

DISTINGUISHED EDUCATION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Category: Professional Practice Innovation Award

Section B: Case Study

Title: E-Placement: embracing the opportunity for online teaching practice

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Summary: This case study describes the implementation and impact of an innovative E-placement – a six week, full-time, entirely online teaching practice placement for MA TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) students who were studying at the time of the pandemic when face-to-face teaching was not possible.

Keywords: teaching practice; online; E-placement.

What was done:

This innovation is unique in that it is the first time that such a teaching placement has been offered wholly online in the School of Education. Students prepared online resources, planned lessons and delivered online English language classes to groups of multilingual learners in different NI education settings for 12 hours a week, using a range of e-learning platforms. The student experience which this placement affords, aligns with UU's five and fifty themes and priorities. **Civic responsibility** was developed through the creation of meaningful networks with a range of NI education providers (NRC, BURC, INTO @QUB Sperrin Integrated College). **Academic excellence** was evident through the development of, for example:

- resilience (Arthur McKeown, employer, says 'Meghan's willingness to 'have a go' in the face of challenge was a significant asset')
- creativity (adapting face-to-face teaching materials for an online setting);
- agility of mind (use of various EdTech tools)
- online cross-cultural communication (facial expression, clarity of intonation and pronunciation)
- expertise with emergent technology.

Importantly, the E-placement supports UU's commitment to widening participation through its **Athena Swan** agenda by tailoring opportunities to meet the needs of students who have commitments which do not allow them to participate in a face-to-face placement.

Motivation and aims:

Past students had expressed hesitancy at having to travel abroad or to travel to complete a home-based placement because they had caring responsibilities. The implementation of an E-placement where students had the flexibility to teach and support their learners from home solved this problem and widens participation. Furthermore, the E-placement offered an opportunity for students to gain skills needed to gain employment with newly emerging on-line TESOL providers. Benefits are:

- new links between the School of Education and local education providers
- TESOL students develop cutting edge EdTech skills
- Widening participation to support recruitment of a more diverse range of students to the 2021-2022 programme.

Implementation:

'Constructive alignment' (Biggs) underpins the course team's approach to implementation of the E-placement. This approach starts with the notion that 'the teacher creates a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes - the learner constructs his or her own learning through relevant learning activities. The key is that all components in the teaching system - the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks - are aligned to each other'. The implementation of the move from face-to-face to virtual placement required the course team to change teaching and learning tasks (e.g. creation of online resources, online peer observation, online feedback, weekly online seminars to explore issues arising, such as, use of facial expression for communicating online with non-native speakers of English) to meet the needs of the online environment and to match learning outcomes. In addition, the course team changed assessment (e.g. moving to OneNote e-portfolio instead of paper based) to meet the needs of the online setting and to match learning outcomes.

Successes and lessons learnt:

Successes:

- Effective use of EdTech tools to teach English. Cathy Madden says 'I used Google Meet, Google docs, PowerPoint, Jamboard (online interactive whiteboard), Wordwall.net (quizzes and random wheel spinners), YouTube videos, Google Classroom (for homework and announcements).
- Relationship built between students and local education employers. Arthur McKeown states 'The placement student made good use of opportunities to network, both formally and informally, with other online delivery team members. In particular Meghan made some meaningful suggestions about options for activities in Zoom breakout rooms and how they might add value to the courses at different levels'.

Lessons learnt: the challenge of building rapport with learners - to this end our weekly seminars explored making space for informal chat in break out rooms, use of emojis to express feelings, and personalisation of tasks.

Feedback was sought from student teachers as part of the weekly seminars and from mentors by email. Responses indicate that students developed sought after capabilities such as creativity, resilience and emotional intelligence: 'Rachel's ability to deliver creatively online was of a very high standard; she adapted activities effectively when the internet connection was weak; was empathetic to learners and kept the show on the road at all times' (Liz McMath, NRC).

Effectiveness:

- Collaboration with local TESOL education providers has led to further opportunities for UU students, for example, Dr Arthur McKeown from BURC contributed to a series of sessions on multicultural education for third year Education as a Minor students
- MA TESOL students have gone on to get paid employment with their placement providers, e.g. Lisa McAuley is currently teaching on the online Pre-sessional programme run by INTO at QUB and acknowledges benefits from the placement 'I have acquired a new and very valuable online teaching skills set which will stand me in good stead, particularly in the current climate'.

Looking to the future, the TESOL course team are considering a placement which is fully online or one which offers blended elements of online and face-to-face experiences.

Transferability:

This type of placement can replace one or more 'location based' placements on our UU courses, providing new ways forward and preparing staff and students to meet the sustainable education agenda. The E-Placement has been discussed at Education School Board and at TESOL course committee meetings. Our advice to colleagues considering this approach is to harness what has been experienced during the pandemic, that is, working creatively, outside our comfort zones, in ambiguous online/at home/at work spaces, in order to implement such e-placement opportunities.

Further information: N/A