

Chapter 4

Chapter Outline

Summary	51
Mission statements	58
Adapting to different situations	59
Key points	65
Resources	65

Chapter 4

Key points

- Find out as much as you can about your placement – historical, geographical, environmental, economic, social, cultural, religious information as this will have a significant impact on the setting.
- Keep a 'learning journal' as an aide memoir and to reflect and analyse your placement and professional development.
- Make contacts with people that have had previous experience of the placement, setting or location, and seek advice and guidance.
- Your placement may provide the opportunity to experience different beliefs, values, customs and practices, make the most of these and learn from them.
- Make the most of each situation – to get to know new people and places, to explore and try new experiences, to develop knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Be prepared to enjoy every situation – however different or alien it may initially seem, and be willing to share your experiences with others!

Chapter 4

Case Study

Case Study: Rachel – Gambia

In February, when I visited it was 43°C. Each day children walked to school in very hot weather and then sat in cramped hot classrooms; which could adversely affect their mood, concentration and ability to learn. There was an average of 46 children per class, and they sat four or five to a desk. They were crammed together creating an uncomfortable environment in which to learn. It was difficult for the children to learn in such poor, crowded conditions. Many children preferred sitting on the floor closer to the board (a black painted wall) as the classrooms were so dark it was hard to see what the teacher had written. The lack of light in the classrooms was a key issue in Gambia. There were small holes in the wall and no electricity for lighting; this had an immediate effect on the children's ability to learn.

Consider:

- How might you feel in, or respond to, a similar situation?
- How can you prepare for such a diverse experience?

Case Study: David – Japan

Although at first a mystery and then slightly puzzling, once I began to understand not just the school context but the cultural context, then the intricacies of the classroom behaviour and management became much clearer. This was a culture where there was a significant emphasis on the group mentality compared to the individual. The notion of group mentality began from day one of a child's peer to peer experiences. This was reflected in the children discussing and solving problems within their class environment and the teacher merely being an overseer in personal, social and emotional terms. Although, undoubtedly, there were occasions when teachers did intervene, these tended to be minimal compared to England.

Classroom and behaviour management were my most challenging puzzle during my placement in a Japanese school, as it was so indirect and therefore hard to

© David Midwinter and Tracy Whatmore 2011

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

identify at first. It was only after a week of observations, many questions and background reading that I began to understand how it worked. It was the children themselves who were given the responsibility for managing each others' behaviour. There was very little direct input from the teacher. The formalities that began and ended each lesson were a clear indicator of what sort of behaviour was expected from the children. The children who begin the formalities at the beginning of the lesson did not begin until everyone is ready, sometimes this meant they would go and confront a child who was not ready to see what the problem was.

During lunch and break recess children were left to their own devices, which often involved roaming around the whole of the school grounds, seen or unseen. Most lessons were followed by a ten minute recess, where the children usually remained in the classroom. During one such recess I witnessed a fight break out, the teacher was sat at the front of the classroom marking work and ignored it. Class children split the fight up and spoke to each of the individuals involved. When the next lesson began, the teacher enquired as to whether things had been sorted out, both individuals agreed it had and the lesson continued with nothing else said. Here, the classmates had felt it their responsibility to stop, rather than encourage, the fight that started in the class. This promotion of independence was something that seemed natural to both the children and the adults.

Another strategy that I saw widely used was 'Jan-ken', or as known in English, 'paper, rock, scissors'. I was amazed at the efficiency of using such a simple game to sort out problems and choose people. For example, if children were arguing over something, they would play Jan-ken to decide who got it. There was no room for discussion after Jan-ken had taken place, whoever lost, lost. I also saw it used when the teacher was choosing the children for different parts in a play. The children could not decide who was who, so the teacher said the part and then asked the children who wanted that part to stand up and play group Jan-ken until there was only one person left for the part. I asked the teachers whether the best dramatists had the lead roles, they laughed and said no, why should they?

Consider:

- What has been the role of culture in schools and settings with which you are familiar?
- What impact may different cultural expectations and values have on learning and teaching in a particular school or setting?

