

Special Needs Unit Placement – Sally

Background

In my third year I elected to undertake a 4 week placement in a ‘Special Setting’. Due to my own interest in Special Educational Needs (SEN) I was already aware of a ‘Special Setting’ that I was keen to explore. As a result my placement was organized by myself and the Special Educational Needs Lecturer at the University.

The ‘Special Setting’ was a Unit attached to a mainstream school. The school was set in a large town which had a range of socio-economic problems. The eleven children who attended the Unit travelled in from a 15 mile catchment area and had a multitude of Special Educational Needs ranging from Autism and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) to Down syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. The ages of children based in the Unit ranged from 4 to 11 years old. Wherever possible the Unit and the children were included in the mainstream activities and were very much considered to be a part of the school.

The University was expecting students to achieve the following over the course of the placement:

- To collaboratively develop plans
- To teach and manage individuals, small groups and the whole class
- To plan, teach, assess and record formatively and set targets for pupil learning
- To demonstrate and promote positive values, attitudes and behaviour
- To take part in, and contribute to, teaching teams.
- To plan for the deployment of additional adults who support pupils’ learning
- To develop innovative approaches to teaching, including the creation of stimulating learning environments

Alongside these objectives we were also asked to undertake three focus tasks which encouraged us to examine aspects of the physical environment and the personal interactions in the classroom in a critical and reflective way. It was hoped that doing so would enable us to deepen our understanding of the learning context for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

Initial reaction

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 4 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.

Planning

Planning within the Special Setting was quite scary at first! I felt overwhelmed by the amount of things I had to consider when planning, including the children's Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets, the Pivot or National Curriculum Level they were working at, advice and recommendations from outside agencies such as Educational Psychologists, Physiotherapists, Speech and Language therapists, the topic being covered within the school at the time and the children's very varied ages and interests. Prior to planning any activities for the children I decided it was important to meet them and develop an understanding of their specific interests. Although there were significantly fewer children in this setting than in previous mainstream classes I had taught the interests were much more diverse, possibly on account of the range of ages present.

Throughout the placement I was supported by all of the staff. Many of the children's key workers took the time to tell me more about their individual children and some of the teachers discussed things they had tried in the past when covering the same/similar objectives to me. The staff really helped me to consider my objectives and the learning steps I was expecting the children to make, they encouraged me to take one objective and break it down to list all of the things you had to be able to do in order to achieve it. This was quite an eye opening experience as it made me realize that often there are many small

parts to achieving one learning objective. While it was important to have realistic expectations and to ensure that the learning objectives were attainable it was also important that we continued to have high expectations and to challenge the children. Having been through the process of breaking down the learning objective it enabled me to see that although all of the pupils may not always have achieved the end goal they had often made progress towards it which, instead of celebrating, I would have previously overlooked.

Once I understood the content my lessons were to have I started to formulate ideas for activities and collect resources. Many of the resources were available from the school although some were borrowed from other local 'Special Settings' and, much to my surprise, from mainstream environments. This was an interesting discovery as previously I had viewed 'Special Settings' in isolation and perceived there would be very few similarities between them and mainstream settings. Subsequently I realized that there was actually much common ground between the educational settings and as such mutually beneficial relationships could be formed. During my time at the Unit I also realized that many things could constitute resources and work well without being expensive or specialized. This was a revelation and made me realize that the pupils I was teaching, despite the diagnostic labels, were essentially just like any other set of children I had taught.

Key thought: On this placement the most important thing I learnt about planning was the importance of understanding the learning which occurs prior to and after the learning objective. By doing this you understand the progression and can therefore celebrate the small yet significant steps children make in their learning.

Behaviour management

Behaviour management was a challenge I identified very early on in the placement. Most of the behaviours encountered were physical including biting, hitting, grabbing and hair pulling, although some others such as spitting and refusal were witnessed. In order to prepare for this the staff taught me a few key techniques such as standing side on to the child, making sure you do not back yourself or the pupil into a corner and the use of key command words such as 'Stop' instead of the word 'No' which antagonized some children further. I was very apprehensive that this was all I was 'armed' with when facing such behaviours. However, the setting believed that having to react to the behaviours like those discussed earlier, was not a situation that should arise often. They took a very proactive approach to behaviour management and encouraged me to do likewise.

The staff introduced me to a new way of looking at behaviour – the notion that every behaviour had an antecedent and that if records were kept of the behaviours and events leading up to the incidents then ‘flash points’ within sessions could be easily identified. By recognizing this I could plan strategies into my sessions to eliminate or reduce the changes of the behaviour occurring. Prior to this placement my behaviour management had always focused on reacting once an undesirable behaviour had been displayed. While this notion of being proactive about behaviour was liberating it was also challenging because with the realization that every behaviour had a purpose and that it was often a reaction to something in the environment, came the realization that effectively I had the biggest role in preventing it. When behaviours did occur it was uncomfortable to consider the incident and look for the antecedent as it often meant it was something that I, or other staff, could have done to prevent it happening. However, the Unit staff were very constructive, and the supportive and positive atmosphere made the process very efficient and effective.

Key thought: The most important thing I learnt about behaviour management on this placement was that if I look for antecedents and consider strategies for removing or avoiding known antecedents then undesirable behaviour does decrease and I can spend less time reacting to behaviour and more time teaching.

Assessment

During this placement I was expected to assess and record formatively and set targets for pupil learning. Assessment would occur against the learning objectives of the sessions, which often included IEP targets, speech and language therapy targets and other more ‘holistic’ targets, alongside the more traditional ‘academic’ targets. The deeper understanding of progression I had developed from breaking down the learning objectives for planning purposes had a huge an impact on the way I undertook this assessment. I found that ‘objective achieved’ or ‘not achieved’ was no longer sufficient. Instead I found that I was writing more about what the pupils’ did and looking for the small steps. Although this was beneficial it was hard to see at a glance where the children were. A member of staff suggested highlighting the children’s’ names on my assessment sheet – green for achieved and exceeded objective, yellow for objective achieved and red for objective not achieved – this gave it immediate visual impact but I also had the smaller steps that children had achieved noted down too.

Before commencing this placement pupils' written work had always formed much of my assessment evidence. However, for some children in this setting, and with hindsight for some children I have taught in mainstream settings, this was not a fair reflection of their progress nor did it sit well with the more practical approach to learning I tried to implement. As such I was a little unsure how I was going to provide evidence of the children's learning. I approached the staff at the unit about it and they were fantastic. They encouraged me to take photographs of the children undertaking the activities, print them off, write the date and the learning objective on them and place them in the pupil's file. Originally I was a little sceptical about my photographic skills and my ability to get round all of the children with the camera and thus the standard of evidence I was collecting but with the support of the other adults in the classroom this method worked really well. The evidence collected also provided something for the children and parents to look at, at a later date.

I have since applied all of these techniques to my teaching in mainstream and have definitely found assessment easier to manage as a result.

Key thought: Assessment does not have to mean copious amounts of paper work, it is about finding a method that works for you in your setting.

Placement highlights

I began the placement by working with individuals and/or small groups of children. Towards the end of the first week I undertook team teaching with the class teacher. I particularly enjoyed taking part in, and contributing to, teaching teams in this way. It gave me the opportunity and the confidence to try new things, in a supportive environment and to learn from and draw on the experiences and expertise of those around me. It enabled me to understand more fully the importance of good communication between staff and the significant role that additional adults have in the classroom environment. All of this helped me when I eventually progressed to teaching groups and ultimately the whole class independently and was having to plan for the deployment of additional adults.

Many of the things discussed previously were enhanced by the support of additional adults. For instance, when undertaking assessment many of them were able to take pictures or jot down notes about something a child had said or done which I might have missed – they were like a second pair of eyes and ears. However, in order to obtain optimum benefit from them it was important to have procedures in place for them to

share their information with me. The Unit had a scheme whereby each child had an A4 piece of paper on the wall and any notes made by the teacher or additional adults could be stuck up there. These were collected at the end of the session or day by the teacher and used to inform planning and then added to the child's assessment file for evidence in summative assessments.

Additional adults also played a significant role in behaviour management. They were often able to spot antecedents and could offer different perspectives on any behavioural incidents.

The special setting I was in did not follow established schemes of work. Instead the approach was very creative and child centred. The staff encouraged me to use resources and teaching strategies that were multi-sensory and very practical. This reduced the amount of verbal input from me in sessions and allowed the children to go off and explore, experiment and interact at their own levels. In this way I felt that I became a facilitator of learning rather than the 'traditional' teacher I had been previously.

Although this was very scary at the beginning I soon relished the 'freedom' from set activities and the autonomy it gave me as a practitioner. I have since transferred this to my mainstream teaching and have seen significant improvement in the engagement from the children and in the learning and progress made by the children. Furthermore it has made teaching much more fun and enjoyable for me!

Many of the challenges I faced on this placement I had anticipated from the outset. However, as the placement continued I realized, much to my dismay, that I had been overwhelmed and perhaps 'blinded' by the diagnostic labels attached to the children. I saw the label and its connotations for the child as a learner and for my practice before I saw the child. This was a particularly worrying revelation for me – had I been the same in my dealings with children with Special Educational Needs in mainstream settings? Working with children with such profound needs in the special setting made me realize that yes, with every 'label' does come considerations and implications for my practice but that alongside that there is a child – a child who still needs all of the parts of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to be met in order to achieve.

A particular highlight of this placement was the impact it had on my differentiation skills. Previously I had differentiated only by support. However, in this setting I was able, and indeed actively encouraged, to differentiate using a number of strategies including by resource, outcome and support – both by additional adults and other pupils.

Without a doubt the greatest highlight of this placement was the realization that I already possessed the skills to teach children with SEN, they just needed honing and developing. In short, the skills required to teach the children on this placement were fundamentally the same as those required to teach in mainstream – this was a significant and liberating realization. It not only impacted the way I teach children with SEN but also gave

me the confidence not to 'fear' having such a child in my class because I was able and capable to provide an environment that they could learn and make progress in.

Key thought: Despite initial reservations this placement really helped me to meet the QTS standards. It made me realize that these standards are merely a starting point, the standards I saw in this setting went above and beyond these standards and gave me a will to strive higher and further in order to be the best practitioner I can be to the children in my care. The overall placement experience inspired and empowered me and as a result I believe I am a much more effective mainstream practitioner.

