

Primary School Placement: A critical Guide to Outstanding Teaching

Catriona Robinson, Branwen Bingle and Colin Howard (2013) Critical Publishing

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Review by Peter Mtika

Primary School Placement: A critical Guide to Outstanding Teaching is an excellent practical guide to primary school placements. The book is written by experienced lecturers in initial teacher education at one of the universities in England and the book is set within the context of initial teacher training in England. Some might consider this book as kind of a manual or toolkit without necessarily suggesting that teaching should be viewed in such a mechanistic manner. This book is very accessible and easy to read due to its down-to-earth tone and language. It is likely to appeal to trainee teachers on different entry routes to the teaching profession.

In terms of structure, the book comprises 11 Chapters; each dealing with a significant topic related to primary school placements. Each Chapter begins with a diagrammatic summary of elements covered in it. Authors start their discussion by connecting each Chapter with relevant (England's) Teachers' Standards (2012). In addition, authors have effectively deployed case studies in each chapter with the view of deepening understanding as well as promoting further reflection and critical questions. Each chapter also ends with suggested readings under 'taking it further' for those who may wish to extend their knowledge and understanding. There are useful 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) at the end of the book which trainee teachers may find very useful.

In terms of contents, the chapters in the book have been systematically organised starting with 'reflection throughout practice' to 'from good to outstanding' and then 'employability'. By placing reflection at the beginning of the book, authors have effectively underlined the importance of trainee teachers (as well as teachers) as reflective practitioners. Other chapters in the book focus on individual and professional attributes, placement practicalities, collaborative professional partnerships, behaviour management and classroom discipline, planning and assessment, teaching the core curriculum, teaching inclusively, and creative placements. These topics constitute an essential mosaic of trainee teacher placements.

Some of the highlights in this book are the importance for trainee teachers to remain professional and preserve the positive image of the teaching profession. Authors have aptly highlighted how, for example, improper use social media such as Facebook can ruin trainee teachers' careers. The importance of building professional relationships by trainee teachers not only with other teachers, their teacher mentors, supervisory tutors and teaching assistants in the school, but also with parents and other relevant agencies has been highlighted. This is significant in view of recent research evidence that collaborative partnership remains vaguely defined in initial teacher education (Mtika, Robson & Fitzpatrick, 2014). A problematic area for trainee teachers who may have to undertake placement in 'troublesome' schools is behaviour management and classroom discipline. Authors have addressed this topic and have emphasised the importance for trainee teachers to 'promote optimum opportunities for

learning' (p. 63) in the course of implementing appropriate behaviour management and classroom discipline. Strategies of systematic rewards and sanctions that trainee teachers may use are considered.

Understandably, at the heart of trainee teachers' pedagogical practice during placement are three-pronged issues: planning and assessment; teaching of the core curriculum, and teaching inclusively. These issues have been discussed and demonstrated in three separate chapters. With regards to planning and assessment, authors have, among other issues, considered differentiated planning and assessment and how this can enhance children's learning when effectively implemented by ensuring that 'learning is accessible and appropriately challenging for all pupils' (p. 104). Authors note that teaching inclusively is about 'celebrating diversity and ensuring equality for all learners' (p. 114). With regards to teaching of the core curriculum, authors deliberate how trainee teachers can implement the (English) National Curriculum in science, mathematics and English. Most importantly, authors note that developing adequate subject knowledge is central to effective teaching and trainee teachers (and teachers) should refrain from conveying any individual negative perceptions about certain subjects to their learners. Unfortunately, while authors have rightly identified mathematics as the most problematic curricular area, they do not provide follow-up case studies in this subject area to help trainee teachers to critically reflect and enhance their self-efficacy. It is hoped that any future editions of this book extends this discussion to include mathematics based case studies.

In a latter chapter, authors discuss alternatives to traditional primary school placements and how these are equally helpful to the development of a 'more self-assured and balanced' teacher (p. 127). The key message from these alternative creative placements such as libraries and museums is that trainee teachers can learn and develop varying skills from working with children in diverse environments. The penultimate chapter, 'from good to outstanding', is appropriately developed in that it outlines (England's) Teachers' Standards (2012) and how trainee teachers can critically engage with these in order to achieve an 'outstanding' in their training. Finally, the book offers successful trainee teachers guidance on how to search for their first teaching post, prepare a personal statement and conduct themselves at interviews. It also considers induction of a newly qualified teacher (NQT).

Overall, this book succeeds in providing trainee teachers with comprehensive guidance on how to meaningfully navigate school placements. The book is likely to become a trainee teacher's worthwhile companion immediately before and during placements. Even though it is written for trainee teachers in England, this book could as well serve as an invaluable resource for trainee teachers beyond its immediate context.

Reference

Mtika, P., Robson, D. & Fitzpatrick, R. (2014). Joint observation of student teaching and related tripartite dialogue during field experience: Partner perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 39, pp. 66-76. [DOI: [10.1016/j.tate.2013.12.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.12.006)]