Co-Operating Teachers: The Untapped Nucleus of Democratic Pedagogical Partnerships in Initial Teacher Education in Ireland

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It is widely accepted that co-operating teachers play a key role in the formation of student teachers during their school placement. Yet, in the Irish context, there is limited research exploring the role and significance of these stakeholders in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). To address this lacuna, this qualitative research draws on a series of semi-structured interviews with co-operating teachers (n=10), student teachers (n=10) and school leaders (n=10) across a purposive sample of ten case study schools from the data base (n=152) of placement schools involved with an ITE programme in a university in Dublin. In her analysis of the data, the author introduces the notion of democratic pedagogical partnerships underpinned by the ontological position of constructivism with a view to interrogating how the social phenomena that are examined in this study are constantly being negotiated by social actors and thus always in a state of flux and revision. While there are some optimistic indications in the data in particular regarding the significant role of cooperating teachers in developing pedagogical partnerships in initial teacher education, the research also demonstrates that the role of the co-operating teacher in the Irish context is often ad hoc, under-resourced and under-utilised. The data presented in this paper suggest that while there are obstacles to the enactment of the role, there are opportunities to develop the role at a systemic level. Ultimately, this research concludes that co-operating teachers are willing participants in ITE, but they require resources, supports and recognition to enact their role more consistently and systemically.

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Defining the Concept of Democratic Pedagogical Partnership in Initial Teacher Education?

Since the 1960s, hierarchical organisational structures in education have been challenged, mirroring attitudinal changes in society towards a more democratic approach to education (Edling & Mooney-Simmie, 2020; OECD, 2019).Current education policy in Ireland, as elsewhere, is also spotlighting the contribution that education can make to the development of the learner as a person and as a citizen. This is evidenced by new curricula specifications being designed which emphasise the "promotion of social cohesion, the growth of society and the economy and the principle of sustainability in all aspects of development" (NCCA, 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, the impetus for teachers to develop a "constructivist pedagogical orientation" (DES, 2015; 2017) to foster 21st century competences (OECD, 2018, Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2019) is also evident in the current myriad of initiatives and curriculum reform across the continuum of education in Ireland. The author asserts that a democratic and collaborative approach to learning in the context of ITE will reflect what is espoused in current education policy for primary and post-primary students and mirror the type of learning, teaching and assessment that student teachers will be expected to exemplify in their practice.

With a primary focus on the role of the co-operating teacher in democratic pedagogical partnerships in ITE, this research examines how knowledge is created and recreated through human activity and how individual stakeholders generate meaning(s) about learning and collaboration through their dynamic interaction with one other. The influential work of Hargreaves (1994, 2000, 2001, 2012, 2019) regarding collaborative practice in the teaching profession and the pioneering work of Smith (2015, 2016, 2017, 2020) regarding school-university partnerships (SUPS) in initial teacher education (ITE) are both central to this study. Their work in turn has been influenced by seminal theorists such as Dewey (1916; 1938) who championed a constructivist pedagogy as well as placing

democracy and the moral purpose of education at the centre of educational discourses; Vygotsky's (1978) influential scholarship on social learning and Freire's (1970) advocacy of social justice paradigms, underpinned by egalitarian, emancipatory, and ethical principles. Fusing these ideas, the author introduces the notion of "Democratic Pedagogical Partnership" as 'a formal but flexible arrangement between teacher educators and stakeholders who engage in 'collaborative professionalism' to improve learning for all students in a variety of contexts through effective pedagogy and practice" (Farrell, 2017).

The Key and Emerging Role of the Co-operating Teacher in Democratic Pedagogical Partnership in Initial Teacher Education

As a key contributor to the literature on school university partnerships (SUPs), Smith (2016) asserts that 'a partnership is an agreement between teacher education institutions and stakeholders of education who work together towards a shared goal, to improve education at all levels' (p. 20). She goes on to suggest that educational partnerships that go beyond mere rhetoric are based on long-term undertakings and honest ambition to work together to improve education at all levels. Smith (Ibid) argues that further to the call for cooperation explicitly outlined in EU documents, namely Supporting Teacher Educators (OECD, 2016) and Strengthening Teaching in Europe (OECD, 2015), teacher preparation should be supported by alliances with a number of stakeholders as illustrated in figure 1. This paper focuses on the practice field and the specific role of co-operating teachers in fostering democratic pedagogical partnerships in initial teacher education.