Foundation Unit in a Primary School – David

Background

This was the final placement on my 4 year BA Initial Teacher Education course. It was organized by the school of Education at my University where they placed me in the appropriate Key stage, in my case, a Foundation Stage setting. I was placed in a two form entry, Catholic Primary school. Now, however, the decision had been taken to merge the two reception classes into one Unit of no more than 60 children. It was the second year that the Unit had been operating and they admitted that they were still on a learning curve but had made good progress since the previous year. 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 6 weeks at school I would take over registering the twenty children in ‘blue group’.

The school was in a predominantly white middle classed area, and had been labelled as an ‘outstanding school’ on its last OFSTED inspection. Previously the Foundation Setting had consisted of two Reception classes and a Nursery. I was at the school during the second half of the autumn term. I was expected to begin by teaching for sixty percent of the time and then build up to eighty percent in my final 2 weeks. I had to produce both weekly and individual activity plans. I was expected to annotate all plans to show any ongoing developments within the activities. I also had the chance to teach a whole topic from beginning to end, assessing progress and giving final marks. I completed at least one daily evaluation followed by a weekly evaluation that was in line with the standards for QTS. I also had to collect evidence to show progress against the relevant Foundation profile points and areas. The evidence collected was mainly observations and photographs but reinforced by formative assessment where appropriate.

Initial reaction

My initial thoughts were apprehensive as I was joining a team that worked very well together with a clear understanding and expectation of one another. I, however, had to

find my own role and place within this already established team. It was made even harder as at face value I could not distinguish between class teacher and teaching assistant. Everybody seemed to do as much as the next person, from leading activities, to tidying up and making the tea. What at first appeared frustrating for me to decipher was actually what made the team and unit successful.

The other key challenge or difference was that I was entering an all female team. This was nothing new for me, as working in Early Years it is something I had come to expect. The standard surprise and excitement I usually receive at first, then gives way to a mine-field of role identity within any setting. What may 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 both inside and outside during the following weeks. Going into what is a female dominated profession is always going to prove very educational for both my colleagues and myself. After the first 2 weeks, however, I felt part of the team. Admittedly, I didn't know exactly what part, but a part.

Planning

The planning process started when the class teachers met every Wednesday during PPA time. We would discuss the topic (if new), areas already covered, areas to be covered and activities that would be suitable. Planning was done as a team, with everybody providing some input and several focus activities were planned for the week. The main focus and independent activities were fed back to the teaching assistants adding or adapting them to any new ideas from the teaching assistants. The teaching assistants then helped to plan for the outside activities as well as the table top activities that would be rotated every two days for 2 weeks.

All teachers and teaching assistants were very supportive of each others ideas but also realistic. Often we had a wealth of activities that we couldn't cover in the proposed week. Once I had been allocated or suggested I run an activity, I would go away and plan this in further detail. For the activity I would plan an introduction, main and plenary. Sometimes the introduction and plenary was a whole group or whole class process. I would differentiate to three levels, including an SEN section as appropriate. If I had any support staff I would also detail what they would be doing and explain this to them before the lesson. For the activity I was expected to cover all 60 children so this would usually take me 3 days, but sometimes 4. I worked with around 6 children in a group and after each group I would annotate the activity plan to show different ideas or approaches that evolved during the activity.

The school had a wide range of resources that were readily accessible. I also found that a key part of the planning was to discuss what resources were available. Although this may

seem quite a basic thing to say, planning as a group gave all people the chance to share their ideas, as well as knowledge of the available resources. This proved especially key in locating the resources! The most valuable resource in the Unit, however, was the ratio of adult to children. This enabled staff to take smaller groups of children out for either support or extension activities.

Behaviour management

Generally the children were very well behaved although, as can be expected, there were times when certain procedures had to be followed. As I was working in a Unit, the response and expectations of all staff had to be constant. There was a 'time out' chair that was used on the third warning. Children would be asked to think about a question given to them by the teacher. Once they were ready to participate appropriately they could rejoin the group/activity. Afterwards the teacher would ask about their response to the question. This worked very well and was very effective with the majority of the children.

There was one child in my family group who found concentrating on anything for a sustained amount of time very difficult unless it was their own choice. This had already been highlighted before I began my placement there but deteriorated as my placement went on. There were several meetings with the child's parents and an IEP was produced. This gave the child achievable targets to begin with. For example, sit still for register and answer your name, the child was given visual prompts and then rewards once achieved. Some days it worked very well, others not so well. This was a good insight into behaviour management strategies. Although, after several visits as well as observations from the Local Authority, the child received a statement and qualified for one-to-one support.

Throughout dealing with any issues I learnt to remain calm but assertive. I often asked the children to talk through what had happened and what do they think I should do. This was a great activity causing the children to take responsibility for their own actions. It generally worked well unless a child refused to admit the truth; this then led to a whole other discussion about telling the truth, all very relevant in the world of a 5-year-old.

Assessment

Learning through play is an underlying principle of the Early Years Foundation Stage and this is most easily evidenced through summative assessment in the form of observations and photographs. I learnt that a key part of assessment in the Early Years is being able to recognize the skills that are being used and then placing these in the appropriate area of learning. Every term the number of profile points a child had gained in the appropriate

area was then entered into a tracking system that collated all of the levels for every child across the school.

It was through assessment that gaps in the curriculum were also identified. For example, if there were very few observations for Physical Development then this would be highlighted and fed back into the next planning meeting. Planning meetings also gave the teachers time to raise any concerns they might have over the progress of certain children. The main concern was usually that certain children only accessed certain areas available. Ideas and activities were then usually brainstormed that would either engage with the child in a different aspect in their preferred area or entice them away to a different area. If these options failed then a play partner would focus on aiding and encouraging children to do different activities.

Placement highlights

As the placement progressed I taught an increasing percentage of the timetable. This involved teaching all six Areas of Learning. As mentioned before, I registered blue group daily seeing them out at the end of the day. Blue group became my group temporarily. It was during register and circle times that we would discuss all sorts of random events that were current to the children. These were some of the best and most thought provoking conversations I had with blue group during the placement. Allowing the children freedom to voice their thoughts led to both agreements and disagreements but also showed how quickly these children were acquiring the right skills to succeed in life. I was also fortunate enough to be at the school while they had OFSTED during 1 week and an RE inspection the next week.

During Diwali I had the chance to plan an activity. I planned an activity based on the Diwali story where the monkey army build a bridge to help Rama. After the children had heard the Diwali story I set them the task of building a bridge in the playground. They had to discuss the available materials and decide which ones to use to build the bridge. They worked in groups of six and every group came up with a different design. As the children seemed to enjoy this activity I set up a simplified version of it as an independent activity the following week. It was one of the most popular activities that week and the children extended it in far more ways than I could have initially conceived. This was when I realized how good practice automatically inspires good learning.

The final activity that captivated most of the children involved taking a group of five pedal bikes on to the big playground and letting the children ride them. Initially this was not a detailed activity but I quickly realized the vast amount of cross curricular opportunities available. Some children could ride without stabilisers, others could not. At first this had been an issue for some but it quickly became irrelevant as I set up cones to ride in and

out of. We then had time trials and made a graph. We also had one puncture and several chains come off. These were all very valuable experiences for the children. We used the bikes for 3 days until everybody had had a turn. For some the challenge was having enough confidence to attempt to ride the bike and for others it was to complete the cones in the quickest possible time. In my family group we used the bike riding as a circle time focus talking about not giving up. We also discussed key words we could use to describe how it felt to be on the big playground riding a bike. Children then wrote some simple sentences about their experiences. The whole process of this activity seemed to flow into the next, especially engaging the practical learners.

Another memorable incident happened while some children and I were making garlands. One was a boy and after he had finished his garland he refused to wear it. I was intrigued and asked why. He explained that only the girls wore the garlands once they had made them so I asked if he thought they were only for girls. He didn't know. I told him I was very proud of my own garland and that I would wear it for the whole week. I did so and many of the boys in the class followed. This made me reflect on my own role as a male teacher.

During the Diwali and bike riding activities I was able to see the Early Years Principles in action. That is a play based, child-centred approach to learning. The children thrived and took control of their own learning with other staff and myself becoming facilitators of learning rather than dictators. Playing alongside, scaffolding and extending the children's learning where necessary was one of the most valuable skills I began to develop. There was a constant notion of childhood throughout my practice that proved both motivating and refreshing. This should be credited to the experienced team I was working with.

It was the team who gave me the freedom and confidence to develop some of my more alternative activities. Some worked, others did not. There were pressures, targets and the general issues, as apparent in most schools; however, the relaxed calm approach of the headteacher and their deputy filtered down through the staff to the children. All team members were valued and their input equal to the next. Praise was constant, not just for the children but for each other as well. It made all feel valued and want to contribute more. As a result, children happily came to school, feeling safe, secure and valued. This placement above all else taught me the importance of having a good team to work with.

Art Gallery Placement – Carolyn

Background

“Just before you go . . .” called the lecturer through the rustling of coats and clatter of bags. Two hundred hung-over third year students groaned at the realization he STILL wasn’t finished. “*There’s somebody here who would like to talk to you about alternative placements for your up-coming teaching practice.*” At the mention of those dreaded words, the throng turned away from the doorway and sat back down. Teaching practice = hell on earth for any student teacher. It means early mornings and late nights (not of the triple vodka red-bull, dancing on the bar in the SU kind). Late nights spent planning, assessing and evaluating . . . the HARD WORK kind; death by Literacy and Numeracy kind. Everyone knows teaching practice is the be all and end all of getting your teaching degree. Fail a TP and you’re out. So after 2 hours of doodling, texting in pockets and intermittent snoozing, 200 hung-over students began to listen.

Initial reaction

It sounded quite good, a bit more interesting than the usual teaching practices. You could opt to swap your ordinary three-week block placement for a three-week stint working in a non-school setting. You could choose pretty much anywhere – museums, galleries, archives, libraries... the list was endless. All you had to do was set up the placement by contacting the host of the setting and getting them to agree to take you. The University would sort out the rest and voila, alternative placement sorted!

So that’s exactly what I did. 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 3-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’. To top it all off, as this

was the first time the University had included something like this in the degree, they had taken the pre-caution of not including it in the criteria for passing the year. 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?

Planning and preparation

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 myself:

- 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 utilizing 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.

