Teaching is a complex affair in which teachers manage a range of classroom variables and dynamics in the pursuit of pupil learning. Teacher education and NQT probationary monitoring tends to focus attention on systems and protocols such as planning, assessing and lesson pace for example, which are easily measureable, but tend to promote a technicist view of the profession. In this climate, in which the imperative to be 'Outstanding' at all times has never been greater, opportunities for pre-service and novice teachers to take risks, follow their emerging pedagogical intuitions, develop comfort with uncertainty and hone professional judgements are often limited. This study examines how an informal overseas teaching placement might support pre-service and novice teachers' professional development in ways which traditional school experiences might not. Using the theoretical lenses of Structurism and Agency (Giddens, 1979; 1998) and novice-to-expert rubrics (Dreyfus, 1981), this research looks at the developing professionalism of three cohorts of ten initial teacher education (ITE) students before, during and after a four week informal teaching experience in township primary schools in South Africa. Beginning at the end of their second year of training and following each cohort into their NQT year, a series of periodic group and individual interviews examines the participants' professional growth from their own eye-view. Whilst the research is still ongoing, initial conclusions strongly indicate that increased professional trust, minimal or reduced monitoring and increased curricular and pedagogical autonomy can have a significant positive effect on trainee and NQT motivation, risk taking, experimentation and confidence. The analysis suggests that these important features of professionalism can easily be undermined by the structure, prescription and monitoring of formal placements, and argues the case for the value of informal teaching placements during teacher education.