build on this visual stimulus.

Consider:

- Why is it important to discuss and agree your objectives, and those of the host, before you start the placement?
- What can you plan before the placement starts, and will this be dependent on information from the host? If so, how might you request this?

Case Study: Adelle – America

During our time in Holland in Michigan, America we were placed in two schools, Van Raalte and Woodside Elementary. These schools both draw from a similar catchment area, mostly Hispanic and white Americans and classed as economically disadvantaged.

I found out a little about the area I was going to and Uni was great in offering us a buddy system, where we could contact a student teacher who was kind enough to share their experiences with me. This enabled us to ask them what resources they had in the schools, what they thought we should take out there to share with the children and if they had any top tips for us. During the planning process both universities were a great help and offered lots of support and guidance. The moment we got to America we were given even more information about the schools, what we should expect, even down to what questions the children were wanting and liable to ask.

Resources for this type of placement were really everyday resources that you would use in schools in England. When talking with my buddy, she wanted to know the basics about what we had in our schools and were they the same as they used. This also applied to the children; they wanted to know what we had

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Midwinter, D. and Whatmore, T. (2011) *Positive Placements*. London: Continuum.

for our classes and what the children looked like, etc. So on the outward journey, the suitcase was filled with story books, stickers, labels, posters, exercise books, pictures, all the things that you would expect to have in an English school. These are what the children and staff wanted to see, real life things, not just pictures from an old book. When planning, the most important thing I learned was to ask the children and the staff what they would like to know and see, from there the planning was easy.

Consider:

- Can you produce a list of resources that you could take to your placement?
- Are there resources that you could usefully develop before the placement starts?

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Traditional placements

- Search the internet to see if the school has a website, or if there are any articles or information about the school;
- request a prospectus or further information – some schools provide a student's guide;
- access reports from Ofsted and the Local Authority;
- talk to tutors and students about their experiences, if the school has hosted students before;
- locate the school, and if possible travel there and back during a working day, to see how long the journey will take and if there are potential issues with public transport, or parking;
- talk about car sharing or travelling together, if other students are going to the same placement, or a school near to yours;
- make preparation visits, and be vigilant, taking note of routines, behaviour management strategies, availability of resources and facilities;
- undertake observation tasks and activities set by your training provider;
- develop relationships with the children/students, staff and adults working in the school;
- offer to help in the class or school: make drinks, help tidy away, sort out cupboards (a good way to see what resources there are and to ask which you will be able to use);
- accompany the class or school on a trip (so that you have a chance to get to know the children and adults outside the school context);
- look after a stall at the school fair/fete (an excellent and informal way to meet parents and members of the local community, and to start to develop relationships before you start your placement);
- ask to be shown examples of school long, medium and short term planning; and clarify what you will be expected to teach and the planning you will need to produce during your placement;
- show your class teacher and mentor copies of your initial ideas for lessons and activities, and drafts of your planning, to check that these will be appropriate and acceptable before you produce too many;
- learn the children's names as soon as you can, as this will help to secure more successful relationships, and aid learning and teaching.

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Alternative placements

- Search the internet to see if the setting has its own website, or if there are any articles or information about the setting;
- research the area or setting in libraries, journals or books;
- contact the setting and ask if you can make a preliminary visit, if this is feasible in terms of distance and time. If not, ask the setting if they can send you any useful information, or direct you to where this can be found;
- establish clear outcomes and objectives for the placement, for you and the setting, as these will be different, and try to link these to QTS when appropriate;
- ensure that you know what is expected of you by your training provider and the setting, and talk to your link contact if there appears to be potentially diverse expectations;
- ask to be shown relevant planning; and clarify what you will be expected to plan before and during your placement;
- show setting staff copies of your initial ideas for lessons and activities, and drafts of your planning, to ascertain that these will be appropriate and acceptable.