Behaviour management

Now confident with the planning aspect of the placement, I now worried about how to manage behaviour within the setting of an art gallery. Compared to a classroom situation, the freedom and openness of the gallery, coupled with the lack of lesson structure and rigid time scales usually found in schools felt daunting. How on earth was I going to manage a class of children in such an open space with so many valuable pieces of artwork around? Furthermore, the workshop space where the children went to do activities after looking around the gallery was completely different to a classroom. There were no chairs, desks, interactive whiteboards or anything resembling an educational setting. I could just imagine a class of children running riot the moment they stepped inside!

However, I needn't have worried. I quickly realized that the gallery itself was a key player in managing behaviour. The surroundings so captured the children's interest that they rarely misbehaved at all. In the workshop, free from the confines and restrictions that a classroom desk and chair normally place on a child, they were able to fully engaged in the activities. Children appeared to enjoy being able to sprawl out in a space to paint, draw or sculpt in a way that was more comfortable for them, rather than being stuck in the more formal sitting position. The most important thing I learnt about behaviour management during my time at the gallery is that a child who feels both comfortable and interested in the task they are doing does not tend to misbehave. Accompanying teachers often commented how a child who usually misbehaved in school had been surprisingly well-behaved, focused and on task during their trip to the gallery. To me, this confirms that making children comfortable and interested in what they are doing is a superb strategy for managing behaviour.

Assessment

Assessment was also an element of the placement that I wasn't initially sure how to handle. I was used to assessing children on paper with numbers, percentages and levels. The art gallery didn't really have a place for this kind of assessment. Through observing and participating in workshops I realized that assessment still played a big part in the learning experiences of the children, it just took a less formal form. Questioning and discussion were used to a great extent within the gallery itself. In particular, the use of open questions about pieces of artwork enabled children to give differentiated responses. It was clear through listening to children's responses that there were a range of levels in their observation, analytical and reflective skills. Open questions allowed children to answer and perform at an appropriate level for them as individuals, while also remaining accessible to all abilities.

During practical activities, it was easy to assess children through observation – such as assessing the level of their fine motor control, grasp of colour or sculpting techniques. As the children were always engaged in practical activities it meant there was always a tangible outcome which also helped in terms of assessment. If anything, assessment wasn't made harder in the non-school setting, it was actually made simpler and was appropriate to the type of learning experiences going on. The most important thing I learnt about assessment during the placement is that the form it takes should be appropriate to the task being completed and that questioning, discussion, observation and outcome are all valid forms of assessment.

Implementation

After initially observing and examining what the gallery already had in place, I began to see the potential for using my own teaching expertise to adapt some of the existing workshops. I planned my own re-vamped sessions using the same resources in different ways. I gained the permission of the education officer to deliver these re-vamped sessions to visiting school groups. The first session I planned and delivered was called the Portraits session, aimed at a group of Key Stage 1 children.

The main learning objective for the session was to understand how artists reproduce the face in portrait work. The session was based around the visual stimulus of a sculpture and paintings of portraits displayed in the gallery. First the children would look closely at portrait work produced by artists before having a go at sketching and copying some of the facial features they could see in the artists' work. The children then went into the workshop area where they worked in small groups using their sense of touch to physically explore

the size and orientation of their own faces. This practical approach really helped the children to understand the relative size of facial features in comparison to one another. After exploring their faces kinaesthetically, I then directed the children to create self portraits out of clay. The previous activity meant they could use their finger-thumb measurements of their facial features to get more accurate size and orientation in their clay work. The results were very successful and the children went away with a much broader understanding of portrait work than when they arrived.

Soon after the success of adapting and delivering the Portraits session, a local school contacted the gallery enquiring if they had a workshop suitable for their Year 2 class, focused on the topic 'People Who Help Us' which they were studying in school. At the time the gallery didn't have any such workshops so I volunteered to do a new session which would be more suitable. Again I focused the session on a visual resource already present in the gallery – a huge landscape painting of Lake Windermere by eighteenth century artist Philippe Jacques De Loutherbourg. The painting is titled 'Windermere in a storm' as it depicts a stormy Lake Windermere with a small boat and its passengers in trouble. The painting shows some figures reaching out to help the passengers to safety. I entitled the session 'Helping Hands' and prompted a discussion with the children about people who might help in such a situation as depicted in the painting. Afterwards the children went to the workshop area where they could choose from a variety of practical, cross-curricular activities relating to the topic Helping Hands. The practical activities covered a range of national curriculum objectives relating to different subjects including; literacy (speaking, listening and drama), art (painting, drawing, colour), PSHE (working together) and science (light using the light box and projector). This shows how a single painting can be used to promote a variety of learning experiences across the curriculum.

Placement highlights

Towards the end of the placement, my confidence in using the gallery's resources as a tool for cross-curricular teaching had grown to such an extent that I progressed to designing a whole new workshop for the gallery to use with future school groups. I based the session on a painting called 'The Gower Family' by George Romney. It aimed to combine teaching art and PE dance objectives. Once I had planned the session it became clear that I needed to recruit a willing school to come along and participate. The education officer at the gallery agreed that as this was a new session I could offer it to schools for free as a pilot session.

Thrilled at the thought of delivering my very own session to a class of children I set about the task of enticing schools to come. I designed a leaflet advertising the session

and distributed it to local primary schools in the area. Very shortly, one of the schools contacted the gallery to say they would love to take us up on the offer of a free art/dance workshop and would like to bring a class from Key Stage 2. I couldn't believe it! I was only a student on placement at the gallery and somehow had managed to completely design, plan, advertise, sell (well sort of) and now deliver a brand new cross-curricular workshop to a local school. At this point I really felt I had achieved something big on this placement. I had learnt so much about teaching creatively in a non-school setting and had now put this to some use.

I am pleased to say the workshop was a success; both I and the children thoroughly enjoyed the experience and gained a lot from it. I asked the teachers of the visiting group to complete an evaluation of the session and was happy to read comments saying they were *“very pleased with the whole visit, the workshop was excellent – well prepared and delivered”*. They said they felt their pupils benefited from *“the opportunity to visit a gallery, with a high standard of art work and to listen and work with such enthusiastic professionals.”* To hear such comments from experienced teachers visiting the gallery was the real highlight of the placement for me. I was so happy to have delivered a meaningful learning experience that was creative in its approach and had been viewed as professional. In this way I had managed to meet the standards for QTS.

This placement linked directly to the following QTS Standards:

Q30: Identify opportunities for learners to learn in out-of-school contexts

Q32: Identify opportunities for working with colleagues, sharing the development of effective practice with them

Q25a: Use a range of teaching strategies and resources

I am sure I met many more during my time at the gallery. It turned out to be one of my most successful placements although it wasn't assessed by the University. The reason it was successful is that in those three weeks my views on what constitutes good practice in teaching were overturned. Teaching in an art gallery taught me that good pedagogy extends far beyond the walls of a classroom. The Excellence and Enjoyment Strategy (2003) stated that *“Children learn better when they are excited and engaged”*. I concur completely and believe that at the heart of good pedagogy is the drive to creatively engage children in subject matter and exploit cross-curricular links in a way that makes learning meaningful.

I have seen first hand that a sure-fire way to get children excited and engaged is to take them out of the traditional school setting and provide them with opportunities to see and experience the stimuli provided by alternative learning environments. I would recommend

that every student teacher complete a placement in an alternative setting because it really does open your eyes to a whole host of learning possibilities within contexts that you may never have thought about before. Now it's easier than ever to set up a placement like this, with websites such as <http://teachingoutsidetheclassroom.com/> which is supported by Creative Partnerships, CapeUK, Learning outside the classroom manifesto, Museums, libraries and archives council (MLA) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). This website allows students on initial teacher training to locate and set up placements in a plethora of non-school settings. I have high hopes that, like myself, many student teachers will take the opportunity to teach in an alternative settings and boost future creativity in the teaching profession.

Family Support Centre Placement – Lisa, Sarah and Tara

Lisa

Background

The Centre works with families in the local community, providing childcare for babies and young children. They also offer an after school club and a holiday scheme for children aged 4–16 years. Children are picked up from school from staff at the Centre and brought back for the rest of the afternoon. Throughout my time at the Centre, my main role was working with the after school children, joining in with everyday roles, collecting children, organising activities, controlling behaviour etc. I was also quite fortunate to take part in the holiday scheme where children attended as early as 8am and stayed up until 6pm. In the after school and holiday club, children have the opportunity to work on fun activities relating to specific themes, play games, play with toys or specific team games. The Centre hopes to give children an enjoyable experience and something that is quite free and different from their time at school.

Planning and preparation

The planning at the Centre was very different to the sort of planning I had undertaken in a school; it was a lot briefer and less structured. The only room at the Centre where planning was carried out was in the art room. In the art room the staff tended to carry out work that originated from the children's own ideas. By doing this the children seemed to become more engaged and motivated, as they were working on activities that they had thought of and were interested in.

During my first week at the setting I became more familiar with the setting's approaches to planning and began working and getting to know the children during activities which were developed from their own interests. I worked with the children and other students making models of certain Disney characters e.g. Nemo, Sponge Bob Square Pants and Cinderella.

Many children worked in groups on these characters, as we found most children wanted to do similar things. All the children in the group contributed in making their model. I was there to provide them with support and guidance, especially for the younger children who are not as capable as the older ones.

After being at the setting for a few days, I began to feel that the children were becoming a little bored, as they were struggling to think of ideas they would like to do. This was when I decided along with the other students to plan something that the children could become more engaged and excited about. We discussed our ideas with the manager and decided to do a project on the rainforest, along with a display. The children were also very keen on this idea and began to add some of their own thoughts, on what they would like to make.

Assessment

We produced weekly plans of activities so we knew exactly what we were doing each day, and what resources and templates to prepare. It also gave us chance to organise adults, to ensure that each child was given appropriate support and guidance that they needed. Children decided for themselves what activities they wanted to become involved in. To ensure children's interests were being met and activities were appropriate for the age ranges of all children we produced assessment sheets to record how well each child got on and to outline any difficulties. By doing this we were able to make further activities more challenging especially for the older children and provide more support to children who were experiencing problems. Some difficulties outlined by assessment sheets were issues such as cutting, identifying colours, sharing etc.

If an activity was carried out without an assessment sheet, I would ensure that an adult was there to observe their difficulties and provide support when needed. The assessment sheets we used were formats of our own, as the Centre did not have a system in practice for assessing the after school children. It could be argued whether this is the correct approach to take. Without assessing the children it could be questioned, how does the Centre ensure all children's learning needs are being met throughout activities? If they don't know where their children are at in their development stage and what difficulties some children are encountering, how else are they ensuring the children are progressing effectively with their skills?

