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The travel scholarship for 2001 has enabled me to spend time travelling to the University of Washington, Seattle and the University of Maryland, Washington DC. I spent a greater period of time at the University of Washington (one month), a shorter visit (one week) to the University of Maryland. Whilst in the USA I was able to arrange an opportunistic one-day meeting with colleagues at the University of Central Florida. I was particularly interested in the provision, initiatives and developments that each of the Universities offer in relation to:

- training teachers to work with pupils with severe and complex learning disabilities
- training teachers to work in inclusive contexts
- competency/ standards based training
- research interests in relation to teacher education and learning

***University of Washington, Seattle***

The Department of Special Education at the University of Washington is 7<sup>th</sup> in the University league of best provision for Special Education Departments in the USA. I found myself immersed in a culture that has helped to drive the Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) process of research inquiry in the USA, a process of enquiry that has also impacted and influenced special education provision in the UK. It was a great pleasure to engage with fellow colleagues who have a passion for a particular approach and also the vivacity and tenacity to continue to develop the approach into a new era of provision. The size of the department allowed me to see how diversity can be achieved with an accompanying depth of knowledge, understanding and expertise. I was able to experience how ABA has been developed in this University, in a humanistic way that centres on actively engaging pupils with complex learning disabilities in their own learning. The opportunities for professional teacher development are many and there are a great variety of course options in the programmes on offer by the University. The two main special education programmes are both at Masters level. One is for practising teachers and the other for postgraduate students requiring certification. There is a need to demonstrate particular competencies on both courses. The quality assurance procedures for these competencies rest with University staff with classroom teachers acting as collaborative role mentors to the student teachers. Students who are working for their certification need to carry out three practica in a school context. These consist of 10 week (10 hours each week) placements where they work alongside a more experienced teacher and carry out some individual pupil programme development and teaching. Following from this, they also need to also complete a 10 week full time student teaching placement. Practising teachers working for their Masters engage in reflective practice, specifically linked to the competencies, with the additional support of an assigned teacher mentor from another school setting. Mentors are teachers who have recently and successfully completed the Masters programme themselves. Both groups of students also have to complete course work that builds up credits. They have to also complete a final exam or submit a dissertation. Most Masters courses are self funding, although some students can receive a government stipend as long as they then teach in the local area for at least two years following qualification. The University has an Experimental Education Unit (EEU) on campus and some teachers

take leave of absence from their current posts and work as part time assistant teachers in the EEU. Such students have their tuition fees paid for them. The duration of the course is normally two years, but it can be completed in one. I wondered what the incentive was for teachers to engage with this high workload that leads a teacher to have to attend class at the University for two or three nights a week, as well as collecting evidence relating to competencies and working part time? I was told the answer - in the USA the achievement of a Masters degree is an acknowledged and expected part of a teacher's professional development and integral to their progression in the profession. They also get paid a great deal more money! In fact, there was wonderment that any teacher in the UK completed Master's course without such an incentive! There is also an active PhD programme which entails taught units as well as independent research.

The development of the experiential model of teacher learning is clearly evident in the course provision, as illustrated by three faculty members in a recent publication:

"Considering that experiential modes of training are so integral to preservice teacher education, it is curious that inservice teacher education has historically been bereft of experiential components"

Stowitschek, Cheney and Schwartz (2000) p 142

The EEU provides an example of an inclusive kindergarten provision whose aims are to provide excellent educational provision, a centre for training and development, and a research centre. The centre, which is partly funded by the University, offers up to 200 pupil places for 0-6 year olds. Each class has a large number of disabled children (more than 50%), a parent and toddler class, early years provision for identified 'vulnerable' young children. There is also a thriving research and practice programme for pupils with autism based at the EEU. The EEU has very strong links to the College of Education. The director of the EEU is a previous head of the department of special education and continues to play a role in the faculty. The school is a highly successful kindergarten school catering for children in the Seattle area, which is illustrated by the long waiting list to get into the school. Each class has an observation booth and technological equipment so that observers may focus in on particular interactions. Student teachers have practicum placements at the centre, and practising teachers from the school district come into the EEU to observe and learn particular approaches to teaching, such as Picture Exchange Scheme (PECS). There are opportunities for staff from the EEU to go back with the teachers into their school context to help them implement what they have learnt. The EEU is an example of the wonderful synergy that can be developed between teaching, research and development. It allows in depth analysis of particular teaching approaches and strategies and shows, through example, how these can be delivered in an inclusive setting.

The role of the Special Education Department in the preparation of students attending the University to train to teach children in 'regular' education is small. However, there are some examples of recent initiatives where faculty members have collaborated on particular courses. This has led to all students needing to complete a course unit in inclusive education where they are introduced to the principles, policy and some elements of pedagogy. Students may choose to complete an optional unit on special

education, which will require them to carry out an assessed practicum. This collaboration between the departments of 'special' and 'regular' education appears to be perceived as a positive step and one, which now needs to be developed further.

### **Reflections on the provision at the University of Washington**

There is a strong level of Masters and PhD provision for training teachers to work in the field of special education, where courses may be multi professional with all the professionals working in the field of disabilities.

