

Brain games & neuroscience: examining perceptions in class

A researcher's perspective



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About Researchers in Residence (RinR)

Researchers in Residence benefits researchers, young people and teachers via UK-wide school placements across social, physical, life and earth sciences and the humanities subjects.

Researchers:

- Work with some of the most challenging and inquisitive minds
- Renew your enthusiasm for research and develop communication and teaching skills

Schools:

- Access valuable classroom support
- Interact with researchers to motivate, inspire and maximise student learning
- Enhance learning experiences and realise improved grades

What was the aim of your placement?

"My passion is neuroscience, so I focused on how amazing the brain is through mini practicals."

What did you hope to get out of the placement?

"I had always been nervous about public speaking and thought Researchers in Residence sounded like a good way to improve my communication skills. I thought it'd be a good challenge, as you really have to understand your research area to make it relatable to an audience as far removed from academia as school children."

How did you determine the structure of your placement, was it a joint effort with school or your own decision?

"I came up with a lesson plan after discussing possible topics with the teacher, whose class I would be

working with. He was very supportive and gave me a lot of help and support when it came to coming up with ideas to engage the students."

Did you have any apprehensions prior to beginning the placement?

"When discussing my background with the teacher, I mentioned that I had been working in animal research and he suggested that this would be a great topic to debate with the students. I was a bit apprehensive about this at first because I had not discussed this subject with students or the public at this point in my career and thought he might want me to steer clear of controversial topics."

How was this different from the reality?

"The students were really inquisitive and friendly, which helped settle my initial nerves. They listened intently and were eager to get involved with whatever task or activity I had in mind."

The whole experience was far less scary than I had imagined. Though I'd never considered teaching before, the sense of accomplishment I felt at the end of my first class made me realise how much I enjoyed it."

Highlight of the project?

"The best moment for me was during my first session with a year 10 class. Whilst researching for my PhD, I had always avoided giving talks at conferences as I hated the feeling of being scrutinised by a discerning and critical audience, so it was a great feeling when, after giving my first talk, the students gave me a big round of applause. It really put me at ease and made me feel confident to get on with the rest of the session."

Best thing about being a researcher in residence?

"I found the whole experience very rewarding. It was great to see the students getting excited about the subject matter and debating issues amongst themselves. Some pupils even stayed behind after lessons to ask further questions. Their energy and enthusiasm was contagious! It got me excited about my own research and what I was trying to achieve."

What did you learn/get out of the experience?

"The experience has made me more confident in terms of presenting my research to different audiences. The work researchers do often has wider implications. Therefore, it's important to be able to explain the research to people who are unfamiliar with it and for them to make sense of it."

"RinR is a really good way for new researchers to get experience of public speaking and build their confidence. You could organise an outreach activity by yourself, but you would not get the training and support that you do through the programme."

Life after Researchers in Residence, what have you been up to since finishing your placement?

"Career wise, Researchers in Residence had a huge impact on my subsequent choices. After finishing my PhD, I did a post-doc at UCL. Following that, I went onto enrol on a graduate teacher placement programme. It is not official yet, but I have been offered a position with a school in Hertfordshire starting September 2010."

Would you recommend Researchers in Residence to a fellow researcher?

"Yes, definitely. It can open up new opportunities for you even if you do not want to change your career path. Additionally, it can help you identify what your strengths are and what you need to work on in terms of skills and which aspect of your research interests you most/which part you can communicate best."

Eligibility

RinR is open to all PhD and post doctoral researchers funded directly or indirectly by one of the seven UK Research Councils or the Wellcome Trust.

Training

Participating researchers attend a one-day training session covering effective communication and pupil engagement and the do's and don'ts in the classroom. Advice on activities past researchers have used to engage young people is given and you'll find out more about the kind of situations you may encounter during your placement.

How to apply

Complete the online application form at:
researchersinresidence.ac.uk
our RinR co-ordinators will then match you with a suitable school and contact you.

