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Sharing Practice in an International Context – a Critique of the Benefits of International Exchanges for Trainee Teachers

Abstract. This reflective article is based on the experiences of two years of teacher training students from the University of Northampton and the Pedagogical University of Weingarten. This article looks more closely at the benefits that international exchange experiences have afforded the trainee teachers involved and how challenges to the process have been addressed. This reflection reveals the value of international exchanges in challenging perceptions and assumptions and how the thinking of the trainee teachers changed following the exchange. This study employs a qualitative approach drawing upon the reflections and experiences of the participants through written and spoken data. The findings reveal trainee teachers developed skills specific to teaching and in particular teaching languages, and they also demonstrated an increased awareness of non teaching specific skills such as problem solving and intercultural sensitivity. The reflections offer insight into how trainee teachers, use, interpret and subsequently act upon the experiences offered in an international exchange.

Keywords: teacher education, professional development, international exchange, intercultural competence

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Introduction

International exchange programmes are not new to Higher Education or to Teacher Education, and it is well recognised that programmes like these offer many advantages and skills to the individuals involved and the host institutions. They provide a notable contribution to the internationalisation agenda of higher education institutes (HEIs) as well as the opportunities afforded to the individuals involved in terms of 'personal development, foreign language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity' (Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016). However, there has been a notable drop in the range and type of international experience available in teacher education (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). In addition, many teachers comment that they feel ill prepared for a multicultural classroom (Walters, et al., 2009). With an increasing need for teachers to function effectively in a globalised society it is valuable to consider the role of international exchanges in preparing teachers to teach in a diverse environment which includes schools themselves and a teaching profession with increased opportunities for international careers (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). The contemporary free market economy alongside the ever-increasing ease of travel offers teachers the opportunity to move between countries and curriculums with relative ease. This combined with an acknowledged global teacher shortage sees the need for teacher education to consider that global travel in teaching is a viable option for their students.

Staff in both the institutions that contributed to this study value and promote wide cultural understanding among the teachers we train; both institutions offer an exchange programme as an enhancement to their established programmes and offer partial funding to the students to increase opportunity and participation. The international exchange programme is one of the ways that both institutions promote intercultural sensitivity and confidence of the student teachers. Currently, the diversity of the school population is increasing in both Germany and England. In 2017 the school population was a total of 8.67 million pupils across all phases of education in England. This figure has increased every year since 2009. There are now 577,000 more pupils in schools than at that time. In primary schools in England, 32.1% of pupils of compulsory school age children are from minority ethnic origins. In English secondary schools, 29.1% of pupils are from minority ethnic origins (DfE, 2017). According to the microcensus in 2014, 31% of 6 to under 20-year-old students living in Germany had a migration background and around 8% had foreign citizenship. In 2014/2015, almost 613,000 foreign students were enrolled in general education schools in Germany, which corresponds to a 7% share of all pupils. The proportion of non-German pupils in primary education was 7% and in lower secondary education 8% (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, 2016, p. 19). The diversity of learners in primary and secondary education includes students from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and communities.

The situation in England and Germany demonstrates the diverse, multi ethnic and multicultural environment in which many teachers work every day. The importance of intercultural understanding and awareness for developing teachers is therefore a priority in English and German ITE (DfE, 2012). Furthermore, school and recent language curricula demand a stronger network of education and foreign languages (EU, 2001, p. 5). Moreover, heterogeneous classrooms in respect to their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are a significant challenge for teachers in primary and secondary schools. Inclusion was enshrined in Baden-Württemberg in the Education Act in 2015 (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport 2016a, p. 5). As a result, students have to be prepared and trained for these challenges as largely the trainee teachers involved come from 'a monocultural white middle class background' (Uusimaki & Swirski, 2016).

The University of Northampton first had contact with the Pedagogical University of Weingarten through a senior lecturer networking at an international conference. This relationship was expanded and the initial teacher educators in each institution communicated with each other in order to organise the opportunity for collaboration. A preliminary visit by staff from Northampton to Weingarten in 2015 strengthened the relationship and visits from students in each institution to the other were planned and took place. Early visits focused on learning about one another's culture and educational systems, supplemented with visits to schools. This later aspect has come to take a dominant place in the programmes with the visiting students teaching in the host country's schools. The early aims of cross cultural exchange remain important but the emphasis on teaching and learning in the school context has risen year after year.