I found that communicating and listening to the children about what they have enjoyed working on was important to their progress. By doing this I gained more of an understanding about what each child had interests in and what further activities they would enjoy. This made the learning environment more inclusive, as the work we developed included all children's opinions. I not only spoke to children but also other students and

staff working with groups. At the end of each day we talked about what we thought about certain activities and what changes could be made if carrying it out again the following day or in the future. This gave us chance to come together as a team, recap on planning and make changes to activities and think about extra activities the children would benefit from.

This experience of working along others helped me to build upon ideas of how I could also improve on my own practice. Working in this kind of way also helped me to see the importance of listening to children instead of them listening to me. This approach is something I will take with me in my teaching career as I found that by listening to the children and taking into account what they wanted, helped us to build a good working relationship. This also helped their enjoyment throughout activities. This is something that I felt I may not have done enough of during my other placements.

Behaviour management

The centre did not have a very rigid disciplinary procedure in force. This is because they believed children should be treated as individuals and understood that they would express themselves with a wide range of emotions and behaviours. By having a strict policy they believed it would not take every child's needs and circumstances into account. However they did outline that sometimes children's behaviour can become inappropriate and affect the well-being of the child and others. This is when the Centre believed in having certain sanctions in place. One was time out, which I had to carry out on a few occasions after children had received warnings about their behaviour and still continued to behave in the same way. The Centre also has several rules on display, which the children contributed to. This helped to manage the children's behaviour as they knew what was expected of them and what was right and wrong.

The Centre has clear policies to protect the health and safety of the children. One of the most important procedures was risk assessments, especially for collecting children from school and taking them to the Centre. They also had an escorting policy which provided guidelines for adults to follow when collecting children. This ensured that a child's safety was paramount. I was given the opportunity to take on the role of collecting children from school and filling in risk assessment sheets.

Planning and preparation

The Centre allowed me and the other students to take responsibility for the planning of activities. This enabled us to work collaboratively and produce a range of activities for the children. We produced planning, assessment records, activity evaluations and displays.

After getting to know the children we also discussed any changes we would make to activities in order to support the children more effectively.

The displays we produced, one on the rainforest and one on under and over the sea, involved a lot of work and effort from the children. Mainly the after school children took part in activities relating to the rainforest and the holiday scheme children took part in the under and over the sea display. These displays were very different to the kind of display you would probably see in a school environment. On display was work which incorporated a range of art materials and a variety of skills in many curriculum areas, as the children had the chance to make 3D models, use ICT, do observational drawings, paintings, collages and learn about different places in the world. By giving the children a topic it helped to keep the children engaged and gave them something to express their own ideas about.

The displays were not just there to display children's work, but to provide factual information about the different animals, plants, places, etc. Throughout the activities the children would learn about certain facts relating to the animal/place they were creating or learning about. Also some children used the internet to research facts relating to the different things they were producing, which were also displayed. When displaying work we had to make sure that, as we were working with a wide range of ages, all the children contributed.

Placement highlights

I was very grateful to be given the opportunity to have an experience in an alternative educational setting, as it has helped me consider some important aspects of how I can improve my own teaching practice. The children engaged much more if it was an activity they were interested in. Therefore, when in the classroom I will try to allow time to listen to children's thoughts and ideas, and plan more relating to their responses. This would also help contribute to the working relationship formed between you and the children. The experience outlined the importance of creativity in all curriculum areas, in order to bring more excitement and enthusiasm to the classroom environment.

Sarah

Background

My placement was within a Family Support Centre and involved working with children from birth to 16 years. My main role throughout the duration of time at the setting involved contact with children from 4–16 years in after school provision. The Centre

worked alongside schools and parents in the local area to provide a facility for children during out of school hours. This allowed me to experience different aspects of provision such as planning and assessment of activities, holiday scheme, trips and school pick ups.

Planning and preparation

The planning of activities took a while for me to get used to as there were no strict guidelines or objectives to follow. Most activities originated from children's interests, a chosen topic or theme. This was quite challenging at first, as it took a while through observation and everyday contact to get to know children and what interested them. Most children enjoyed working within the art room and experimenting with different creative resources.

Working from the interests of the children was an efficient strategy which worked effectively at motivating and encouraging the children to participate. It was amazing to see how much children became actively involved, progressed and worked together collaboratively. Preparing activities that were not too structured allowed us to provide an educational environment that could easily be adapted. An adaptive educational environment was one that could be changed to better suit the differing needs of the children and provide additional opportunities for progression. Spaces were adapted to accommodate collaborative group work, where children and adults worked together.

To ensure activities were suited to the needs of the children we prepared a weekly plan, which was set out on a daily basis giving a brief overview of possible activities and how they could be implemented. Most the ideas evident in the planning were elaborated upon from children's own interests. This gave great significance to the children, as it gave them control over their own learning and made activities more meaningful. This worked exceptionally well for children who didn't achieve as well at school, by giving them the opportunity to work from their own aspirations. Using a plan to work from enabled us to prepare activities in advance and adapt activities where necessary to incorporate the needs, thoughts and feelings of the children. I tended to use the art room as there was space for the children to work at tables and use creative resources.

The use of the Internet was a convenient source of information and planning tool, which helped us find resources to support topics, themes, interests and ideas of the children. It was also relevant for searching for factual information, pictures, photographs and activities based around our topics 'The Amazon Rainforest' and 'Under and Over the Sea'. Overall accessibility to the internet at the setting allowed us to plan activities that were innovative, flexible and easily adapted creatively to suit the needs of individuals. The use of books was also important as they were popular resources frequently used to develop children's knowledge and ideas. A lot of the children used the books to gain information,

find a particular area of interest, to aid drawings, models, collages, paintings and to select and prepare appropriate resources.

In the classroom environment, children generally have to undertake very structured activities that require specific outcomes and objectives. When arriving at the Centre the children enjoyed playing freely and participating in activities of interest, which often involved collaborative work. This type of educational experience provides opportunities for the children to work with others, develop social skills and build good working relationships. Through implementing activities where children are working within groups encouraged children to allocate roles and support each other in their learning.

When making Nemo and Sponge Bob Square Paints models the children attributed roles, helped each other mix paints and decide on materials to add. It was very useful to have children of mixed age ranges working together, so that discussions and ideas could be strengthened and younger children could be supported. However, because of groups being so diverse in age and ability, adult intervention was often needed to help children organise thoughts and establish roles to prevent disagreements and voices being unheard, as older children without realising tended to be a little more dominant.

In order for groups to communicate effectively, children need to feel comfortable working together as part of a team and taking part in problem solving without having too many restrictions. It was important for adults to enforce the social skills required, but too much of a focus I found began to affect children's contributions. The children at the setting referred to all adults using their first names. This was a strategy that worked well, especially because of the nature of the setting and the fact that the children's interests and ideas were priority. If adults were given too much of an authoritative role, I think children would have lacked confidence and opportunities to express themselves as openly.

Throughout the implementation of activities group talk was often encouraged as we strongly believed in children having time to raise difficulties and make sense of them for themselves. To encourage interaction group tasks sheets were used to organise children's perspectives. These sheets were filled in by an adult working alongside each group to encourage the children to communicate ideas, solve problems and establish roles in activities.

Assessment

For many of the activities individual and group assessment sheets were produced to monitor the children's progress in activities. The long and medium term planning clearly identifies all the skills children develop through taking part in activities at the setting. However, assessment procedures were rarely in practice to assess progression in these areas.

Within the setting children had the chance to take part within a number of enrichment activities. In order to enrich activities as much as possible, make reliable adaptations to planning, and support children in their learning it was beneficial to assess children in all areas. In order to implement inclusive activities to suit the differing needs of the children, assessment was needed to discover where children were experiencing difficulties and where support needed to be provided. Without assessment children's out of school time can not be as enriched as much as possible and fully represent an opportunity to help children grow in all areas.

Each child at the setting was given a text book with their name on. This book was given to the children to write about their time at after school club. These were placed out on an empty table on a daily basis for the children to add in information. These worked well in encouraging the children to express their thoughts about previous activities and enjoyments, ideas of possible activities, games and resources they would like to have at the setting or take part in. These books could have been more productive and richer in assessment opportunities if activity evaluations or pictures were stuck in to the children's books to direct thinking and written work.

Risk assessments were filled out everyday, as children encountered a number of risks during their journey from school into the setting. I seriously considered all the possible risks in order to limit any occurrences when taking on the responsibility of school pick up. In order to ensure this I read through their escorting policy and took part in a few school pick ups with an adult from the setting, so that I could familiarise myself with any rules and expectations before taking on this role. This helped me become fully aware of the journey e.g. where the safest areas were to cross roads and when to enforce rules when children were behaving inappropriately.

Team work was essential at the setting in order to evaluate children's learning and make appropriate adaptations to planning. At the end of each day we would get together and discuss children's achievements and progression in activities. We would then make amendments to planning so that children experiencing difficulties could become better supported, and those that are finding activities too easy could become challenged. We often challenged excelling children by extending activities and allocating more difficult roles. For example we recognised an awareness of a child's interest and ability in drawing, and prepared an individual activity which involved him drawing a turtle. By telling him that his work was going to be placed on display, he extremely valued his contribution and became focused and dedicated to produce his best work. He thought carefully about resources especially when mixing paints to match colours in the picture and choosing paint brushes to suit their purpose.

Paired teaching with two other students worked successfully, as we were able to support each other throughout teaching, decision making and sharing knowledge and expertise.

For example, we made shared decisions when critically reflecting upon our practice in order to change structures and strategies which were hindering children's learning and effective teaching. Selecting a topic to work from generated a wide range of ideas and activities and helped to achieve diverse teaching. Producing two large displays helped the children see the variety of work produced and learn about other areas.

Behaviour management

In order to manage children's behaviour it was crucial to have a clear understanding of all rules. These rules were placed on the walls in each of the rooms and were regularly discussed with children. Children who did not follow by these rules were given three warnings in total. If they continued to behave in the same manner they would take 'time out'. This was an effective strategy that worked well at controlling the children's behaviour. This is because most of the activities in each of the different rooms met the interests of the children, so 'time out' where children sat back watching others having fun often disappointed them and provided them with the opportunity to think about their actions. In most circumstances this influenced their future behaviour, as children did not want to lose time participating in activities they enjoyed. Throughout my experience 'time out' was not given too regularly as children tended to act upon feedback given. Also because rules were not too rigid children often controlled themselves accordingly to meet expectations.