Case Study: Rachel – Gambia

The Lower Basic primary school that I undertook my international placement in was built in 1980 by the Charity SOS. The Charity has established schools and centres in Bakoteh, in the Gambia, to help provide the children with a basic education.

© David Midwinter and Tracy Whatmore 2011

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

The Mission on which my placement school was based was displayed in the school:

School Mission

To cultivate in the children an interest in learning and to develop the skills needed in learning.

To encourage pupils to be interested generally in agriculture with emphasis on vegetable gardening, tree planting and flower growing, to beautify the school environment.

To demonstrate and maintain a high sense of discipline in and out of school.

The Mission included behaviour and learning objectives which are common to schools in England, however it also included specific reference to the environment and horticulture, demonstrating the importance of both.

Consider:

- What might the 'hidden messages' be behind such a Mission Statement?
- How could this impact on learning and teaching in the school?

Case Study: Jaz – India

As a part of this international experience I, along with another student, proposed a mural project to promote a varied experience in art for the children. This project aimed to provide children with ownership of their artistic processes, which would be valued in a whole school context. This project was very different from what children had done before. As teachers, we provided guidance and choices as well as the freedom to explore a new medium (paint) to create art. By actually taking risks in creating something new and personal, children engaged in an artistic process rather than focusing on the end result.

While teachers were initially reticent about this project, as it progressed, it made them aware of the value of art. By observing the process, teachers commented that they learned about the value of teaching the skills and processes of art while nurturing the children within the whole learning environment. This project inspired teachers to develop their own projects and to collaborate with others. Significantly, they began to involve children in activities around the school (outside of the classroom) to promote experiential learning.

Consider:

- Jaz noted that art lessons were much more structured than he was used to, and thought that it would be useful to share his specialist interest in art with the children and staff. Why would he have needed to be careful when suggesting the project?
- What does the case study illustrate about achieving a positive placement?

© David Midwinter and Tracy Whatmore 2011

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

Case Study: David – Japan

When children enter elementary school they can generally read and write, this is something that is usually taught on a one-to-one basis by the parents. By the end of the first grade children are expected to have learnt between seventy and eighty kanji. Japanese elementary schools are structurally very similar having virtually the same classroom set up through grades one to six. Japanese and Mathematics are taught everyday, with music, art and PE being taught frequently. Shodo (Japanese calligraphy) is taught from first grade progressing from pencil to paintbrush further up the school. Moral Studies is the equivalent of RE, which makes the children think of right and wrong contextual decisions but is devoid of any direct religious ethics. In the three weeks I spent in my main elementary school I only saw one visit to the computer room where the focus of the lesson was a maths game.

The most striking thing in elementary school was the difference between lesson time and recess time. There was at least ten minutes recess in between every period, during this time it was common to see children running, shouting, fighting, rehearsing, singing and dancing in the classroom itself as well as outside compared to the focus and concentration I witnessed during lesson time. 'These frequent opportunities to relax and engage in vigorous physical activities undoubtedly play an important role in the sustained ability of Japanese children to respond so attentively to their teachers during lessons' (Lee et al, 1995, p162).

Recess also proved to be a time of exploration where children ran freely around the school out of the teachers' sight, enjoying their freedom, a freedom you rarely see entrusted to pupils in England be it due to health and safety concerns and so on . . . Whereas the National Curriculum features heavily in English school life, I felt, in my elementary school that the curriculum was only a fraction of what school was about to the children and teachers. 'Japanese children see school not only as a place to learn, but also a place where they can play and be with their friends. This view is in marked contrast to the stereotype of tense Japanese school children who are so busy with their studies that they have little time for fun' (Lee et al, 1995, pp 162–163).

Consider:

- How does David's experience compare to his experiences in England?
- In terms of curriculum and expectations what might you need to consider for an international placement?

Case Study: Rachel – Gambia

The classrooms contained very few displays, which had been made by student teachers and there for years, so were faded and damaged. There seemed to be limited interest in displaying the children's work and the few displays they had were not eye catching and did not appear to stimulate the children or interest them.