The aims of this program were four-fold:

1. To strengthen the skills of the students in teaching in a foreign setting
2. To provide students with the opportunity to engage with another culture in a professional and personal context
3. To experience the teaching and learning approaches of both higher education and primary education in the respective host countries
4. To reflect upon these experiences as it pertains to their personal and professional development.

The past 3 years of the exchange have seen a settled team in both institutions involved and this has allowed a significant professional relationship to develop. This has been expanded through the sharing of taught sessions in both institutions during visits and through extensive professional dialogue between the staff involved. Careful planning and delivery has allowed the exchange programmes to be engineered to expose the students to a range of situations designed to offer them opportunities to experience the host country's teaching, learning and educational systems as well as social and cultural activities designed to encourage the students to reflect on the

exchange. This paper offers a critique of the outcomes and challenges of two years of the programme from the perception of the student participants who are all pre service teachers training in primary or secondary education in their respective institutions.

Review of Literature

International experiences have much to offer in terms of both teaching skills, pedagogical skills, intercultural sensitivity (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013) and an awareness of global citizenship (Uusimaki & Swirski, 2016) by offering the student teachers the chance to engage with the host countries' schools, staff and curriculums. They are also able to immerse themselves in the educational and cultural life of another country for a short period of time. The exposure to a different and potentially multicultural and diverse environment is increasingly important as population demographics have greatly changed with the movement of migrant families, refugees and asylum seekers. The student teachers taking part in international exchanges are able to experience differences and challenges at a cultural, economic and geographic level. It is the responsibility of initial teacher education (ITE) to offer opportunities to develop those skills necessary for training a global workforce and to 'challenge values, attitudes and practices... and develop socially just dispositions in beginning teachers' (Mills, 2008).

Not only do international educational exchanges challenge the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants, they allow participants the opportunity to develop skills that are transferable to their home environment such as tolerance, empathy and criticality of their own teaching approach (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). Barkhuizen & Feryok (2006) discuss the opportunities that international practicum can have and report both sociocultural and educational gains such as coping strategies, attitudinal changes and enhanced professional understanding. These however are not teaching specific skills, and consideration must be given to the desired outcomes both personally and professionally. It is important to note that without a thoughtful structure it cannot be assumed that any of these gains will happen during an exchange (Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016) and simply being in a foreign context is not enough. Walters et al. (2009) discuss the feeling of 'multicultural apathy' where many trainee teachers are not interested enough in the global society. International exchanges are not without their risks; they can serve to reinforce stereotypes about the host country, its inhabitants and its schooling systems. Location is a key factor in a successful exchange offering the right mix of challenge and support for the trainees.

Whilst international exchanges offer the potential to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity they may not be effective in developing other reflective traits. Uusimaki and Swirski (2016) propose that without effective reflective practices only a surface level awareness is developed, and more meaningful changes to values

and beliefs such as a socially just disposition are not as easily made. Designing an effective cross international exchange that appreciates both soft skills and profession specific skills is challenging and requires opportunities for regular reflection on the experience and discussions on feelings, observations and misconceptions. This allows the participants to question their values and beliefs through critical reflection and begin to build a sense of personal responsibility, empowerment and cultural confidence (Walters et al, 2009).

A lack of exposure to and experience with working with families of different cultural backgrounds is a challenge for trainee teachers. International exchanges can offer opportunities for trainee teachers to experience a variety of ways in which family culture, background and community can influence classroom practice. Without this the trainee teachers may be at risk of misinterpreting this in their settings; not to say that exchanges will make all trainees culturally confident, but it offers them a chance to view children and families through a different lens and appreciate the impact of home and community on the children. Leutwyler and Meierhans (2016, pp. 118–119) propose that international exchanges can challenge trainees to consider what it means to be the ‘white normative race’, how this relates to their teaching of minority ethnic groups and begin to question their own practices and ‘peculiarities in their own systems’. Walters et al., (2009, S. 152) suggest that international practicum offers trainees the chance to ‘learn to embed flexibility and cultural responsibility’. Their study revealed an increase in other traits such as adaptability, resourcefulness and persistence.