Having rules present in each of the rooms and discussing them with the children assured understanding. However in order to provide equality to all children it was important that all rules were applied fairly and consistently.

Placement highlights

My experience of working within a setting providing out of school provision, enabled me to realise the importance of taking into account the interests and desires of the children in order to deepen the children's learning about themselves, their community and the world beyond. Building good working relationships with adults and children was a priority in order to incorporate these aspects into the planning and implementation of activities. Activities were often more fun, enjoyable and open for children to find an area they felt competent working within, and expand upon ideas and interests. I found this approach worked productively for all children but especially for children that were less able or experiencing behavioural difficulties. Working within the Centre, implementing various strategies, enabled me to see the importance of working adaptively and flexibly in order to provide the best provision necessary to meet the needs of the children.

Tara

Background

The Centre provided after school provision for children from local schools and had a private day nursery. The main role I undertook was to help with the running of the after school club and holiday schemes. Children were collected from their schools by the staff of the Centre, and brought back to participate in a range of activities. Children could stay at the Centre until 6pm and the ages of these children varied from 4–16 years. During the school holidays children went to the Centre from 8am till 6pm, and they could take part in a variety of activities related to specific topics and go on out of centre visits.

Planning and preparation

Planning was an important part of ensuring that the children at the Centre were getting the most out of the opportunities given to them, and a way of making sure that there is some kind of progression taking place. In the Centre, the planning that is carried out was very basic and straight forward. This is so that the children could carry out activities that they wanted to be involved in and could enjoy for themselves. However, within the first few days at the Centre, I found that because the children were not encouraged enough to think of their own fun activities to carry out, they became bored and unmotivated. So two other students and I decided to do a whole topic on the rainforest, to produce a large display and to get as many children involved as possible.

Our main focus was art and design activities, so we made structured weekly plans that we could follow. Each activity gave every child the opportunity to get involved through adaptation and differentiation and the opportunity to learn a new skill or progress in a skill through the range of activities and resources that were available to them. Being able to differentiate the activities to meet the individual needs of the children were crucial. A range of photographs and factual information was also available for the children to access to make the experiences as educational as possible. The internet was extremely useful in gathering information like this and a way in which the children could get involved in the use of ICT.

Preparation of the activities took place each day before the children arrived and was taken from the ideas from the structured weekly plans. As I worked in the art room each day with the children, it was easy to access all the resources, and they were available and ready for the children to use. This was essential in making sure that the children could gain something from each activity. The resources promoted a different skill or helped them to gain knowledge and experience.

When the children arrived at the Centre, I would talk to them as a group and individually about the activities that were going to take place and encourage them to contribute. The children seemed very keen to get involved, especially when praised and motivated by the idea of their work being put on display. Some of the activities that took place were collage parrots, 3d beetles, painting Jaguars and making symmetrical butterflies. Most of the activities were supported by adults, this was to ensure that younger children or children with specific needs were given guidance where necessary and so that the children could get as much as possible out of the activity and to push them further in their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Assessment

When carrying out the activities, I made assessment formats to assess where the children were at and to evaluate the activity as a whole for future development. Each activity had objectives and goals that the children could achieve. The assessments were simple enough for other adults in the room to fill in, by observing each child, filling in a simple tick chart and writing a small comment. Due to the limited amount of time in the Centre, it was difficult to assess children over a long period of time to see much progression, but the information that was taken from these assessments were shared between all adults at the end of each day and were given to long term staff to take the children further in their learning.

In the Centre they promoted inclusion and diversity, and they had a clear policy in relation to this, to guarantee that every child has equal opportunities. The Centre worked with a range of people in the diverse local community, and with children who have specific individual needs. I worked with a child with dyslexia and children who had specific emotional problems from recent family problems. I encouraged the children to be involved in fun learning activities to help improve their confidence. I also tried to talk with parents as much as possible about their children and the work that they had done in the Centre, so that the children could talk about their learning in their home environment.

During my time at the placement, there were many occasions where I was given the responsibility of escorting the children from their school to the Centre. Before doing so I ensured I read their policy on the whole procedure, to guarantee that the whole process ran smoothly and to make sure I was aware of any risks that could occur. There were simple instructions to follow for the journey but I had to make sure that I was vigilant on each trip.

Behaviour management

There were times in the Centre where my behaviour management skills were put to the test, as children were allowed to move around the Centre freely and choose activities that suited them. Thus, some of the time the children challenged the instructions or requests made to them. As the Centre was informal, I found that some children did find this an opportunity to behave inappropriately. One example involved dealing with two young children who had stolen items during an out of centre visit. The approach I took was to be firm and to ensure they understood the consequences of their actions. I found with many children, the way in which to manage their behaviour effectively, was to get to know the children and understand the way in which they responded to certain situations. Having a firm but friendly approach from the first day, in relation to behaviour management, was definitely a positive action.

I used positive reinforcement and praised the children to keep a positive learning environment and to encourage them to continue to work well. When children did behave inappropriately, I gave them three warnings which on occasion resulted in 'time outs'. I always tried to talk with children about their behaviour to encourage them to understand the consequences of this.

The friendly but firm approach I took from the very first meeting with the children helped me successfully develop good relationships with them. Through developing these relationships it made the tasks and activities fun for both the children and me. I ensured that I used effective communication skills with all children, these encouraged children to want to participate in the activities that I organized. The use of good communication skills gave opportunities for the children to listen and talk, whereas at school, a lot of the time, children tend to have to listen a lot to obtain information, as opposed to being given many opportunities to talk and discuss on a one-to-one basis with the teacher.

Having a good relationship with the children enabled me to understand what they wanted out of the Centre and to help them achieve this. I tried to support children to develop good communicative relationships with other children, so that learning could be enhanced through working collaboratively. When children did work collaboratively, it made their learning enjoyable and more interesting, which promoted children's own ideas, thoughts and opinions. The only problems that occurred when trying to allow children to work co-operatively, was the particular grouping of the children, so I tried my hardest to get to know the children to see which children were able to work effectively together.

Placement highlights

Working with two other students gave us the opportunity to work collaboratively and put all our ideas together so that we could provide the children with a good experience. We worked together on planning, assessment, activity evaluations and produced two large displays. The displays were of two themes, the rainforest and under and over the sea, which were very successful. The displays produced at the Centre were very large, colourful, stimulating, 3d, contained a range of textures and materials and were also educational through the use of photographs and factual information. The whole purpose of producing the displays was so that the children could be proud of the different things that they had done, so that parents and colleagues could see what the children had achieved and so that the children could continue to learn about the different themes of the displays.

The reason that the displays were originally on the rainforest, was through discussion with the children about what interested them. From taking this on board, children were confident and attracted by the idea enough to want to get involved. A lot of the activities that were put on the weekly plans were ideas from the children themselves. The way in which the activities were approached was through providing learner inclusive environments. This is what I tried to aim for, where the children could create their own learning experiences with guidance and support from adults.

Through doing the displays, in a slightly less formal way, I was able to motivate and engage the children in a fun and exciting way. The displays also created opportunities for cross curricular learning for the children, due to the broad topics taught. The Centre is intended to give the children an opportunity to learn, but to gain an experience that is different from school based learning. Through using the aim of the centre and my own experience of school teaching I was able to incorporate both approaches in an informal way. I will definitely consider using approaches like these for my own teaching in the future to try and promote educational but fun learning experiences for all children. Everything that I have learnt from the placement I will use to help in my teaching career.

American Placement – Adelle

Background

As part of the 4 year route into teaching at University, each student is given the opportunity to take part in an overseas short or long term placement. The short term placement is voluntary and does not contribute to a grade or passing the year. It is the opportunity to experience new places and different ways of life and to witness first hand different educational institutions. The university organize the school teaching placements and the accommodation over in America. During our time in Holland in Michigan, America we were placed in two schools. These schools both draw from a similar catchment area, mostly Hispanic and white Americans and classed as economically disadvantaged. The placement was 3 weeks in total with 2 weeks spent full time in school and the rest experiencing classes and lectures on the teacher training programme at the local College. When in America, it was expected that we kept a detailed diary of what we experienced and attended all classes and placement days.

Initial Reaction

When given the school details an initial instinct is 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 were only to be answered when we got there and met the children in person. One major challenge that was identified would be how much did the children know about the wider world and was this only with an American bias on their thoughts and ideas.

Planning and Preparation

When beginning the planning process for teaching in America, I found out a little about the area I was going to. University was great in offering us a buddy system, where we could contact a student teacher who was studying there 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 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.

Behaviour management

During my time in both schools in Holland, Michigan the behaviour of the children was excellent. When talking with other students out there on placement the consensus of opinion was one that the majority of the children in school were very well behaved. Through observations there were many factors that contributed to this. The classroom sizes were huge; the children all had plenty of space to work and so weren't cramped on top of each other. The classes were very structured and although lacked the much needed creativity they did give the children a sense of routine and the children were able to expect what was coming next in their curriculum.

The children were also allowed to be children outside on the playground and were given the most fabulous resources I have ever seen in a school playground. Jungle gyms and swing sets as far as the eye could see, the outdoor area was immense. What was refreshing to see was that the children were swinging and jumping without a worried teacher flinching as each child moved, just in case they fell. This enabled the children to really let off steam and challenge their bodies physically when on their playtime. In turn the children came back into class ready to sit down and focus on the task. The staff and children offered each other lots of praise and were proud to highlight their achievements; in turn this contributed to the children feeling of self worth and so affected their behaviour in a positive way. Through these observations the most important thing I learnt from

my time in America was for good behaviour; provide the children with structure and challenge, both in the classroom and outside.

Assessment

The assessment expectations in America were given by the different states. The children were assessed on the work they completed written in class. The work set often only enabled the children to either pass or fail; it was not differentiated depending on ability or past experiences. This approach to assessment did not give the children a chance at times I felt. They were given sheet after sheet during math work and due to the fast moving pace of the curriculum the children who struggled with a particular area did not get the chance to try it a different way or practice it some more. Rather they were assessed as not being able to do it and were moved onto another topic. During my brief time in the class, I planned little activities based on what the children had been doing. The next days activities were then planned based on what the children had achieved that day. When carrying out these activities, observations helped me to assess the children and then in turn informed my planning. Therefore the most important thing I learnt about assessment is that it should not just be done as a means to an end but should be done to really benefit the child and their learning.