Figure 1. Partnerships in Teacher Education (Adapted from Smith, 2016, p. 21)

The issue of the selection and professional development of co-operating teachers is an obvious gap in current policy and provision (Hall, Murphy, Ni Aingleis and Rutherford, 2019; Harford, 2010; Harford and Gray, 2015). However, it is widely accepted that co-operating teachers play a key role in the formation of student teachers during their school placement. Clarke, Triggs & Nielsen (2014) note the need for greater scrutiny of the "nuanced understandings that both provoke and advance how the work of cooperating teacher is conceived and enacted" (p.164). They go on to identify common constructions of the role of co-operating teachers as illustrated in the typology in Figure 2. which is useful for any interrogation of participation.

The first conception reflects a limited level of support provided by the co-operating teacher, who is perceived as classroom placeholder tantamount to being an "absentee landlord". The assumption is that

the student benefits from complete immersion in the practice of teaching, taking on all the main duties of the class teacher with minimal interaction with the co-operating teacher. Hopper (2001) asserts that such a view can lead to an impoverished experience for students and a narrow view of what it means to be a professional. Further along the continuum is the co-operating teacher as supervisor of practice. In this interpretation, the role of the co-operating teacher is to provide feedback on the student teacher's application of knowledge in the practice setting (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Eck & Ramsay, 2019). The interaction between co-operating teacher and student teacher is increased but largely unidirectional (i.e., from the co-operating teacher to the student teacher). In contrast to these two conceptions, a third description is that of co-operating teacher first described by Knowles & Cole (1996) as teacher educator. Being a teacher educator in this situation, demands that a co-operating teacher, among other expectations, is far more engaged than a classroom place holder or supervisor. This conception is akin to that of a coach or mentor (Ellis, Alonzo & Nguyen, 2020) which according to Ambrosetti, Knight, Dekkers, (2014) is often misunderstood in the context of ITE as it is often confused with the role of supervisor and is difficult to fully enact at times due to the ad hoc nature of school placement. For the purposes of this study the author extended Clarke et al.'s (2014) typology of the level of co-operating teachers' participation to include Willegems, Consuegra , Struyven and Engel's (2017) concept of the co-operating teacher as co-inquirer wherein they engage in reflective practice and practitioner research with their student teachers while on school placement. In this conception of the role, both student teachers and their co-operating teachers, given the right circumstances, have the potential to be agents of change and drivers of improvement with regard to pedagogy and practice.
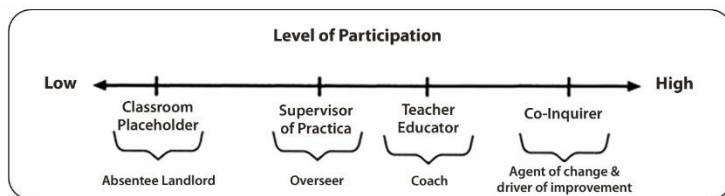
Figure 2. Common and emerging conceptions of co-operating teacher participation in teacher education (Author) adapted from Clarke et al. (2014, p. 167) and Willegems et al. (2017).

In their new *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*, the Teaching Council of Ireland have recently introduced the term "Treoraí" the Irish word for guide, to replace the term co-operating teacher, asserting that it more accurately reflects the nature of the role of a teacher who supports and guides the student teacher during his/her school placement experience in the Irish context (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 6).

Methodology

This qualitative study consisted of carrying out a series of semi-structured interviews with co-operating teachers (n=10), student teachers (n=10) and school leaders (n=10) across a purposive sample of ten case study schools from the data base [n=152] of placement schools involved with an ITE programme in a university in Dublin. The rationale behind interviewing student teachers and school leaders as well as co-operating teachers was to examine the ways in which co-operating teachers' understanding of their role was echoed or contradicted in other actors' experiences of the operationalisation of this role. Sampling in this study was concerned not with size but with the richness of data. Furthermore, the research aimed to involve the three main models of post-primary schools in Ireland: Voluntary Secondary Schools (fee paying and non-fee paying), Education and Training Board (ETB) Schools, and

Community and Comprehensive Schools[1]. Schools in communities of disadvantage referred to as DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools and non-DEIS schools along with co-educational and single gender schools are also represented in the case studies.