Fung King Lee (2011, p. 17) discusses the teaching specific benefits of exchange programs and suggests that those who had participated had ‘new teaching ideas, skills, strategies and knowledge’ and could reflect upon links between theory and practice and differences in the educational systems and aims of the two countries. This demonstrates an openness and receptiveness to diversity which can allow an appreciation of the best that different approaches to education can offer. Many trainee teachers who participate in international exchanges would rate themselves as more globally minded than their colleagues (Walters et al, 2009) and were more aware of globalisation. Fung King Lee (2011) found that trainees who participated in global exchanges ‘think globally’ and are able to bring a global dimension to their teaching. They demonstrated global awareness and were less likely to judge students in their care on linguistic and cultural diversity. Walters et al (2009, p. 154) describe the trainees who have experienced an international exchange as ‘cultural brokers’ who can ‘go sensitively and gracefully into a new culture’. Cruickshank and Westbrook (2013) in their study maintain that trainees developed substantially in the ‘domain of professional knowledge’, their ‘understanding of how children learn’ and ‘the range of learning styles’

Current Context in UK and Germany

When analysing teacher education in England and in Germany it has become clear that while systems of training differ in structural ways, there are similarities in the context in which newly trained teachers must operate. Trainee teachers are expected to gain both pedagogic skills and subject knowledge appropriate to the phase of education they will enter. These are aligned to a national set of benchmarked Teacher Standards (DfE, 2011) which set out the requirements of all trained and qualified teachers in maintained schools in England. As noted above England has experienced a shift in population, in addition the government requirement to teach and model 'British Values' (DfE, 2014) highlights the increasingly globalised expectations of teachers. Trainee teachers in England are required to complete a minimum of 120 days in schools appropriate to the age range they are training to teach although routes into teaching vary from undergraduate routes which offer a bachelor degree alongside qualified teacher status (QTS) to post graduate teacher training in the form of a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) that can be studied either at a university or in a school based training setting. Conversely, Teacher Education in Germany predominantly takes place in Universities of Education in the 16 federal states in Germany each of which has its own curriculum and teacher education expectations. This study is based upon teacher education in the state of Baden-Württemberg. There are six teacher education institutions in Baden-Württemberg, the only federal state that has Universities of Education, (in the other federal states, students go to universities). The Universities of Education were founded to strengthen teachers' profiles in educational, teaching and learning research; characterised by intensive activities in basic research focusing on educational science, and they also focus on practical orientation with theory-based reflection. Students complete a bachelor and master's degree at university where the first phase of their teacher training focuses upon educational and pedagogical theory. Following this, students do their "Referendariat" (teaching practice of 1.5 years, followed by a second exam) then they are a fully qualified teacher.

Regardless of the routes into teaching and the country in which the trainee teachers are studying they experience similar phenomenon of: an increasingly diverse student population, increasing demands upon their time and much more accountability of student achievement. This study allows the trainee teachers to share their reflections on their experiences of teacher training and to explore the similarities and differences of cultural, personal and professional opportunities in teaching.

Research Methodology

This study is grounded in the field of educational research and is located in the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative approach that was adopted for this study was based on constructivist principles including multiple meanings, socially and historically constructed data (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Qualitative research methods were deemed to be most appropriate for a study of this type as ‘the emphasis remains on meaning and processes which may not be rigorously examined [or] measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency’ (Noor, 2008, p. 1602). Qualitative research methods are aligned with processes and meaning (Atieno, 2009). This study is concerned with building data and is therefore inductive and descriptive (Atieno, 2009, p. 14). This allows the researchers to consider the deeper meaning behind the data by locating the research with the participants in a way that allows their views to be shared honestly and in a way that is truly reflective of the occurrences. It is common that in qualitative research ‘data is usually collected in naturalistic settings’ (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014 p. 361). Interpretivism is concerned with understanding the world as it is experienced by the participants, to try and understand the meaning behind the narratives and the way in which knowledge and experiences are socially constructed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Participants’ individual perspectives and subjective interpretations lend themselves to a method that values uniqueness and individuality; therefore, the study adopted a phenomenological approach Henry, Casserly, Coady and Marshall (2008) as its selected methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This offered the study a methodological approach that would embrace the uniqueness of the participant’s experiences and their subsequent interpretations (Henry et al, 2008) of ‘what’s it like for them’. The psychological situations, social circumstances and meanings attributed to these phenomena allow researchers to acknowledge the participants as individuals who react to, respond to and make decisions based upon the phenomenon in question (Bennett, et al., 2013.) Phenomenology can be viewed as ‘... the study of direct experience taken at face value...’ (Cohen, et al., 2008, p. 22), this approach allows the researchers to analyse the data as a determinant of the occurring events, interpretations and reactions. The essence of human experiences is key to phenomenological research, and it can be a philosophy as well as a methodology (van Manen, 2014), it ‘involves studying a small number of subjects... to develop patterns and relationships of meaning’ (Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