The Masters courses have a strong experiential learning component that may take place at the EEU or in partnership public school provision across the Seattle district. This may comprise of segregated and integrated provision.

The notion of competencies is very strong with University developed competencies for severe learning disabilities. These competencies are influenced by applied behavioural analysis, but encourage teachers to apply these strategies and processes in a socially valid way.

The integration of teaching and research is very strong, particularly in the example of the EEU.

The relationship between the EEU and the Special Education Department is a dynamic and active one, both academically and practically. For example, faculty members have office space at the EEU and in the department and their time is spent between the two buildings.

The funding arrangements for the Special Education Department and the EEU are wide-ranging but appear stable. The EEU receives funds from diverse quarters, including federal grants, due to the varied research and development programmes on offer. There was, during my visit, a sense of a level of stability of funding that allows a sense of continued development and growth. The Special Education Department is funded through state and federal grants, which also appears stable for the foreseeable future.

The undergraduate opportunities for teachers in 'regular' education appear at the introductory and awareness raising level, unless a student chooses an option in special education. This may well perpetuate the idea that special education is something separate and additional to 'regular' education.

### **Outcomes of the visit**

An international research project relating to teacher education between a member of staff at the University of Washington and myself has been developed as a result of my visit. We intend to apply the Appreciative Inquiry approach and analyse teachers' perceptions of effective teacher learning. We are going to carry out structured individual interviews with a group of 10 teachers in the USA and the UK who are practising teachers attending a Masters level course. We intend to offer the teachers a definition of teacher learning and ask in depth questions relating to a recent experience of teacher learning that the teachers have encountered. These interviews

will be transcribed and analysed, with joint analysis occurring via a web cam or video conferencing facility. A jointly authored publication will be written for an international journal, and it is hoped that the research can also be disseminated through conferences, both in the UK and the USA. The methodological issues of carrying out collaborative international research using technology may also be analysed and written up for publication.

### ***The University of Maryland***

The Department of Special Education sits in the college of education in the University of Maryland. The department has a reputation for engaging in research. Over the past four years, it has secured more than \$12 million in sponsored research funding. Even by American standards, this is a large department where there are fourteen tenured professors and one hundred and five other academic, research and administrative staff. A unique feature of the University is the five year undergraduate programme that is offered in special education. There is a cohort of about thirty students in each year and credits from the fifth year may be transferred to the Masters programme. A student would need to complete an additional six courses to fulfil the requirements for a Master's degree. This could take one year full time or two years part time. There is also an active Ph.D. programme with about thirty students enrolled. The department offers a variety of core and option courses that lead to teacher state certification in special education along with academic credits.

The undergraduate and post graduate courses have been recently evaluated and revised in order to embrace the movement towards inclusion of pupils with disabilities in mainstream educational provision. Taught courses have been developed to be more reflective of this. The courses are strongly influenced by the Standards for Children with Severe Disabilities published by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the State of Maryland published indicators for this group of pupils (referred to as IMAP). The practicum experiences are carefully organised and managed over the duration of the course to ensure that there are opportunities for sustained experience in inclusive contexts for the student teachers.

However, student teachers that participate in the certification programme to teach in 'regular' education in Maryland have a different experience. They may choose to complete a unit on special education, which is University based and requires no experience in a school context.

### **Reflections on the provision at the University of Maryland**

This is a very large and research active department for special education, which is eclectic in the themes that appear to drive the work and development of the department.

The undergraduate provision offers an example of an interesting approach to teacher education in the field, particularly in the five year duration of the course and the direct credit link to the master's programme. There appears to be an effective process of natural progression for the students that ensure they stay with the University of Maryland.

The standards published by the Council for Exceptional Children and the State indicators (IMAP) appear to be closely mapped to the content of the course provision at the University of Maryland.

The Department of Special Education is developing its provision to reflect directly the changing context of teaching and learning for pupils with learning disabilities and severe disabilities in more inclusive settings. As with the University of Washington, teachers in regular education may well see special education as separate and additional.

### **Outcomes of the visit to the University of Maryland**

An international collaborative research project between the University of Maryland and the University of Northumbria was initially discussed. This would focus on issues of 'standards' (either teacher standards or pupil progress standards). It would involve collaborative work between a member of faculty at the University of Maryland and myself. The planning stage of the research is set to continue electronically on my return to Northumbria.

### ***University of Central Florida***

Whilst in Seattle I took the opportunity to make links with a professor in severe disabilities at the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida, where I was to go independently once my official scholarship ended in Maryland. I visited the department for a day, where I made a presentation to faculty members about the UK perspective on inclusion. The department is also very large with nineteen tenured professors and a hundred other staff. The department offers an innovative unified five year Masters course for teacher education. Here one sees regular and special education teachers learning together and specialising in their fifth year; either in a curriculum or disability focus. The fifth year at Masters level appears to be particularly attractive to students. Integral to the course is experiential learning and students have practicum and block teaching in a range of inclusive settings. The emphasis of the course is on pupils with mild learning disabilities, and students wishing to obtain an endorsement in severe disabilities are able to do so in their fifth Masters year.

