

e3i Employability Case Study



Placement in France of students in their second year of undergraduate training as primary teachers

Chris Willan and Angie Evans

C.Willan@shu.ac.uk

Angela.Evans@shu.ac.uk

Faculty of Development and Society

Subject group:	MFL primary languages
Number of students involved:	12
Elements of the employability framework addressed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of autonomy; • Key skills development; • PDP; • Real world activities; • Work- related learning; • Reflection on use of knowledge and skills; transfer of these to work environment; • Preparation for specific professional areas.

Description of learning and teaching approach adopted

This relates to a French elective in year 2 of the 3 year undergraduate BA Honours in Primary Education with QTS.

Student teachers opting for this attend a taught module in French at SHU in term one of their second year and then undertake a 4 week placement in a French primary school.

The taught module aims to

- 1) enable them to develop their language skills so that they
 - a) have a lexically, grammatically and phonetically accurate command of the French which they will use to teach KS2 pupils in England
 - b) are able to communicate effectively with those they meet in a French primary school and in their wider social encounters in France
 - c) are able to teach a range of subjects in the French primary school through the medium of French
- 2) develop some knowledge of French culture in general and more specifically about the education system and teaching and learning in primary schools to prepare them for the experience of the placement
- 3) help them develop a knowledge of and ability to use in practice MFL teaching methodology relevant to the primary sector.

This involves, developing a range of ways of presenting and consolidating pupils' linguistic knowledge in an enjoyable and motivating way, finding ways to use language for "real purposes" in the classroom, considering ways in which other subject content might be delivered through a language other than English, developing all 4 language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing and becoming familiar with and able to use the Key Stage 2 framework for teaching MFL. It is also important to see the function of MFL in primary schools not as a way to develop competence in a given language but to develop language learning skills and language in general.

The assessment consists of:

- 1) a portfolio of work including
 - a) reflection on similarities and differences between English and French education systems, teaching and learning approaches and the wider cultural dimension.
 - b) the student's own linguistic development - what, how and future targets
 - c) the production of teaching materials and commentary on their use in both settings

2) an oral discussion in French on their return home about the placement, experiences and reactions to it

3) a French micro-teaching to fellow students

Although not part of the formal unit assessment, students make use of the "Common Reference Framework", which can be found through the website below:

http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/c/common_reference_framework.pdf

Jointly drawn up between English and French HE partners. This ongoing document contributes to providing evidence for the award of QTS but also logs the student's progress in the areas of linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. It is reviewed at a weekly meeting with a school-based mentor and further supported by visits from SHU tutors in the third week of the placement. This document is cross-referenced to the English and French QTS standards, as well as that for the "European Teacher Competences."

Employability objectives and intended learning outcomes

This is taking place within the context of the forthcoming statutory requirement (Sept 2010) for all KS2 pupils to be taught a foreign language within curriculum time. It is recognised that one of the issues related to this provision is the shortage of suitably qualified teachers.

Living and working in a French school and being part of a team of teachers within another educational culture is invaluable first-hand experience which most other teachers will not have.

Working in another educational culture enables and encourages those involved to reflect on their own educational philosophy and practices in a non-threatening way and to deepen their understanding and knowledge of both. It gives them a broader perspective on teaching and learning.

High level communications skills (more challenging in a foreign language) with both children and adults become absolutely essential to create good relationships.

Participants need to become more autonomous and independent; they have to respond appropriately to new and unfamiliar situations which are often challenging, to seek help and guidance from new sources and in new ways.

There are therefore many employability skills which are developed through this project. It involves preparation for a specific professional area through work related learning, the development of autonomy and key skills and the participation in real world activities. All of these are linked and interrelated through a holistic approach.

Description of and tips for good practice; lessons learned

It has become clear over the few years of this placement that detailed and specific preparation of the students in a number of areas contributes enormously to their ability to benefit from it.

These include inevitably development of their general French language skills but also for more specific purposes such as language for school: teacher instructions and explanations, key language for teaching each subject, language for interaction with colleagues and understanding pupils – especially the younger ones. An initial familiarisation with the French educational system, for example curriculum content, nomenclature of classes, pattern of school attendance (day, week and year), teaching and learning

approaches, handwriting styles are indispensable.

Similarly, knowledge of more general cultural dimensions such as mealtimes, shop opening hours alongside political issues, multicultural France etc. is important together with some reflection as to why these might be different from the students' own experience and it to the need to avoid cultural stereotyping

There are also the very practical issues such as using transport, eating, accommodation, access to ICT facilities, which need to be anticipated.

The organisation of the placement needs to be well managed with close attention to detail in order to improve quality of the pedagogy in the placement, develop good professional relationships and generate further quality school based placements. This requires close contact and the investment of time from both the French and UK Coordinators. A problem resolution framework needs to be agreed so that any issues can be swiftly and sensitively addressed. A placement information sheet for the French supervisor is important: defining the purpose, giving brief background details of the student teacher's prior experience and clarifying the aims and learning outcomes of the placements. Finally a 'thank you' letter to the placement Headteacher is much appreciated as formal recognition of the value we place on their school as being part of the European Initial Teacher Training partnership and the professional dialogue which is an essential component of the placement.

A further important development since the first two years of the project is the assessment of the trainees by SHU staff, who observe a lesson in the French school and then discuss it with the student and the French mentor. At the same time there is the possibility of immediate feedback on how the placement is progressing from all parties concerned and it is interesting to compare this with post-placement evaluation.

Key points of any feedback gathered or evaluation undertaken with students or staff

What follows are comments from five students who participated in the placement in January 2007:

'This was an amazing opportunity to work a month on placement in a French Primary school. I was able to teach across all subjects across the curriculum although my primary focuses were of course MFL as well as Mathematics, PE, Art and Design, ICT and Music.'

'During this placement I supported a class link with a local newspaper; this resulted in my class being able to produce a page for the paper regarding a theme of our choice. The pupils had majority input however I took an editorial role that supported ideas, design and input. This was a fantastic project which really created a motivating and purposeful situation in which the pupils could extend their literary knowledge and skills. The project climaxed with a trip to the newspaper printing facilities during the evening where the children were able to be part of the process of the printing of their page and the paper itself.'

'As a result of this placement I have established some very useful links with the Headmaster and Teacher of the school. They have expressed their wish to partake in verbal and written exchanges with English classes using ICT to develop MFL skills in both the French and English schools.'

'The part of the course which I thoroughly enjoyed was the French placement. It provided excellent opportunities for language development in both in and out of school contexts, as well as helping me to become more independent and gain insights into the teaching methods of others. My confidence in teaching was greatly improved by this placement, as being able to teach the curriculum in another language, sometimes on the spot, gave me belief in myself as a teacher. It was an amazing experience, which I would love to repeat!'

'The French specialist module was also particularly enjoyable. I enjoy revising my language skills and also learning about the French culture. The highlight of this module was the placement in Dijon in January. This was such a rich experience, with so much to learn. The experience in school proved very different to those in English schools.'

'One of the highlights of the course for me was my placement in France. It gave me so much more confidence both with my teaching and also my French language and I enjoyed every part of it.'

'Another of my favourite modules is French, as language is very important to me and extremely useful within the world. Working in a French school and living in France was an invaluable opportunity and an experience that I will take with me through my life.'

Resources used

A variety of PowerPoint presentations, reference sheets, interactive sessions, micro-teaching, videos of French classrooms and French teachers talking about their system / daily routine in school / teaching demands etc.

This information can be made available in other formats.
Please contact us for details.