Research Methods

This study used semi structured interviews to elicit the responses of the trainee teachers. This forum and discussion allows reflections and observations to be shared with the researchers in a way in which the researcher acts as a prompt whilst having

a set of standardised questions. The data has been collected over 2 years 2016–17 and 2017–18 of the international exchange programme with a total of 41 trainee teachers being involved and sharing their views. The transcripts of the interviews and answers to the questionnaires were analysed via qualitative content analysis, according to Mayring (2010). The video-recorded interviews were transcribed and prepared for content analysis. The deductive approach included all transcribed interviews. In a first step, the text passages were paraphrased; next, these paraphrases were then generalised to a level of abstraction and then reduced in two steps. The category system created in this way was then again checked for representativeness based on the source material (Bortz & Döring, 2015; Mayring & Gläser-Zikuda, 2008).

Results

The results are presented in categories and are also provided with selective descriptive examples and citations (Gibbs, 2011). The results can be assigned to the following categories: Intercultural Sensitivity and confidence; Transfer of Skills (teaching and learning) and Developing a socially just disposition.

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were adopted during analysis:

- Intercultural sensitivity and confidence: accepting cultural differences, adapting practice, reflecting on difference
- Transfer of skills (Teaching and Learning): intention to or examples of ways in which teaching and learning skills could be used in home settings
- Developing a socially just disposition: recognising difference, questioning difference, promoting global awareness

Intercultural Sensitivity and Confidence

Both the German and English trainee teachers developed their intercultural sensitivity by being immersed in the social and professional life of the country they were in. The programme design allows for both professional development as well as social and cultural experiences within the host country. All trainee teachers commented upon the similarities and differences to the settings that they were used to and how this might impact upon their future attitudes and practices. The trainee teachers fostered and enhanced cross-cultural skills; they gained intercultural awareness and competence as well. Furthermore, they experienced an insight into a different educational system and could thus compare similarities and differences between Germany and England.

Within their reflections we see the trainee teachers reflecting upon the similarities and differences between their cultural practices. They demonstrate an open attitude

to new experiences and cultural diversity (Fung King Lee, 2011) following the exchange.

I really liked to have such exchange programmes as it is nice to think about your own culture as well as the other one as well as your own and to compare similarities and differences. (German Student- exchange 2017)

Intercultural competence is a big issue, and I really like to think about the differences in other cultures and in this exchange such as the school system is one of the most important things I have to think about. (German Student – exchange 2017)

In terms of the culture I have never really been to Germany, so I didn't have an opinion on what the German school system is like and how the children are taught so that has been really interesting for me. (English Student – exchange 2017)

The trainee teachers also reflected upon the differences in approach to teacher training and university life, appreciating the differences and similarities of the respective systems (Walters et al., 2009).

I learnt some differences in how to become a teacher in England and in Germany, the similarities and differences, and actually there were more differences than similarities. (German Student – exchange 2017)

Much of the reflection focussed upon the educational practices in the host countries, the challenges of teaching in another country, not just on a practical level but in adapting to and adopting the practices seen. The comments reflect the trainee teachers thoughts on cultural responsiveness and embedding flexibility into their own practices.

“By visiting UK schools, we gained a better insight into the British school system as well as in their teaching philosophy. In the UK it is usual to have teaching assistants in every class who support the children's learning process. Moreover, the schools provide much more teaching and learning materials than in Germany. As we had the possibility to teach at UK schools, one became curious about teaching in a foreign country”. (German student – exchange 2016)

“We had the chance to gain an insight into a different system of education and we also had the chance to experience a normal day in a UK school regarding methods, social interaction, etc. Furthermore, having a comparison with a different school system allows you also to reflect critically on how we teach in Germany”. “I was surprised by the

fact, that two teachers were standing in the classroom and teaching the young ones. Moreover, I appreciated the opportunity to give a lesson about Germany, which was also enriching for the pupils I suppose". (German Student – exchange programme in 2017)

Moreover, the trainee teachers could develop an understanding of teacher training in both countries, strengthen the partnership between institutions and consequently develop long term relationships with students and the faculty. It is important to acknowledge that not all experiences and expectations were articulated (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006) however, of those the trainee teachers chose to discuss; there was overwhelmingly positivity towards their development of intercultural competence and sensitivity.