Analysis of Data

Interview data was initially coded according to participant and school type (see Tables 1 and 2). For example, when referring to the code CT1S1, the first letter and number identify the participant as a co-operating teacher [CT1] and the second letter and number identifies the school type [S1].

Following on from the classification of participants and schools, the analysis of data followed a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1994; O' Donoghue, 2018) enabling theory generation to be emergent, that is "emerge from, rather than exist before, the data" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 598). This involved analysis of interview transcripts to generate substantive theory 'grounded' in the data provided by the participants through semi-structured interviews conducted using guiding questions to prompt discussion. The value in this process was the flexibility it provided to respond to and explore participants' responses (Punch & Oancea, 2014), especially as the interviews progressed and themes being generated could be explored further.

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[1] While all three are funded by the state Department of Education and Skills, the ETB is the sole patron of ETB schools, community schools are established either by one or more private or religious patrons coming together with an ETB patron or as the result of the amalgamation of voluntary secondary and ETB schools. Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed post-primary schools, usually under the patronage of an individual body such as a religious community, a charitable trust or a private charitable company. See O' Donoghue, T., Harford, J. and O' Doherty, T. (2017) Teacher Preparation in Ireland: History, Policy and Future Directions, Emerald: UK.

Table 1. Case study school types and codes

School	School type	Code
1	Voluntary Secondary School /DEIS/Co-Educational	S1
2	Voluntary Secondary School /Non DEIS/Non Fee-Paying/All Girls	S2
3	Voluntary Secondary School /Non DEIS/Non Fee-Paying/All Boys	S3
4	Voluntary Secondary School /Non DEIS/Fee-Paying /Co-Educational	S4
5	Voluntary Secondary School /Non DEIS/Fee-Paying /All Girls	S5
6	ETB: Community College/DEIS/Co-Educational	S6
7	ETB: Community College/Non DEIS/Co-Educational	S7
8	Community & Comprehensive School/Non DEIS/All Girls	S8
9	Community & Comprehensive School/Non-DEIS /All Boys	S9
10	Community & Comprehensive School /DEIS/Co-Educational	S10

Table 2. Participant type and codes

Participant	Code
Co-Operating Teacher	CT
School Leader	SL
Student Teacher	ST

Using an inductive analysis, three main themes emerged from the research in relation to co-operating teachers: The complexity and significant potential of the role of the co-operating teacher in building democratic partnerships in ITE; the need to adequately resource this role, establishing a more formal landscape in ITE; barriers to the development of genuine and effective democratic pedagogical partnerships in ITE.

The complexity and significant potential of the role of the co-operating teacher in building of democratic partnerships in ITE

A key part of the challenge in relation to understanding the nature of school-university partnerships and of roles therein is achieving a clearer appreciation of how co-operating teachers understand their roles (Izadinia 2014; Livingston 2014; Flores 2016; Czerniawski, Guberman & McPhail 2017) and making explicit the work that they do in the formation of student teachers on placement in their schools (Flores, 2016; 2018; Livingston, 2014). It is evident from the data that there is a general sense that while co-operating teachers are informally aware of the nature and importance of their role, they lack the professional shared language and more formal connection with the university sphere to enable them to both critically reflect on and construct their role. Those co-operating teachers who, however, play a more formal role within the university setting, usually through lecturing in subject methodologies on programmes of ITE, have a stronger professional identity as a co-operating teacher and align their work supporting student teachers in schools more closely with their work lecturing in the university setting. They see this alignment and collaboration as central to the development of democratic pedagogical partnerships in initial teacher education:

> Working so closely with the university in the professional formation of student teachers, and carrying out a key role in the ITE university programme and in my school in supporting student teachers on placement, I feel I really contribute to the development of democratic pedagogical partnerships in ITE. I don't think it would be possible to have the kind of understanding that I have, the kind of knowledge that I share, without working across the spectrum of those key relationships and roles (CTS2).