The Permanent Secretary at the Department of State for Education in the Gambia, Mr. Babucarr Boye (2007) stated that 'In the case of public opinion poll that was carried out on the achievement of learners, the outcome indicated that better learning conditions and output of teachers hinge squarely on the circumstance(s) surrounding them.' If the teachers could provide a positive working environment the children were more likely to want to go to school and learn.

As the school had very few resources lessons were not very interactive and children were not actively involved in their own learning. There were no practical activities and children were expected to copy from the board or a book. The children were given one exercise book for the year and were expected to buy another one if the book was lost or finished, however some children could not afford a second book. Children provided their own pencils, in many cases the children could not afford to buy a pencil and had to share with each other, taking turns to write up their work. Children without an exercise book or without a pencil did not participate in the lesson. Economic circumstances meant that books and materials were scarce and classrooms more so. As Bennett (2007) suggested there seemed to be a huge divide in educational provision between the developed and the developing world.

The children became disinterested and got bored easily. This in turn led to the children misbehaving and disruption of lessons. Some teachers would hit the children, which was a real shock. They said that this was the only way to make the children behave and that hitting the children was part of life in the Gambia. We talked to the tutors with us about this as we were so concerned, and tried to show and explain that we did not hit the children when we taught them.

The use of corporal punishment alarmed the students; it was an aspect of school, family and community life in the Gambia, which they had not expected. The students discussed the issue with tutors and some of the teachers in the school, and said they would not physically punish the children during their lessons. The lack of resources and facilities meant that teaching interesting and interactive lessons was a serious challenge, and that consequently the children and students became distracted and demotivated. The resultant behaviour management issues became a further challenge, exasperated by the normal practice of 'hitting' the children if they misbehaved. Indeed managing the children and students, in a positive, meaningful and respectable way became the major challenge of the placement.

© David Midwinter and Tracy Whatmore 2011

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

Consider the following questions:

- What would you think if you saw a child/student being hit in your placement school or setting?
- What would you do and/or say, and to whom?
- How can situational and cultural knowledge and understanding help in such an event?

Case Study: David – Japan

I did lots of travelling while I was there. I spent the odd weekend travelling but also the last two weeks. During my stay I visited Tokyo, Kamakura, Kyoto, Himeji, Hiroshima and Miyajima. I also visited the surrounding area of Nagoya, where certain temples held local celebrations. Most memorable was probably the 'Penis festival' that celebrated fertility. It was very popular with tourists. Another highlight was when I visited the 'Snow festival' in Sapporo. I decided to get the boat which took two days as it was much cheaper than flying as you got a student discount. The only downside to this was that out of the six days I was away, four were spent on a boat.

I am quite adventurous with food and willing to try most things. If anybody wrongly assumes sushi is all that Japanese people eat, they should reconsider this! Japanese cuisine is one of the best I have tried. I ate various dishes, at restaurants, street stalls, home made and at school, where the lunches were excellent. My favourite dish was 'shabu-shabu' a bit like a meat and vegetable hotpot, but you put all the ingredients in at the table. 'Okonomiyaki' are like pancakes topped with cabbage, meat or seafood. 'Takoyaki' are pieces of grilled octopus inside balls of batter. 'Basashi' is raw slices of horse meat, eaten in a similar way to 'sashimi' (raw strips of fish). The most challenging thing I ate was 'natto' which is usually eaten with rice, but they are fermented soya beans that give off a pungent smell. I managed it; it's lucky food isn't a problem for me!

Visiting Japan made me question many values that I take for granted, not just in an educational sense but in a cultural sense as well. The main thing I learnt was that you have to give a lot of time and patience to any new experience you have if you want to get the most out of it. This means going out of your way to make an effort, smiling lots and saying when you don't understand something.

Consider:

- After reflecting on David's case study extract, what might you hope to gain from your placement, in addition to experience working with children and students?
- How can you use these 'experiences' to enhance your personal, professional and academic development?

© David Midwinter and Tracy Whatmore 2011

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