Transfer of Skills (Teaching and Learning)

The trainee teachers discussed their developing appreciation for a range of approaches to teaching and learning, particularly language learning. They also exhibited surprise and admiration for the emphasis placed upon learning foreign languages. They were surprised at the relatively open access afforded to German schools in comparison to the strict security arrangements in England. They also commented upon the relationships between staff and pupils as being much more mutually respectful. There were distinctly more references to the differences in how languages were taught in primary schools from the English trainee teachers, whereas the German trainee teachers focussed upon the differences in classroom practices and expectations. They discussed and compared similarities and differences of methods and approaches of teaching English and experienced how native speakers teach English.

It has been a great program, it has really developed me as a teacher working with children who might not have English as their first language... It has been a really useful tool to help me to adapt quickly and to plan proper structured lessons to allow these children to be included in the classroom. (English student- exchange 2017)

It is really nice that now you have been to Germany you know even more, and it is even easier to discuss and talk about things and get insight into how you do it. You will take some things home, and we will have a lot to think about what you are doing in England and it was really productive. (German student – exchange 2017)

Reflections also focussed upon the intention to alter practice and apply their experiences in their home context. This demonstrates the transfer of professional

skills between contexts and an openness to adopting alternative approaches to teaching and learning. Those trainee teachers who acknowledged a development in their teaching skills did so in relation to quite a specific set of skills. They did not discuss teaching per se, rather the skills needed to teach languages and EAL learners. This was very skills based rather than based on the wider consideration of the needs of language learners, for instance the learners personal and social needs when integrating into the system (Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016).

We know how to teach, but we have only ever seen English schools, so it was completely different for me to see a primary school in Germany, especially the technology; they don't have the same types or as much technology, and I found that a surprise. (English student- exchange 2017)

I have really enjoyed going into schools and seeing how they teach modern foreign languages here, and I have been able to magpie a few ideas that I will use in England when I go back; rather than just using words when teaching languages, they submerge them more by using full sentences. (English student- exchange 2017)

The bilingual classes that we have seen have been very good with their languages; they use rhymes and stories to teach the content. This is something I will use more of in my teaching. (English student- exchange 2017)

It's been really really good, I think for me personally I had not had any experience with EAL⁴ learners, but I am going into a school where it is quite high. So coming here and seeing how English can be taught as an additional language has been helpful for me to learn these strategies. (English student – exchange 2017)

Developing a Socially Just Disposition

This was the most diverse and difficult attribute to analyse and was displayed in a number of ways. In this study the majority of the trainee teachers referred to what they could adopt in their practice to maintain the link and friendships made on the exchange programme. This was demonstrated through suggestions of penpals, etwinning and letter writing. This demonstrates an intention to teach in a more globally minded way and expose the children they will teach to a more diverse learning experience. There were also reflections upon the differences in the facilities in each country and how this might impact upon the teaching and learning

4 EAL – English as an Additional Language.

experiences of the children, demonstrating a sense of justice and awareness of inequity. The trainee teachers began to critique their experiences, compare, question and engage in a critical dialogue relating to their own and others practices (Uusimaki & Swirski, 2016).

Also, because we have made such good friends with the German students, we have already started to talk about projects that we can do in schools to promote partnerships, penpals and lots of different things. (English student- exchange 2017)

I really enjoyed coming to Weingarten as it has more of a village sort of feel, so the culture and learning all about that alongside going into lots of different schools has been really useful, and I can hopefully take that and use that when I teach geography and things like that as I have lots of pictures, and the German students have been very good in telling us a lot about the area and the towns. (English student- exchange 2017)

The hosting trainee teachers also reflected upon the process of sharing their own institutions and educational systems with guests, this offered them a chance to question and reflect upon systems that they had trained in and were very used to and begin to challenge some of the traditions and conventions.