In instances where links between partner schools and the university were strong, there was ample evidence of engagement in the building of democratic partnerships in initial teacher education enabling the "seed that enables 'partnership' in school placement to

be experienced, understood, and grown" (Hall, Murphy, Rutherford & Ní Áingléis, 2018 p. 179). This was made possible through a shared understanding of the nature of roles, a common professional language, agreed objectives and a sense of organic collaboration:

> There has been a long history in our school whereby we recognise the importance of playing our part in the professional development of student teachers. We have long had an excellent relationship with our university partners and the role of the co-operating teacher has always been regarded as a central part of this framework. This has a knock-on effect. We share our knowledge, we work as a community, and the role brings added value to the wider school community. It is, however, really founded on a partnership approach, where everyone's voice and experience and expertise is valued. I know from friends and colleagues in other schools that this is actually quite rare and very often schools and universities take a more informal, unplanned approach (CTS1).

When asked to reflect on the nature of their role, taking account of the author's extended version of Clarke et al's (2014) model to guide their thinking, the majority observed that they enact their role in different ways at different times depending on a multiplicity of factors. However, the majority noted that their role was most particularly shaped and informed by the rapport they shared with their student teacher and their knowledge of the university's expectations of their role:

> I think a lot of it depends on the student teacher, which I know sounds strange but a lot of them are much more welcoming of your support than others. And if there is no minimum requirement set by [the ITE provider] as to what a co-operating teacher has to do, I have found myself sometimes maybe being down near the absentee landlord because I am not getting any kind of response from the student teacher. So I have been at both ends of the scale I would say, but I would like to know where I should be as a minimum as a co-operating teacher with more guidance from the university (CTS5).

It was also clear from the testimony that the way in which co-operating teachers understood and went about their role was mediated by how student teachers view the role of co-operating teacher and how they engage with the relationship:

> I think the role has evolved over the years but I think a lot still does have to do with the student teacher's understanding of the role of the co-operating teacher and where they see the co-operating teacher, because sometimes they are lacking in confidence, for whatever reason it is, they would probably not have you around too often and they kind of nearly feel that they would manage better and they would prefer to make the mistakes themselves. So I think a lot has to do with the student understanding of the role as well as my understanding of the role (CTS3).

Because of the way in which the student teacher/co-operating teacher dyad is typically managed in the Irish context, a student teacher may have more than one co-operating teacher, which again brings a further level of complexity, as expectations from different co-operating teachers can fluctuate:

> To be honest, I would be more down at the overseer stage realistically, maybe on the odd occasion touching into coach but more overseer and occasionally dropping back down to the absentee landlord as well. I think it depends on the student teacher and their willingness to let you get involved with them and work with them. But also it depends I find as to how many co-operating teachers the student teacher has. So you could be trying to be really proactive and helpful with them but the other four or five teachers that are also their co-operating may not be as interested in assisting them with their progress and development. So that could make you look a bit like the odd one out so to speak (CTS4).

Comments from student teachers echoed the views of co-operating teachers namely that the way teachers enact their role as a co-operating teacher can depend on the attitude of the student teacher as well as the personal traits and interests of the co-operating teachers themselves:

> There should be a mirror image of the typology of participation of CTs for student teachers as to what kind of perception student teachers have of their own role in the CT – ST relationship on school placement. Some students are open to support while others are not and sometimes this can change over the year or between year one and year two (STS5).

Some CTs observed that being an agent of change was a two-way process in that sometimes student teachers can also act as catalysts for change. Student teachers' use of some approaches and technology toppled the typical co-operating teacher/student teacher hierarchy, placing the student teacher as mentor to the co-operating teacher (Farrell & Marshall 2020). This was particularly true of the recent move to remote learning as a result of Covid 19:

> Covid-19 has changed my relationship as a co-operating teacher because of the potential to collaborate more during remote learning. It started with sharing and collaborating on resources with my student teacher using online platforms. They also helped me with the technology during me early attempts at distance teaching. I really felt that they were mentoring me at that stage. It really highlighted for me the value of having a student teacher on placement and how they can also be an agent of change in the whole process (CTS6).