Placement highlights

During the placement we were assigned a class in a school for 1 week, we then switched schools and were assigned a class for the second week. During my first week, I was placed in a first grade class. The class had twenty five children in it and was an equal mixture of boys and girls, with 80% of the class Hispanic and only 20% white Americans. The children were so excited to see me and were eager to ask me lots of questions. They told me that they had been learning all about England and showed me the book they had looked at, published in 1981, before I was even born! The pictures showed a different England to that of today and so the children were already full of misconceptions. Some of the children thought we all lived in castles like the queen, drove wooden cars (due to the straight cut lines of old cars), we were all friends with the queen and that I was speaking a different language due to my accent.

The children found it really interesting when I told them about where I lived and showed them pictures of my house, my car and my family. I tried to explain that I was speaking the same language I just pronounced some of my words differently, though I think this confused some of them even more. The children were eager for me to see what they do in their classes and took great pleasure in showing me round the classroom. I was

able to observe the class teacher and see how her teaching style differed to my own. She was quite formal, though this was due mostly to the structured nature of the curriculum. During the school placements we were encouraged to work with small groups and show the children how we like to teach in England. The children appeared to find the group work as a refreshing change to what they had been doing in their whole class work. The creative nature of teaching in England was enjoyed by the children and they engaged in the activities I set for them with enthusiasm.

During my second week, I was placed in a first grade class at a second school. The class had twenty children in it and was an equal mixture of boys and girls, with 55% of the class Hispanics and 45% of the class white Americans. The children at this school had lots of questions also, but did not have as many misconceptions as the previous school. I observed the class and the class teacher and was able to work with some of the children on an individual basis. It was interesting to hear the children read as part of a one to one guided reading scheme, similar to some schools in England. The children were proud to show me how well they could read and what books they had read in the past. At Woodside I was fortunate enough to take part in a field trip with the older children, giving me the opportunity to gain another insight into American education. The children were excited just as all children are and thoroughly enjoyed their trip to a wildlife sanctuary. They were able to experience first hand creepy crawlies, pond dipping and rescued wild birds of prey. The structure of the day was similar to how we would organize a school trip in England, the content differed slightly due to the creatures they found and could handle.

The most rewarding experiences I found were making little differences to some of the children's views on a particular subject or topic. The children really appreciated the time I put into the activities and how I tried to make them fun and interesting. It was very rewarding to see the motivation of the children towards their work, with the teachers and children reacting so positively. This confidence promoted excellent speaking and listening among the children and they weren't afraid to talk and loved being the centre of attention. The insistence on a high level of patriotism and the great pride in their school which is instilled in the children made a great impression on me and I was also impressed at how the children enjoy showing off their talents. This is now something that I try to promote with the children I work with in England.

Although my placement did not count towards any final grade or passing the year, it gave me the opportunity to develop myself as a teacher and my teaching style. The placement gave me new techniques to add to my repertoire. Through living on campus and taking classes at the university I was able to immerse myself in the culture and was able to appreciate the opportunity to learn from them. America was a wonderful insight and I would recommend the experience to anyone, even if it is just to reassure you that what you are doing back here in England is good.

Japanese Placement – David

Background

In the third year of my degree I was given the opportunity to experience either an alternative placement or an international placement. I chose the international placement as travelling is one of my favourite past times. There is currently a programme ran by the EU that places candidates from European countries in other European schools. But, I decided to venture further a field. I had always wanted to visit Japan and after speaking to several people discovered that my University had an agreement with a Japanese University. However, no one from our University had ever been to theirs, as such, I would be a pioneer. A professor from both the Japanese University and my own University became responsible for the amount of paperwork that had to be exchanged in order for the placement to take place. After 6 months of paper shuffling, I received confirmation and was ready to go.

The bulk of my placement in Japan was to be in a local, government ran elementary school. Children begin elementary school when they are 6 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 to 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 enough 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 also attended University lectures at undergraduate and post graduate 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 3 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 under utilized.

After the placement was finished I then had to complete a comparative report of the two education systems of Japan and England. The report aimed to highlight key similarities and differences between the two systems.

Initial reaction

My initial reaction was of excitement at the opportunity to experience another education system. The opportunity to experience another education system at such an early stage in my own teaching career would also have great benefits for my own professional development, especially when applying for jobs 18 months later. I knew the experience would also make me step outside of a culture and education system that I had been subjected to all my life. I recognized that through doing this 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 had contact with spoke very little English.

Planning and preparation

Planning proved difficult as it was all in Japanese. I collected samples of planning from different schools and was able to get them translated and explained to me by a professor at the University.

The Nursery school planning was an overview in that they aimed to cover traditional poems and rhymes throughout the year. Festivals and celebrations also contributed heavily to the years work but these were not 'planned' as such, they were more tradition. The nursery environment was much more about giving the children freedom to develop their personal, social and emotional skills. This was not, and could not be planned for, the principal explained to me. It is very important that the staff are well trained so that they can help the children utilize everyday experiences and situations to aid in their development. At the nursery school the emphasis was on practice not planning.

The elementary school had a more formal structure to its planning, having clear short, medium and long term plans. The subject and area of the subject being taught were

highlighted. Lessons were 50 minutes long and all followed a structure. The beginning and end of each lesson was something not detailed in the plans, it was more custom. Every lesson was begun and ended with formalities, led by the children whose turn it was that day. The structure of the planning and wider school year gave little room for children who had not understood the lesson. If children were struggling, they usually stayed behind to catch up during one of the regular recesses they had daily, where the teacher would then give further help.

The two distinct styles of pedagogy I saw highlighted the difference in planning. There was a clear awareness of child development (personal, social and emotional wise) in the way that the nursery teachers worked with their children and no attempts were made to document this. It seemed to be just accepted as the norm. In the elementary school there was evidence of progression throughout the planning stage, but this progression was a general progression that was considered the norm for most children. The progression through elementary school to junior high leads to what is seen to be a key characteristic of the Japanese education system, the entrance exam. Junior high school students are, effectively, taught to pass the entrance exam for high school. The different styles of planning or not planning as such highlighted the difference of the freedom to explore when younger as to the necessity of specific subject learning when older.

Behaviour management

Classroom and behaviour management were my most challenging puzzle as it is so indirect and therefore hard to identify at first. It was only after a week of observations, many questions and background reading that I began to understand how it works. It is the children themselves who are given the brunt of managing each others' behaviour. There is very little direct input from the teacher. The formalities that begin and end each lesson are a clear indicator of what sort of behaviour is expected from the children. The children who begin the formalities at the beginning of the lesson will not begin until everyone is ready, sometimes this means they will go and confront the child who is not ready to see what the problem is.

During recess however, children are left to their own devices, this often involves roaming around the whole of the school grounds, seen or unseen. Most lessons (except morning break and lunchtime, when the time is longer) are followed by a 10 minute recess, usually children remain in the classroom. During one such recess I witnessed a fight break out when the teacher was sat at the front of the classroom marking work, they ignored it. Class children split the fight up and had words with 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 I felt came natural on both parts of the teacher and the child, as the adult: child ratio was much higher than what I had experienced in England.

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 will play Jan-ken to decide who gets it. There is no room for discussion after Jan-ken has 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 teacher whether the best dramatists had the lead roles, they laughed and said no, why should they?

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 implications of the classroom behaviour and management became much clearer. This is a culture where there is a heavy emphasis on the group mentality compared to the individual. The notion of group mentality is begun 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 terms of personal, social and emotional terms. Although, undoubtedly, there are times when teachers do intervene but these can be seen as minimal compared to England.

Assessment

I saw very little formal assessment in both the nursery school and kindergartens I visited. One principle told me that a good teacher is continually assessing and that it is something that it is expected to be done naturally by the teacher. They give parents verbal feedback about the child's personal, social and emotional development as well as discussing craft work etc. They had no statutory requirement for assessment before elementary school.

Assessment was difficult to follow in the elementary school as it was in Japanese. I did however see summative, formative and peer assessment. Children were tested weekly on the new kanji (the written Chinese characters used by the Japanese) they had learnt. They were also given maths tests every week. They were tested on Japanese and Mathematics at the end of every term. Peer assessment was interesting as it was done by a set of hand signs which were universal throughout the school. These included, agree, disagree, question, opinion and children were often invited to discuss each others work with both positive and negative comments.

An interesting difference in the marking was that a clear tick meant that the child needed to look at their answer again. Once it had been corrected the tick was then closed off to form a triangle. If an answer had been corrected then the teacher would make a swirl mark next to it. If everything on the page was correct the teacher would make a big swirl mark over the whole page.

In reflecting on assessment it has made me realize how integral assessment has become at all stages of education in England. It was only through experiencing another education system that I was really able to reflect on the English system and question whether assessment is now taking priority over practice. Undeniably both inform each other but in the Japanese nursery school and kindergartens that I visited it was the practice that took priority.

Placement highlights

For the bulk of my placement I assisted class teachers during lesson times, although at times, to the amusement of the children, I would also join in as a learner. For example, when the second grade class which I spent most of my time in were beginning to learn 'shodo' (Japanese calligraphy), I would sit at a desk and learn it too. At all the junior and senior high schools I visited I gave a brief talk on English culture to several English classes. There would also be a question and answer section with the students for their speaking and listening skills. Students would record my answers and I would look at them after the lesson with the English teacher and provide some simple feedback. At the university lectures I attended I was there as a student so my role here was much the same as if I was attending a lecture in England. The exception being that I was often asked to explain things in more detail to the Japanese students by the professor.

The children at the elementary school seemed to be given enormous responsibility for themselves as well as others. The sense of community was evident at many different levels of the school, from class, to year group, to the whole school. One of my fondest memories is of the children lining up at the end of everyday in the playground, before they bow in unison with the teachers and thank them for the days learning. The children then walk home in neighbourhood groups led by the oldest children. At first it all seemed alien to me but after returning to England I realized how important such small formalities were in establishing a sense of community throughout all involved.

Another common occurrence I witnessed through elementary schools to senior high was cleaning time. This happened for 15 minutes after every lunch time. It involved the children and teachers cleaning the whole school. Classical music would be played through the loud speakers and children would spread around the school, sweeping floors, wiping

desks, trimming bushes, weeding etc. . . . One teacher admitted it may not be the most effective method but it gave the children the responsibility of maintaining their school premises. I asked how everyone knew what to do, as the first few times I witnessed it seemed to work like clock work. I found out that each class was divided into smaller groups who followed a cleaning rota.