### **Reflections on the visit to the University of Central Florida**

The visit was indeed short. This is a very large department for special education, which is eclectic in the themes that appear to drive the work and development of the department. Teacher learning at under and post graduate levels appears to be a strong directional theme of the department. The innovative unified approach to teacher education was very interesting and it was clear that faculty members I talked to believed this to be the way to prepare teachers to teacher more inclusively.

### **Outcome of the visit**

Contact was made with the professor for severe disabilities who is active in TASH (The Association for Severe Handicaps). She advised me whom to contact in relation to conference papers for the other research initiatives I have been able to develop She

is also most interested in developing international links in the future. We plan to stay in contact.

### ***Reflections on the experience of the scholarship***

The scholarship has offered a great opportunity to analyse the provision of teacher education opportunities at three main universities in the USA. It has been truly exciting to observe such large programmes that attract considerable numbers of student teachers and has highlighted a major difference between the USA and the UK. These undergraduate courses in special educational needs are not present in the UK; our provision is at Master's level only and post teacher accreditation. Although I feel the UK perspective has a great deal to contribute to the development of a scenario where all teachers are prepared to teach all pupils, my experience in the USA has also shown me what we are not doing in the UK. We are not supporting our teacher trainees to apply directly their knowledge of pedagogy to pupils with learning disabilities in a sustained way. Owing to constraints of time and funding issues we can not offer the extended experiential learning that our American colleagues, working in departments of special education, are engaged in. I feel that in order to develop teachers to be able to embrace inclusion, teacher educators (both in the UK and USA) need to address the issue of sustained experiential learning for teachers of all pupils. We need to move beyond awareness raising to a situation where teachers are able to apply effective pedagogy to all children in a range of learning contexts.

The status and accompanying financial rewards for teachers in the USA to obtain a Masters degree created a large and continuous market for the courses on offer at the Universities. Many teachers not only want, but also need, to obtain their Masters degree for their professional careers. The undergraduate courses that have an integral element of Masters provision in them show creative strategies for ensuring students stay with a particular University.

The scholarship has also allowed some reflection of the underlying drives that influence and impact upon the provision in each of the Universities. For example, in one University there was an allegiance to a particular form of research inquiry (ABA). In another, there appeared an adherence to particular standards (CEC and IMAP), and in another, it was an emphasis on the pedagogy of teaching teachers that seemed to be a feature of the department.

I believe my visit had some reciprocal benefit for the institutions. I have been offered the opportunity to share my reflections, participate in some teaching and develop research projects. The duration of the scholarship has been helpful in this, particularly the longer period in Seattle at the University of Washington.

Through the scholarship it has emerged that there are similar issues of concern, such as: distance learning, ICT, standards driven agendas, and research funding and activity. There are examples of some Universities being at similar stages in their development. For example the University of Washington (USA) and the University of Northumbria (UK) appear at similar levels in the development of distance learning courses. There are other examples where some Universities are at different stages of development. For example, the grant related severe disabilities research developments at the University of Maryland and the University of Washington appears extremely

developed and refined, whereas the unified approach to teacher education at the University of Florida reflects a cutting edge approach to the training of teachers.

### ***Recommendations for University of Northumbria***

To make maximum effect of what has been learned from the scholarship, I recommend to the University of Northumbria School of Education that:

- the current ITT experiences for our trainee teachers, designed to develop the understandings, skills and strategies to work in a more inclusive context, be further developed. Specifically, this needs to be in an experiential way where trainees are supported in translating their pedagogic knowledge with a range of pupils who present as 'learning' different
- greater levels of disability equality training is incorporated into the learning experiences of our trainee teachers so that they may better realize the potential contribution disabled children can offer to the school
- the strong partnership already existing between UNN and regional link schools be further developed to include a range of schools that cater for children with more complex needs
- the research projects and links initiated by the scholarship should be developed and supported

I recommend to the University of Northumbria that

- serious consideration be given to the potential of developing an inclusive nursery that brings together good practice, teacher development and research. Such a school, set up along the lines of the EEU in Seattle would offer the University and the local community a rich resource indeed

### ***Recommendations for UCET/ACCTE***

I intend to write up and publish my experience of the travel scholarship where I will focus on an international perspective to teacher learning, specifically issues of experiential learning, synergy of teaching and research; preparation for teaching in inclusive settings, progression to Masters work, competencies and incentives. However, to make maximum effect of what has been learned from the scholarship, I recommend to the UCET/ACCTE that:

- consideration is given to continued support for the research initiatives that have been set up through the scholarship. This could include advice and guidance, and expenses incurred through the research process and for attending conferences to disseminate findings
- consideration is given to enabling the scholars of this year mentoring and supporting the scholars of future years

I would like to end this report by extending my sincere thanks to those who have supported my travel scholarship, particularly:

- my husband, Bill, who facilitated my going by taking great care of our three young boys in my absence. Also, my boys who rallied and helped their dad
- the staff of UNN, particularly Professor Patrick Easen, who has been unfailing in his support
- the staff of the three different Universities in the USA who welcomed me into their departments and homes
- the staff of UCET and ACCTE who had the foresight and commitment to develop this travel scholarship for new academics