> I was delighted to be able to help my co-operating teacher to use digital technology during lockdown. It was a great way for me to be able to pay them back for all the support they gave me, and I really felt appreciated. I have to say that I would not have been able to do this only for all the great ideas I picked up during my methods lecturers in the college (STS6).

Again, this was an issue that a number of the school leaders interviewed alluded to:

> I really saw the blossoming of the student teacher/co-operating teacher during Covid-19 when in partnerships they worked to ensure the kids continued to receive an education as best we could under the circumstances. For many of our more experienced teachers, the remote teaching aspect proved challenging and

> many of our student teachers really put their shoulder to the wheel, working alongside their respective co-operating teacher, in ensuring that the teaching continued and that the kids were ok (SLS8).

Teacher education programmes in the Irish context have historically endeavoured to bridge the theory practice divide (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008; Heinz & Fleming, 2019; McGarr et al., 2017; la Velle, 2019) and promote 'inquiry as a stance' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Willegems et al., 2017). However Hall et al. (2019) suggest that if "reflective practice and an inquiry stance are to be valued by student teachers, they need to see this enacted in their placement schools as part of the socialisation process (p. 105). The key role of research in building pedagogical partnerships was highlighted by participants:

> I think working with student teachers on their research dissertation helped me to re-engage with the literature in the field of teacher education and I felt this strengthened the professional relationship I was forging with my student teacher. I liked the fact that I was being asked to participate in this aspect of their professional development and I felt that made the process more democratic and ultimately more meaningful (CTS1).

> If schools are to be true partners in initial teacher education, then we must also be asked to contribute to other key aspects of the work of student teachers, including their research work. I think this should also contribute to the work of the school and particularly our work in relation to reflecting on our own practice. Choosing together the focus of key research is therefore really important and only when schools are asked to contribute will there be meaningful partnership (SPS10).

Thus, there was widespread agreement across the various actors who participate in ITE that the role of the co-operating teacher is both complex and multi-faceted as well as being central to the success of any effort to bring about democratic partnerships in ITE.

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The Need to Adequately Resource the Role of Co-Operating Teacher, Establishing a More Formal Landscape in ITE

The issue of the selection and professional development of co-operating teachers is an obvious gap in current policy and provision (Hall et al. 2019; Harford, 2010; Harford and Gray, 2015). Currently co-operating teachers are selected by school principals to work alongside student teachers. The criteria for this selection may be linked to their professional and personal capacity to undertake this role, yet it may also be linked to other variables, such as timetabling issues or the need to supplement an ineffective experienced teacher with a student teacher (Harford and O' Doherty, 2016). The fact that this model was not fit-for-purpose and the urgent requirement to adequately resource the role of co-operating teacher and formalise it within the ITE landscape was a recurring theme from participants in this study. One school leader commented:

> If this is a role we believe to be important, then we need to name it, we need to resource it, and we need to ensure that this is done across the board, and not just by those schools who are willing to take a leadership role in relation to ITE. We wouldn't accept this kind of haphazard approach to who was training in our junior doctors in hospitals so why do we accept it of our teachers? (SLS8)

The haphazard nature of how the role was viewed and assigned was a bone of significant contention amongst all those co-operating teachers interviewed in this study:

> Okay. I actually think it goes out to the laws of chance whether or not you become a co-operating teacher in many cases. In my school it depends on who is coming to the school and what subjects they are looking for. It is very much a chance really… kind of a bit of a lottery in many senses. I was actually selected because of my involvement with ITE at university level, but I would say I am one of the rare ones. In most other cases in the

> school people are selected on the basis of what subject the student teacher has (CTS7).

This can also be a function of how large a school is and how many student teachers a school principal decides to take:

> So it's usually on your timetable so we don't have a choice but if you were to ask not to have one of course it would be taken off your timetable, but we have found in recent years we have so many students teachers that a lot of teachers will get a slot at some point (CTS9).

