

CASE STUDY:

Panel School Placement in Initial Teacher Training

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SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY:

The majority of student teachers (training to be secondary school language teachers in England) have for many years followed a one year training course, based in schools and higher education. Government legislation in the 1990s obliged universities to reform their courses, a specified amount of time student teacher would spend in schools. Practicing teachers also came to play a larger role in the training process, and worked more closely with university staff. Teachers attended training for their role as mentors to student teachers. Funding was transferred from universities to schools to partially fund their contribution. As a result of this reform, courses were adapted so that all school placements involved pairs of student teachers. This allowed a range of languages to be maintained, and proved to have positive spin-offs for student teachers' professional development.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT:

Postgraduate teacher training for language graduates in England: preparation for teaching in secondary schools.

WHAT WE NEEDED TO DO AND WHY WE DID IT:

Involve schools and teachers intensively in the initial training of student teachers, in response to government demands. This involved, for resource reason, a reduction in the number of schools involved. A placement of student teachers in schools, previously individual, were paired (i.e. two students).

MAIN PURPOSE:

Maintain quality of training and breadth of language provision in the face of unwanted government specifications for initial teacher training.

ACTION TAKEN:

1. Consultations with head teachers on shape and resourcing of new partnerships.
2. Proposals designed and sent to local schools.
3. School responses analyzed and invitations issued to schools.
4. Partnership between university and schools finalized.
5. Training of mentors – how to organize paired practice was a main focus.
6. Start of course to meet new criteria – student teachers prepared by university tutors for the opportunities and challenges of paired work.
7. Paired placements undertaken.
8. Paired placements evaluated (along with other course components).
9. Supporting documentation and training of mentors developed and refined.
10. Paired placement becomes established as a future and strength of the course.

MAIN OUTCOMES:

1. The university was able to sustain and develop the partnership between itself, schools and student teachers. A range of languages was also maintained.
2. The strengths of paired placement proved to be considerable. It allowed student teachers to explore ways of collaboration through team teaching, e.g. support work in the classroom, observer and critical friend, teachers’ reflection on practice, moral support.
3. Panel placement, introduced as an expedient, was found to bring many benefits to student teacher development beyond the practical consideration.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

With time for preparation, an initiative embarked upon for reasons of practical need can yield unexpected benefits.

Parings were successful in 100% of cases, but “failure notes” were very low. Failure, when it happened was often due to a low of professional tolerance or flexibility, and offered opportunities for some needful professionalism development in itself.

The great majority of student teachers were in favor of paired placements in their end of year evaluations.