“Explaining how schooling works in our region as well as showing UK students around in our school helped me to reflect on the German educational system as well as on teaching methods. It was also very interesting to discuss the student’s reactions on methods that were used in German schools to get a broader view on education in general”. (German student – exchange in 2016)

“I think as a non-native speaker you can get another point of view when it is about teaching, especially when a native speaker is giving an English lesson to German students learning English as a foreign language. You can become more aware of the differences between the school systems of the UK and Germany but also recognize the similarities between those two”. (German student – exchange in 2017)

“All in all it was absolutely interesting and enriching to gain insight into a typical school day in the UK (including teaching) and to compare it to Germany under aspects such as cooperation, respect, open classrooms, staff, teaching material and (technical) facilities – definitely a unique chance!”. (German student- exchange in 2018)

The statements from participating trainee teachers clearly show that taking part in the exchange programme has seen them reflecting on many different aspects and

benefits of the exchange. It might, therefore, be justified to say that the exchange programme did not only heighten the trainee teachers enjoyment for spending time in each other's countries and company and at the same time enhancing intercultural learning at a deeper level.

The study is not without its limitations, the reflections of the trainee teachers are transcribed accurately and taken in the context in which they were given as is the case in phenomenological studies. However, reflection and assertion does not always equate to actuality (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006). The trainee teachers expressed many intentions to alter practice and philosophy, but there is no way to monitor whether this has or will occur. It might also be the case that those trainee teachers who applied to be part of the programme already possessed some of the traits of intercultural confidence and were more globally minded in the first place. This exchange took place between two relatively wealthy, European countries where the challenges of multiculturalism and poverty are similar in many ways. Perhaps the results of a study between an exchange in a less well-developed context would have yielded different reflections.

Conclusions and Recommendations

International exchange programmes are undoubtedly of benefit for the individuals and institutions involved and although this particular paper does not address the opportunities afforded to the schools and universities involved; these were evident in the experiences for the children and staff in the schools and also in the universities.

This paper concludes that the exchange programme is beneficial to the trainee teachers involved in that it has allowed development of intercultural confidence and competence. It has allowed the trainee teachers to immerse themselves in the social, cultural and educational experiences the exchange has to offer. The educational differences in the two countries are evident in the reflections about pedagogical approaches to teaching languages and teaching in general. These reflections demonstrate a developing cultural awareness about the philosophies and practices of the respective countries' schools and allow reflections and comparisons to be made. Intercultural sensitivity and confidence is evident in the trainee teachers' reflections about teaching and learning approaches, adaptability, enjoyment of the immersion and the challenge of teaching in a foreign context. Teaching and learning skills are discussed in as much as the trainee teachers reflect upon the facilities available and the challenges of teaching foreign languages and EAL children. The experiences have made them reflect upon their own practices and adopt and adapt techniques seen on the exchange. The trainee teachers also discuss other transferable skills such as confidence, tolerance, empathy when they discuss the respective schooling systems,

staff and pupils. Finally, the exchange programme has empowered the students to think more globally and to develop traits of a socially just disposition. Their reflections upon practice and policy, facilities and opportunities afforded operated at a number of levels. Firstly, they discussed the relative 'safeness' of the respective countries in terms of safeguarding procedures and child protection legislation, they also discussed the facilities in the respective countries choosing to focus mainly on the differences in technology, how much there is, how it is used, etc. Interestingly the trainee teachers also felt that in English schools the numbers of staff present in a primary classroom might mean that the classrooms were more inclusive, and the children received more adult attention. Other reflections focused upon developing a more socially just disposition and the opportunity that the exchange programme presented in maintaining the relationships formed between the trainee teachers by becoming penpals, etwinning and more informally sharing friendship and ideas through social media.

The recommendations following this study are threefold: firstly, when planning international exchange programmes in teacher education, there are important considerations in the planning phase of opportunities and experiences that are deliberately targeted at developing intercultural sensitivity, in some respect these may need to be engineered into the programme depending upon the length of the exchange. These need to be carefully negotiated and shared with the participants in advance of the trip (Uusimaki & Swirski, 2016). Secondly, during the exchange programmes time needs to be planned for systematic reflection, this should be both formally and structured but also informally as the relationships develop between the exchange students. Finally, as the experience draws to a close, it is important to allow time for reflection and action planning. Intention to practice is not enough, time spent identifying where change can be made or assumptions challenged empowers individuals to act upon their experiences and become the cultural brokers and globally minded teachers of the future. Teacher exchange programmes such as this one offer more than a trip away; this study demonstrates that a well planned and strategic programme of events allows trainee teachers to develop soft skills and in the case of teacher education, teaching and learning specific skills that will make them more adaptable and resourceful teachers. Similarly, this study demonstrated the beginnings of a developing a socially just disposition where the trainee teachers questioned and reflected upon traditions, assumptions and challenges presented during the exchange programme and gave them the confidence to become agents of change in their own settings.

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