Rural School Placement – Carolyn

Background

In my fourth year of teacher training, the University placed me in a rural primary school for my final block placement. The school was situated in the North West of England and served a small, close-knit village community. The school was small (only four classes) and thus had mixed-aged classes, where children spent 2 years in each class. Class 1 was for Nursery/Reception aged children, Class 2 was for Year 1/2, Class 3 was for Year 3/4 and Class 4 was for Year 5/6. I spent 8 weeks teaching Class 3, with children ranging from age 7 to 9. My class was full of white, middle class children – an unusual experience for me after spending much of my training teaching in multicultural, multi-ethnic and socio-economically deprived areas. I had also never taught in a school that had been judged “outstanding” by Ofsted: this one had.

Initial reaction

The University expected a lot from us on this placement, we had to prove we were ready for the teaching profession. I knew I had to perform well; this was the last hurdle before I qualified. If I did well I would graduate and be on my way to teaching my own class in September. If I didn't do so well, I would have to repeat the year. Seeing as so much hinged on whether I passed this placement, I was determined to do a good job. The fact that I was placed in what you would probably call a ‘nice’ school did ease my anxiety, but I was still aware I was expected to teach as good as a professional to pass. In addition, this was the first time the university would be grading my performance, and being the ambitious person that I am, I desperately wanted to be graded as a First.

Planning and preparation

So as I embarked on my 8 weeks of teaching in a rural school, I didn't initially think there would be many challenges getting in my way. After all, this was a ‘nice’ country school.

I just had to teach my little socks off and everything would go swimmingly. However, I learnt from this placement that every school, in fact every class, has their own plethora of issues that as a teacher you need to accommodate and plan for. It isn't about you just teaching a class, it's about accommodating every individual in that class. I quickly identified the following challenges I would have to meet:

- Planning and teaching for a mixed-age class
- Teaching in an inclusive way which would cater for the needs of two children with hearing impairments
- Managing the behaviour of two age groups within 1 class
- Learning how to operate as a school within a community and how to get involved with members of it

I began the planning process by addressing the first of my many challenges – how to plan for a mixed age class. Initially I didn't know where to start, as I was so used to taking topics from the National Strategies for the appropriate year group I was teaching and planning around those. Now, I had two year groups to accommodate and didn't have a clue which topics I should teach. I wasn't sure whether I should be looking at Year 3 topics, Year 4 topics or both. Luckily for me, help was at hand. Teachers at the school informed me they worked on a two year cycle so that all of the topics recommended by the National Primary Strategy and QCA could be covered without any children suffering the repetition of having to do the same topic again during their second year in the same class. The idea was that during the year, you would teach half of the topics from year 3 and half of the topics from year 4. Then the following year, you would teach the other topics you had missed. And so on, the cycle would continue so that all of the children accessed all of the topics. The school was also registered with 'The Hamilton Trust' which provided examples of mixed age planning and access to resources. So there was plenty of help and resources available to me.

However, although the school had found a way to cover topics and curriculum areas for mixed-age classes, it hadn't provided for the fact that whatever topic you taught, you would have to teach it at multiple levels so that it was accessible yet challenging for all of the pupils in the class. For example, when teaching the Numeracy topic 'Rounding, Estimating and Measuring' I had to ensure I planned activities that were challenging enough for the more able year 4 children, appropriate for the less able year 4s and more able year 3s while still being accessible for the less able year 3s. All while covering the same objectives for everybody. This was indeed, a challenge, but I did find a successful way of dealing with such extensive differentiation. The trick was to break each objective down into levels

of success criteria for each lesson. In a lesson where the main objective was 'To round numbers to the nearest 10, 100 & 1000'. I used different levels of success criteria to assess the children against at the end of the lesson, such as:

- I can round 2 digit numbers to the nearest 10.
- I can round 2 and 3 digit numbers to the nearest 10 and 100.
- I can round 3 digit numbers to the nearest 100.
- I can round 3 and 4 digit numbers to the nearest 100 and 1000.