The most rewarding experience of my time at the elementary school was similar to that of any of my previous placements and that is when the children take to you and accept you. This is something that usually comes quite naturally when I've been on placement before and I'm happy to say it was the same in Japan, although the language barrier did mean that communication was much more 'fun'. It also re-enforced the reason why I want to be a teacher and made me realize that the feeling and motivation I have experienced in England is not just relative to England but anywhere when given the chance.

I believe that this placement gave me a real appreciation of the social skills children can develop, if left to do so, in an appropriate and responsive manner. It made me question the incessant intervention that teachers feel compelled to make in England. This is clearly something culturally bound and I am not suggesting that one system is superior to the other. However, when experiencing both it made me able to recognize similarities, differences and basic realities of each system. This critical reflection was only enabled from the opportunity to step outside of my own culture and in doing so the constraints that come with it. I began not knowing what to expect and concluding the experience not knowing where to start to reflect, but without a doubt it has had a very positive influence on my role as a teacher. Experiencing the Japanese school system made me begin to appreciate other aspects of schooling that are just as, if not more, important than the academic side of school. For example, after school clubs played a very important part in all of the children's lives and lunchtimes were a class event, in the classroom, with the class teacher. Lunchtimes were when I got to know the children in my class best. I intend to take parts of the good practice I saw in Japan into my own classroom in England.

Gambian Placement – Rachel

Background

The educational environment and practice in a Gambian school was quite a shock for me and very different from state schools I had experience of in England. Bennett (2007)¹ states that ‘Schooling is not compulsory in the Gambia; the government recommends that all children over the age of 7 should receive some kind of formal education’. Jagne (2007)² noted that the Department of State for Education in the Gambia was striving to improve the education and that teachers know that quality education is the key to the development of the nation. While Bloomfields et al. (2007)³ stated that many Gambians see education as the only way out of poverty.

The Lower Basic primary school that I placed in was built in 1980 by the Charity SOS. This charity has set up many schools and centres in Bakoteh to help to provide the children with a basic education. The school was based on the following mission that included behaviour, learning objectives and the environment, as the physical environment and climate have a huge impact on Gambian schools and on the children’s learning.



Initial Reaction

In February, when I visited it was 43°C. Scientific research suggests that in these conditions people are more likely to become irritated, bored and have a lower concentration span than those who are in a cooler environment. Each day children walked to school in very hot weather and then sat in cramped hot classrooms; this could adversely affect their mood, concentration and ability to learn.

The classrooms housed an average of 46 children per class.



Children sat four or five to a desk and were crammed together, creating an uncomfortable environment in which to learn. Many children preferred sitting on the floor closer to the board (a black painted wall) as the classrooms were so dark it is hard to see what the teacher has written. Rather than windows there were small holes in the wall, and there was no electricity for lighting. The children sometimes became disinterested and bored, which led to some children misbehaving and disrupting lessons. The lack of light in the classroom was a key issue in Gambia.

Classrooms contained very few displays if any at all, most of these had been made by student teachers and have been there for years, and were faded and damaged. The children's work was not displayed and the teachers did not think that it was useful to do this. So the few displays there were, were not eye catching, and did not stimulate the children or interest them. They were not used as an interactive source of learning or a teaching resource.



These are typical displays in a Gambian classroom, they are dull, old and damaged. They did not interest the children or help to consolidate their learning.



In contrast these are typical displays in an English classroom; bright, colourful and eye catching. The children used these displays to help consolidate learning; they are an interactive resource that benefits the children and supports teaching.

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

Planning and Preparation

The school we visited in the Gambia had very few resources, and as a result lessons tended not to be very interactive. There were very few practical activities and children were generally 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's families could not afford a second book. The children were expected to provide their own pencils, but it appeared that 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 lessons.

Although the school was unable to provide the children with many learning opportunities due to economics, physical environment and the lack of resources available, the teachers did not complain and tried hard to provide a good level of education for the children. The State, in response to the lack of resources, provided each school with a set of 3 text books per child; English, Mathematics and Social Studies. These books were the basis of all teaching; the teachers teach the children using these books, until completed. They are similar to English schemes of work; however they offered no flexibility and no regular reviews. The Head teacher informed me that teachers are 'encouraged to develop a scheme of work from which they can make their lesson plans'.

There did not appear to be much differentiation of work during lessons. Classes were large and poorly resourced, and the teacher only had one small black board for the children to work from. Differentiating work was difficult as the children needed to be split into groups and set different tasks. However, only one group could work from the board, so the other children needed to be taught verbally which distracted others from their work. Another way of providing children with differentiated work would have been to individually set questions in their exercise books. However, this would have been a huge change in practice, and would have been very time consuming for such large numbers of children.

The Department of State for Education in the Gambia suggested that teachers should teach using one of two methods, the 'presentation method' or the 'enquiry method', and that the presentation method was the most efficient way of making sure all pupils could learn when they were part of a large class. Most methods would be challenging with such limited resources and very large class sizes.

Assessment

The teachers produced weekly lesson plans which contained headings, content, learning objectives, work planned, reference, materials and comments; however there wasn't a section on assessment. There was little evidence of recording the children's progression, or assessment taking place in the everyday routine of the classroom. Some marking was undertaken by the teachers, which consisted of a tick but no written or verbal feedback was given. Summative assessment consisted of a test at the end of the academic year. Questions were written on the board, time given for the children to answer the questions, then these were rubbed out and additional questions written. These tests were carried out to establish what levels the children were working at and to determine whether a child had reached the right level of knowledge to move up to the next grade; or whether they needed to repeat the year to make sure they have a solid understanding of the work taught that year.

Placement Highlights

My time in Gambia was a wonderful learning experience and a beneficial venture. It confirmed my belief in the importance of a safe, secure and positive learning environment and the impact that this has on the child's attitude and ability to learn. It also consolidated my previous learning and added to my professional development by demonstrating to me how important it is to have appropriate resources, carefully differentiated in order to engage and stimulate the children, so that they are fully involved in their learning. It showed me the value of a positive, comfortable and efficient classroom environment; an area where children are happy and eager to learn. My Gambian placement made me realize that the English educational system is effective and well resourced; and that we have many facilities to offer our children. It made me want to strive to be a better teacher and to provide for our children what cannot be so readily provided in other countries.

Notes

- 1 Bennett, L (2007) *Travellers: the Gambia*. Peterborough: Thomas Cook Publishing.
- 2 Jagne (2007) Gambia News Community. Available at: <http://wow.gm/africa/gambia/abko/article/2008/2/28/quality-education-is-fundamental-to-success-abuko-principle>
- 3 Bloomfields, P et al (2007) 'Creative approaches to staff development: global education in ITE in the Gambia' in *Education* 3–13. 35:2, 117–131.

Indian Placement – Jaz

Background

Public primary schools in India determine their individual curriculum, as there are no nationalized programmes such as the National Curriculum. All public primary schools are affiliated with an Education Board, which are similar to Local Education Authorities in England. This board will solely establish which subjects must be taught and the timescales for these. Following affiliation, teachers at schools decide upon subject content, thus forming a curriculum. In relation to the subjects, school teachers have the flexibility to teach what they feel is appropriate using independent pedagogical methods and strategies.

Planning and preparation

Within Indian public primary schools, subjects are taught in complete isolation. No approaches are instigated where subjects can be grouped and taught collectively, unlike the cross curricular approach established in England. From observing teaching at S Public School, it was noticed that learning objectives were not used to structure and direct learning. Without objectives linked to specific activities, there seemed to be a lack of specific purpose to the tasks. Consequently, the children did not know what lesson expectations were. Teachers relied on general categories from planning, for each subject, which were not supported with specific learning objectives and outcomes.

Learning objectives are a significant part of the learning process; without their structure, it would prove difficult for both children and teachers to identify what has been achieved. While the children did participate in lessons, their understanding of what was covered did not appear to contribute to the lessons that followed. As a result, there appeared to be few opportunities for children to build on previous knowledge and progress their understanding and skills.

The majority of subjects taught in India were similar to those in the English National Curriculum. Both countries place a great deal of emphasis on literacy, numeracy and science. When considering foundation subjects, such as art, S Public School focused on technical skills and the children were not taught about the processes that underpin art

activities. Ultimately, *good art* is classed as art that children copy identically, rather than individually explore and develop. As a consequence, the children were very restricted in their creative processes; and therefore, also restricted with their personal philosophies about art.

Implementation

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. The 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 the teachers in the school were initially reticent about this project, as it progressed, they seemed to become more aware of the potential 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.

The foremost method of teaching and learning within the Indian public primary school I worked in was through reading textbooks. Textbooks were considered as accessible and appropriate resources, which allowed the children to gain academic achievement. All subjects and lessons at S Public School were based on set textbooks, which systematized lessons. It was evident that textbooks profoundly influenced the school's curriculum. Heavy reliance solely on the textbook method seemed to result in teachers tending not to use varied and innovative teaching/learning strategies; thus not nurturing and promoting the diversity in children's learning needs and styles.

It was apparent that particular children did not seem to benefit from *learning* from textbooks; it begged the question if they were learning at all. This may have been for numerous reasons including possible hidden learning difficulties such as dyslexia or specific learning preferences which were not accommodated. However, textbooks have a valid cultural existence in the Indian education system, and can be an effective resource if used as a launch pad for learning. The methods that teachers employed in order to effectively use this resource had a major impact on children's learning. The feasibility, purpose and existence of textbooks are appropriate when considering India's state of socio-economic status.

During the placement I introduced role play as a new teaching/learning strategy. This approach to deliver subject knowledge was intended to meet children's diverse learning needs and styles. This teaching approach resulted in more children positively engaging with the subject, as it appealed to a wider spectrum of learning needs; promoting inclusive practice for the children.

Assessment

There were no statutory assessment requirements in place for Indian public primary schools. Schools adopted independent policies and methods, as appropriate. S Public School's policy (2007) solely consisted of a nine point assessment scale. The scale allowed teachers to purely grade children's work in terms of performance level. The Headmaster at S Public School explained, 'Our assessment scale is very effective as it provides both students and their teachers with informative and up to date evaluations and progress on learning'. Nevertheless, this process did not appear to assess children's progress, knowledge and understanding; it merely provided a marking structure in which children received a grade and no structured feedback or comments to consolidate learning.