The overriding view on this was, however, that it was a 'marriage of convenience' with many school principals having no choice but to take on student teachers in areas where there were gaps in the school timetable:

> In an ideal world co-operating teachers would be selected on their willingness and capacity, but in the real world it is a marriage of convenience. The student teacher is matched up with a teacher that has suitable classes at suitable times and if there is more than one teacher in that category, then it goes on a rotation basis so that everyone gets a chance to have a student teacher if they wish. It's a bit ad hoc but it is the only fair way to do it (SLS7).

The need to urgently not only recognise the importance of the role but also to resource it was again universally observed with all co-operating teachers interviewed unanimous in their view that it is the responsibility of the university to provide training and development for their role:

> I think that it is important for CTs to be effective that they must get some guidance from the university. I have been a co-operating teacher for many years and I never once got any formal training. I know that there is a school placement booklet that is sent to schools and I do find this helpful to a certain extent, but I would like the opportunity to sit down with other co-operating teachers both in and outside my own school to see what they do and what the university expects them to do. This is something that should be organised by the university in my opinion (CTS5).

In particular they felt they required support in the area of mentoring:

> The university that we take our student teachers from did offer a module on mentoring a few years ago for any co-operating teachers that worked with their students. I thought it was a great initiative. It was provided to give you something back for supporting their students on placement. I think that the way that COVID-19 has made teachers feel a little more comfortable with online courses there is an opportunity with to make this an online course for all co-operating teacher (CTS4).

The reciprocal nature of the learning for both student and co-operating teacher was identified by many, further evidence of the need to resource and properly recognise the role:

> I really enjoyed working with my student teacher this year more so than any other year, as I found that there was something in it for me. I got to learn how to use some really useful and interesting digital storytelling tools relevant to my subject in a very targeted and non-threatening way. For me, this provides even more of an argument as to the importance of this relationship. An effective partnership between a co-operating teacher and student teacher impacts hugely on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning at a wider school level, so why is it not recognised and resourced? (CTS6).

The context of becoming a teacher is a critical variable in shaping student teachers' professional identity and the absence of a universal framework which supports a professional conversation between university and school personnel challenges the potential of this resource to empower student teachers to deconstruct their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) and build a strong professional identity which is central to teachers' self-efficacy, motivation and job satisfaction (O' Doherty & Harford, 2016).

Barriers to the Development of Genuine and Effective Democratic Pedagogical Partnerships in ITE

Despite the generally positive engagement of the various participants in this study in the area of initial teacher education, there were concerns voiced across the spectrum in relation to barriers which persist and which impede the development of genuine and effective democratic pedagogical partnerships in ITE. While there was an acceptance that these barriers are historically and culturally embedded in the system and were being incrementally challenged, the frustration of participants with the lack of meaningful dialogue on this issue was palpable. Despite the different roles undertaken by co-operating teachers, student teachers and school leaders in the shaping of ITE, there was a common understanding of the need for the policy agenda and policy community to 'shift a gear' as one school leader noted in relation to more effectively building democratic partnerships in ITE. To some extent, the frustrations voiced mirror the rather piecemeal development of teacher education policy agenda in recent decades, where a focus on stages of the continuum of education and the role of actors across the various stages (ITE, induction and continuous professional development) has lacked coherence and joined up thinking (Hall et al. 2019; O' Doherty and Harford, 2018).

The lack of a shared policy agenda was identified as a major challenge which contributed to a disconnect across the roles of the various actors. A number of co-operating teachers and school leaders spoke of their desire to contribute to the development of policy in relation to ITE, both at a university and wider national level:

> I know that not every co-operating teacher does the job to the same level. I think this is because perhaps, the loop hasn't been closed between themselves and the university. If they felt that they were feeding into policy including at university level they would be encouraged on multiple levels to actually take more of an interest (SLS3).

Feeding into the development of policies in relation to ITE would, co-operating teachers observed, render the ITE relationship more democratic, meaningful and ultimately successful:

> Really participating in the process of supporting student teachers must include input in the development of policy, both at the university level and also in relation to the policies of the Department of Education and the Teaching Council. As a co-operating teacher, with over twenty years' experience who has worked with quite a number of student teachers and NQTs, I feel I have a lot to contribute to this space (CTS2).