This allowed me to differentiate my teaching accordingly so that all of the children in the class could be challenged at an appropriate level within the same lesson. This was the most important thing I learnt about planning, that regardless of the topic or subject, the lessons must be differentiated so that all children are challenged appropriately while still maintaining a sense of inclusion by adapting the same learning objective to suit everybody.

Behaviour management

Behaviour management became a bigger issue than I originally anticipated. Since the children generally came from supportive families and a 'good' catchment area, I hadn't foreseen many difficulties. The problems I encountered didn't stem from individual children, they stemmed from the divide between the two age groups in my class. The year 4 children saw themselves as very much older and more important than the year 3s. In turn, the year 3s felt intimidated and over powered by the year 4s. There was a clear divide between the two age groups and at times, quite a hostile atmosphere within the classroom. The year 4 children dominated, both in size and volume, almost eclipsing the younger children who tended to withdraw in group situations. This was an issue I was anxious to overcome in order to get the best out of both age groups.

I decided that the divide between the two age groups was already big enough, that a physical one such as grouping year 4s together away from year 3s would only make it worse. Furthermore, having the children working independently wouldn't do anything to improve the situation. So I took the bull by the horns and decide to scrap ability groupings and instead planned activities where the children would have to work in mixed-ability groups. This meant the year 4 children would be forced to work with the year 3s and vice versa. In geography, children had to work together to research a world river and devise a poster presentation to deliver to the class.

In Science, they had to work in teams to design and advertize a product, justifying the use of particular materials in that product by explaining their properties. As you can

imagine, the children were less than thrilled with this arrangement to begin with. However, after days and weeks of integrating with one another and working together to achieve common goals, the year group divide began to disappear. The children found they actually got along and enjoyed one another's company, despite being older or younger than one another. For me, the break through was really when, after working independently on cross-curricular RE/Art topic 'Islamic Patterns', the children asked ME if they could work together to make a giant class mural of an Islamic style pattern to decorate the classroom. I was over the moon; finally the children didn't see themselves as two age groups within a class, they saw themselves as one class.

Needless to say, I didn't have many issues with behaviour after this! By the time I left the school, the dynamics within the class had really changed for the better. There was a positive atmosphere, with children mixing well and eager to help one another despite their differences. This taught me a valuable lesson in behaviour management: tackle the issues head-on and putting children who have a problem with one another together rather than separating them might be turbulent in the short term but can work wonders in the long term!

Assessment

With regard to assessment, the expectations were quite high during this placement. I had to assess the children's learning both formatively and summatively in order to pass. In addition, I had to account for the two year groups in my assessments, as learning expectations and targets were not the same for both. I devised differentiated record sheets in order to keep track of the children's learning at the appropriate level. I made simple tick-sheets with appropriate learning objectives for children in each year group. I used these sheets rigorously after each lesson in order to ensure I was keeping track of what each child (a) was expected to achieve, and (b) was actually achieving during my lessons. Though simple in their nature, my assessment sheets provided an easy way for me to formatively assess the children's attainment as the lessons went by. It meant I could quickly identify children who weren't achieving the intended learning objectives (i.e. gaining ticks on the sheet next to their name) and make alterations to my planning and teaching in order to target them in subsequent lessons.

Furthermore, the head teacher at the school advised me to research the work of Shirley Clarke in order to expand my repertoire of approaches to formative assessment. A quick 'google' of the name enlightened me to the fact that Clarke is a bit of guru in the world of formative assessment. I picked up one of her many books at the library and became very interested in what she called 'effective' questioning. I knew that I had been asking hundreds of questions throughout the school week but began to wonder whether the questions I was

asking were actually doing anything constructive in terms of assessment. I took on board Clarke's suggestions and began to actively plan my use of questioning. Instead of asking questions which only required a single answer and thus only assessed a single level of understanding (e.g. What is 4×5 ?), I made a conscious effort to ask more open-ended questions which would assess children's understanding at multiple levels (e.g. how many ways can you make 20?).

