

The Value of an Alternative Placement Experience for Primary Initial Teacher Training Students

This paper is an analysis of the impact on student teachers of a module enabling them to experience an 'alternative' placement to those settings for which they were training. The introduction of an alternative placement in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) is innovative and has implications for ITT, both within the United Kingdom and abroad.

The module was run with Year 2 students on a three year undergraduate Primary School (3-11) initial teacher training degree programme in the United Kingdom. As part of the module the student teachers were able to organise their own 'alternative' placement. The only requirement made by the University was that the placement was to be in a setting where learning takes place. The intention was to enable students to have the opportunity to broaden their experience and provide them with the opportunity to explore education in a wider context, in theory and in practice. By opening the range of opportunities, it enabled students to be adventurous in their choice of setting. It was hoped to expand the student's view of the world, particularly those who moved straight from school onto the University programme. From a cohort of 265 Year Two students, 87 students elected to undertake their placement within an international context; examples of which included, working in an underprivileged camp for children in Ghana, working in schools in Malaysia, visiting a school for gifted and talented children in Barbados. Other students organised their placements in a range of settings in the United Kingdom; examples of which included, working in museums, libraries, special schools, pre-schools, outdoor adventure centres, heritage sites, zoos and working with healthcare professionals.

The following areas were the focus of the research:

1. How such a placement can develop a student teacher's knowledge and understanding mapped against the Standards for the Award for Qualified Teacher Status;
2. The impact of the placement on the student teacher's professional identity (personal growth / confidence / challenge / independence);
3. How such a placement contributed to students' awareness of alternative approaches to teaching and learning in a range of different settings and contexts;
4. Transfer this experience into their classroom practice.

Method

A grounded theory approach was taken to explore the areas noted above. There was a range of data collection methods used including; general whole cohort evaluation to gain information about personal and professional development (questionnaire), Evaluation against the standards for Qualified Teacher Status to gain information on frequency and professional development (Survey); three case studies to gain depth of response (case studies) and proposed interviews of students on placement to establish a sample of impact (interview). The data collected was qualitative and quantitative in an attempt to establish as complete a picture as possible of the impact of the study.

Expected Outcomes

Expected outcomes: To establish the value of an alternative placement to students' personal and professional development and consider the impact on their classroom practice. This will be done by focussing on the following four areas: 1. How such a placement can develop a student teacher's knowledge and understanding mapped against the Standards for the Award for Qualified Teacher Status; 2. The impact of the placement on the student teacher's professional identity (personal growth / confidence / challenge / independence); 3. How such a placement contributed to students' awareness of alternative approaches to teaching and learning in a range of different settings and contexts; 4. Transfer this experience into their classroom practice.

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