When considered in the context of the National Curriculum, alongside effective marking as a fundamental component of assessment for learning, a mutual understanding of marking constitutes specific and constructive feedback. This feedback is tailored to individual children's needs to progress them as learners. With this feedback, children can take appropriate action to consolidate and/or extend their learning as well as build on prior knowledge. Consequently, children can appreciate the context of the original feedback when reflecting on work; rather than being graded, and not knowing what steps could have been taken to enhance learning.

Placement highlights

The international experience positively impacted on my professional development. Within S Public School, collaboration proved to be an essential approach to teaching. By working together, we were able to develop, maintain and progress, not only learning, but also relationships with children. This allowed us to establish high expectations, which challenged us to consider the children's abilities and skills. In developing the mural project, in particular, I learned about how constructive the English National Curriculum can be when considering how to monitor, plan for and evaluate children's learning.

The international experience contributed to my critical reflection of my pedagogy with regard to identifying potential barriers that can result when working with children with EAL, but also highlighted alternative ways to communicate in order to understand the

potential that the children possessed. Specific consideration was given to 'Q18 – Understand[ing] how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic influences' (TDA, 2007, p.10).

Before this placement, I did not anticipate having difficulties in communicating with the children as I speak English, Punjabi and Hindi fluently. However, I did not account for the variety of dialects and the impact these would have on misunderstanding. This made me reflect on the way that I communicate not only with children, but with all individuals and emphasized the need to use a consistent clear voice, supporting gestures and visual aids. The placement made me appreciate the international setting and the reasons for the differences in procedures that are followed. Fundamentally, the experience improved my own pedagogy because it strengthened my understanding of how I can teach diverse learners more effectively.

Spanish Placement – Adam

Background

After having experience of teaching, and how children learn, in schools in England, I decided I would like to travel abroad to experience how an international school educates their children. My main aim was to learn from, and actively work with good practice of teaching and learning within an international school in Spain. I wanted to experience, and learn from, teachers within a school that cater for students of many different nationalities, all with different backgrounds, cultures, religions and interests. I was also interested to find out about the curriculum used and any differences in the teaching styles, lesson structure and the ICT provisions in such a school, compared to those I had experienced in England. The school in Madrid provided me with an opportunity to undertake such learning in a friendly and informative environment.

The school, which was founded in 1982, consisted of around 550 pupils (of about 30 different nationalities), ranging from early years (3 years old) through to sixth form (18 years old); and about sixty teachers, most of whom were English or from the UK originally. The school followed the English National Curriculum extended to incorporate the multilingual requirements of an international school, with the children sitting GCSEs in art, drama and ICT, and IGCSEs (International GCSEs) in every other subject at the end of year 11. The school had also started implementing “classic” subjects at GCSE. These included Latin and Economics.

To ensure the school follows the National Curriculum, it employs fully qualified staff and implements up to date British government initiatives. The school is a registered member of both the Council of British International Schools in European Countries (COBISEC) and the National Association of British Schools in Spain (NABBS). These associations work to ensure high quality teaching, while complying with the Spanish Educational authorities to satisfy the requirements of Spanish legislation referring to foreign schools in Spain.

Originally, the school was for English children but since 1993 it has been licensed to, and welcomes children from all nationalities within the area. This enables them to learn surrounded by the rich culture of the country they live in, but also with the languages and cultures of children from many countries worldwide. The school aimed to offer a broad

and balanced curriculum, recognizing the importance of academic success with a philosophy 'to provide opportunities for our students to discover explore and develop their talents in a friendly and supportive atmosphere that encourages academic and personal achievement' School Prospectus (2007).

The school is private and so parents had high expectations of what the school, and the fees they pay, can provide for, and benefit, their children. Obviously, convenience plays a significant element, with the location of the school and the provision of transport to and from school being important. Similarly, the services, extracurricular activities and clubs provided play a role in a parent's decision to send their child to the school. Thus, daily meals, an on site nurse and a wide variety of clubs, including sports such as fencing, swimming and cricket as well as art and crafts, gardening, drumming and homework clubs, added to the appeal of the school. Parents expected an effectively and positively taught curriculum, in a variety of subjects, by well qualified teachers. Class sizes were also a key requirement, and the school offered reasonably small class sizes. As a result of this, coupled with the many highly qualified teachers within the school, the children gained very good one on one support and were able to develop substantially academically, with many going on to higher education at universities such as Oxford, Harvard or Yale.

All this led to the high results that, firstly the parents have come to expect, but also on what the school has come to pride itself on. 'Over 80% of school candidates regularly achieve A-C grades at IGCSE/GCSE level. Well over 95% of our students achieve passes in three or more subjects at A-level. Recent A/B grades have placed the school in the top 100 UK independent schools' School Prospectus (2007). The school timetable consisted of eight lessons a day, seven of which last forty five minutes and the final lesson of the day lasted forty minutes. The school day began at 9:00; the first lesson beginning at 9:05 and finished as late as 16:00.

Another important aspect of the school, and one it took very seriously, was that all children should learn foreign languages and have very high ICT skills. This provided an additional incentive to parents as the school offered a variety of taught languages from an early age right through to GCSE and A-Level. These included French, German, Spanish and more recently, Latin. In today's rapidly developing ICT based world, parents similarly expected their children to be taught effective ICT skills.

Planning and preparation

In order to maintain a high standard of taught ICT, the school provides many resources, both electronic and paper based. The ICT department has a wide variety of text books and mock exams, while their ICT lab is furnished with around 40 new and up to date computers, all with internet access and access to a child's unique profile settings. In addition, the

school has a computer in every class, and eight within the school library, with access to printers widely available. Many classrooms also contain interactive whiteboards (IWBs) which teachers are free to use if they wish. This was something more commonly used in the primary end of the school as it was here where the IWBs were first purchased. However, IWBs were beginning to become common place within classrooms in the secondary end of the school too with school now owning twenty five in total, after originally owning just six only 2 years ago.

During my time in school I attended lesson observations aimed at evaluating, with the intention of improving, the schools use of ICT across the curriculum. These observations allowed me to see what subject teachers were currently doing, and in which areas staff were confident within their use of ICT. I also issued simple questionnaires to some of the subject teachers and some of the children to gain more information. I found that the use of ICT varied from frequent use, in subjects such as History, Geography, Spanish and the core subjects, to little or no use of ICT at all.

As the use of ICT in other subjects was not a main requirement in school, its use depended greatly on the individual preference of the subject teacher. Many had chosen to use it, mainly due to the recent purchase of new computers and interactive whiteboards. The school had recently started to identify ways in which ICT could be used more effectively across the curriculum. Many teachers saw the use of ICT as both important and useful. A meeting was held, which I attended, that allowed ICT teachers to offer advice and ideas to subject teachers on how ICT could be incorporated into their lessons based on the previous observations. These provided me with an opportunity in gaining ideas and developing my own methods of teaching ICT, both in an ICT lesson, and across the curriculum. The children generally enjoyed their ICT lessons and worked at a high standard. Many used ICT frequently at home on their home PCs or laptops. The children were even encouraged to bring their own laptops to school to use, not just in ICT lessons, but in other subjects as well.

Implementation

Across the whole school the year groups were very small, and were split into just two groups. This led to very small class sizes, the largest of which contained 15 pupils, with the smallest, in year 13, containing just 1 pupil. This was a big difference compared to an English school where often class sizes can exceed 30 pupils, and year groups can be well over 120 pupils. Therefore, there is no need for teaching assistants (TAs) to support teachers during lessons.

As I was placed within the ICT department I decided to focus on the use of ICT within the school. First, ICT is compulsory at GCSE at the school, with Computer Studies (as

opposed to ICT) being offered as an option to the pupils should they return to take A-Levels. This differs to England as ICT is not compulsory at GCSE although this could change should it become a core subject in the future. The ICT lessons themselves were divided into theory and practical sessions. During theory lessons the children would be seated in a classroom away from the computers to learn about the topic they were currently studying. Ideas and tasks from these lessons would then be put into practice during the practical sessions, which would take place in the ICT Lab. In England, both these components tend to occur within a single ICT lesson and within an ICT lab/suite.

Pupils only had two ICT lessons per week so if more time was needed on a practical activity, a theory lesson would be replaced by a practical one. On the whole the children enjoyed ICT, had a good knowledge of the subject and were encouraged to bring their own laptops to school to use in the other subject areas. As a result of the children's high ICT skills, many were beginning their GCSE coursework, at a good standard, in year 9. Generally, any coursework would not be started until year 10 in English schools. Even children in year 7 and 8 were encouraged to attempt more advanced ICT skills and techniques, such as HTML coding, if they felt comfortable with the software.

Placement highlights

While working in the ICT department I had many duties. Often I supported the regular ICT teachers within lessons, watched over classes, helped with marking and just generally took the opportunity to learn from the staff I worked with, grasping every opportunity possible. However, it was also a good opportunity to work with non ICT specialist teachers. Often, the school Biology teacher would have to take a year 8 ICT lesson twice a week. Originally during these lessons I supported the class but after a few lessons I found I played very much a central role. Although the non-specialist teacher's ICT skills were secure, often the teacher didn't have the knowledge to extend the children's learning and work further.

This led to me leading the lessons, explaining issues in more depth to the children, getting additional ideas and examples and helping them with more complicated problems in their work. This meant the non-specialist teacher would often take a back seat and leave me working with the children. This was particularly useful during the children's website lesson as the non-specialist didn't have much experience of using 'Microsoft Front Page' and so I was able to show the children how to use tables to improve layout, show them how to use banners and marquees, give them help with colour use and explain about saving images. Subsequently it was me the children turned to for help and support, and for answers to their questions. This also led to high praise from the non specialist teacher as it was felt the standard of work from the children, as well as their subject knowledge,

had improved to a high standard. It also allowed me to build good relationships with both the teacher and the children.

The short lessons didn't really allow for the lesson structure I was used to in England. Often, lessons would just begin, there was rarely a starter activity, usually just a brief introduction. The children were then given maximum time to work during the lesson and again this often meant that there was no plenary to draw the lesson to a close. Although learning objectives were included on the teachers planning and schemes of work, these were not shared with the children. Also, unlike in English schools, teachers were given no timetabled PPA time and were not required to provide the same amount of assessment data as required in England.