Asking open questions allowed me to see what level of thinking and understanding different children were operating at, rather than just answering in parrot fashion something they had learnt by memory. This meant I could identify and thus plan to challenge higher level thinkers with more analytical questioning. It also gave lower attaining children in the class good examples of higher level thinking from their peers. I enjoyed using classroom discourse as a genuinely sound way of assessing children's learning in a way that didn't place restrictions on the level they could attain.

During the placement I also embarked seriously on my use of summative assessment. As it was the Summer Term, the children undertook optional SATS tests during the time I was teaching at the school. This was the first time I had been involved in this kind of assessment and found it to be quite a learning curve. I played my part in distributing and overseeing the tests, and of course marking them. I learnt a great deal through the process of marking the writing tests in particular. I was astonished at the depth and rigour of scrutiny required in order to assess the writing using the QCA levelling descriptors. I had to mark each piece of writing and give marks for various aspects of it (e.g. sentence structure, composition and effect etc.). The marks were then added together to give an overall National Curriculum Level.

It was good to experience the process and I learnt a lot about what to look for when assessing writing. I also gained an accurate picture of what is expected at each National Curriculum level. The tests gave a good indication of what the children could and couldn't do, which then provided a platform for future planning and teaching in order to augment the progress of each child. For example, children who scored low on 'sentence structure' would need more input on basic sentence construction in order to improve their writing. The most important thing I learnt about assessment is that whether it be formative or summative in its nature, its purpose should always be to inform future planning and teaching in a way that moves children's learning forwards.

In terms of summative assessment, I was also required to report on children's progress to parents, through an end-of-term written report. I wrote detailed reports about four different children, detailing their progress and attainment in the core National Curriculum subjects for the period that I had taught them. Due to the fact I was relatively unknown to the parents, I decided to attach a letter to the reports in order to explain its purpose and invite them to meet with me and discuss the content if they so wished. The most important

thing I learnt about reporting back to parents is to focus on what children CAN do rather than detailing what the child hasn't yet achieved. As well as emphasizing the positive aspects, a report should also assert realistic and achievable targets for the child's next steps in their learning. This way, the parents are clear about what level their children are at and can also be involved at home in helping the child focus on their next learning target. A parent simply can't do this if they are not aware of what the target is!

Highlights of the placement

The highlights of this placement were the times the rural nature of the school was exploited. I thoroughly enjoyed my experiences of interacting with members of the local community through school activities. The children's school experience seemed particularly enhanced by these episodes of community involvement too. For example, on one occasion, members of the local crown green bowling club invited the children for an afternoon of bowling tuition. So, one sunny afternoon our class ambled down the lane to the nearby bowling green where the children were treated to some lessons in the art of bowling. On one hand it seemed bizarre (this certainly hadn't featured in any curriculum I had read!) but on the other it was absolutely wonderful! The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and learnt a lot in the process. It certainly worked on their hand-eye coordination skills. Moreover, it was a socially enhancing experience, as it gave the children the opportunity to converse and interact with some of the local community's more senior members. Furthermore, it allowed members of the community the chance to get to know its youth and build a positive relationship with them. In a lot of communities, young and old cease to interact in a positive way, but here there was a real sense of community.

This was my last placement as a trainee teacher and will remain one of the fondest in my memory. I learnt a great deal and took away reams of inspiration from the experience of teaching in a rural school. The placement helped me to meet the standards for QTS in a plethora of ways. By the time I left the school I really felt I was ready to begin my teaching career as a professional. However, the most important thing I took away with me was the realization that a school is part of something much wider than itself. A school sits within a community and its purpose is to serve that community, both educationally and socially. I am proud to say I now work in a school where community matters a great deal and I feel so lucky to have had this experience before I began applying for a teaching post. This placement changed my idea of the kind of school I wished to work in, and also the kind of teacher I wished to be.