This view was echoed by the principals interviewed in this study:

> We have been working with student teachers in this school for decades and have a lot of expertise and currency. Yet we are rarely asked what our views are on key changes introduced in relation to ITE. That to me is a major gap. Policy makers, university administrators, the education management community more broadly are missing out on tapping into key expertise (SLS3).

More joined up thinking from the various key actors, including the Teaching Council, in relation to resourcing and consolidating the role of the co-operating teacher in ITE was a common refrain from participants in this study:

> There is currently no recognition of the role of the co-operating teacher from the Teaching Council which I find very surprising. I think that they should work with ITE providers to have some recognition for the role maybe in the form of some sort of training and development for the role. I also think that a teacher organisation for co-operating teachers should be set up like subject associations to give co-operating teachers a collective voice (CTS3).

The lack of joined up thinking with respect to the various key actors who contribute to ITE in the Irish context has been flagged for some time, yet structural and cultural impediments, as well as a lack of vision and leadership in policy circles (Harford and O'Doherty,

2016) and lack of resourcing (Hall et al., 2019) continue to limit progress in this area.

A further challenge identified which impeded the operationalisation of an effective partnership approach was the perceived mixed-messages coming from different actors. This was further compounded by the lack of an agreed agenda, common goals and even the paucity of a shared professional language:

> I think there is a bit of a mismatch in standards between supervisors, co-operating teachers, tutors, and everybody. This even happens at the level of the kind of professional requirements and language being employed across the difference contexts – school and university. I think it can be quite disheartening for the student teacher at times when they are being told one thing by their supervisor and then their tutor might be recommending something totally different and me as a co-operating teacher is asking them to try something different. This is hardly professional when those who are supposed to be guiding and mentoring the student teacher can't agree on common goals or use the same language (CTS1).

Central to establishing a shared agenda and a common language was an agreed roadmap in which all participating actors felt their voice was being heard and valued:

> I think information and communication are key. I would have an annual information session involving the university and the senior management Principal or Deputy Principal, co-operating teachers, tutors, supervisor and methods lecturers because we all need to be on the same page and there needs to be buy in, and awareness of what we are buying into. There really is no reason not to have them now… they don't have to be face to face, they can be Zoom meetings. But these meetings are essential if we are to give a clear, common, democratic message to our student teachers (SLS2).

All categories of participants agreed that there were lessons to be learned from the Droichead induction model that could be adapted to the ITE landscape.

> I suggest a replication or maybe some version of the Droichead model that is taking place with NQTs in schools. Maybe some kind of adapted version of this to guide how you effectively deal with your student teacher as a co-operating teacher. This should be done on a national scale to ensure a more consistent approach to the student teacher experience in schools nationwide (SLS3).

The lack of synergy between the ITE policy agenda and that at induction (Droichead) and continuous professional development level was thus a common refrain among participants.

Closing Thoughts

The issue of where student teachers are most effectively prepared for the profession of teaching is one of the 'most vigorously debated' issues throughout the history of formal teacher education (Zeichner, 2008, p.263). Teacher education programmes in top-performing countries emphasise the significance of preparing teachers in structured, appropriate and supportive clinical settings. Ireland is one of those countries, yet we are still struggling to articulate and implement what our plan for this vision actually is. This gap persists despite a very vocal and public acknowledgment of the fundamental need for student teachers to be adequately supported and the need to ensure meaningful relationships between universities and schools in the achievement of this objective. This is not to suggest that building democratic partnerships in initial teacher education merely requires a clear plan and dedicated vision, however, the current ITE framework is not fit for purpose, more especially as it continues to rely on the informal, often ad hoc role of co-operating teachers. While this research has demonstrated that co-operating teachers are willing participants in ITE, it has also shown that they require resources, supports and recognition to more fully enact their role.

Authors

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school-university partnerships in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in the School of Education in University College Dublin. With a keen interest in partnerships in education, Rachel has led many collaborative initiatives involving a range of education and industry stakeholders.

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