

‘You’re Kind of taking this Person Under Your Wing...’: The Experiences of Co-operating Primary Teachers in Engaging with Student Teachers during School Placement in the Midwest of Ireland.

Mark O’Sullivan

Neil Ó Conaill

Mary Immaculate College, mosullivanresearch@gmail.com

Abstract.

This paper stems from a larger body of work undertaken as part of a postgraduate research study on co-operating primary teachers’ experiences of the school placement process in Ireland. Given that co-operating teachers play a key role in the initial teacher education process in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2013), the paper focuses on the types of engagement and interaction currently evident in the practice of a select number of co-operating primary teachers who intermittently host and work with student teachers in classrooms and schools. The factors which inhibit the development of significant pedagogy-focussed interactions are also explored. Through using a qualitative methodological and analytical lens, findings indicate that there are a range of factors which constrain engagement, and that co-operating teachers rely heavily on verbal pedagogic discussion to interact with student teachers. Participants also emphasised the challenges to engaging with student teachers as a result of uncertainty or unwillingness from the perspective of either party. The implications of this research are considered in terms of future research to extend the findings presented herein, and the current national priority to develop a formalised programme of co-operating teacher professional development in the Irish context (Teaching Council, 2019). While the research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic has underlined the key role of co-operating teachers in the placement process and has highlighted the need to formally acknowledge and support them in their work with students.

Keywords: Co-operating teacher; Practicum; Preservice teacher education; School placement; Student engagement; Student teacher; Teacher education.

1. Introduction.

Building on the consultative fora held throughout the 1990s, the passing of the Education Act (1998) and the Teaching Council Act (2001) heralded a decade of significant change in teacher education in Ireland. The subsequent publication of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011), signalled a reconceptualization of the long-standing model of initial teacher education (ITE) nationally, with programmes of teacher education significantly adjusting to meet Teaching Council accreditation criteria (Teaching Council, 2011). Lengthier programmes of study at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and accordingly, extensions to practicum elements of such courses, were the obvious changes. Not only did this mean a significant emphasis on practical experience within these third level courses, it also meant an increase in the amount of time student teachers spent in the classrooms of their co-operating teachers.

Partnership is an implicit principle underpinning the current organisation and conduct of school placement as evidenced in *The Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2013), the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (Teaching Council, 2016) and the *School Placement Innovation Report* (Teaching Council, 2021). The key role of the co-operating teacher within this partnership model is further acknowledged in *Céim* (Teaching Council, 2020), which details the current accreditation criteria and process for ITE programme providers. This refers to the co-operating teacher as Treoraí¹, translated from the Irish language as guide, a term which now implies significant agency for the co-operating teacher in the placement process. Ascribing such a formative and formal role to the co-operating teacher, is indicative of how their role has moved from one of marginal involvement (Kellaghan, 2002; Coolahan, 2003; DES, 2006) to key partners. However, this change has not yet been matched by support structures, training or dialogue, leading Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) to contend that '*the level of partnership and sharing of professional responsibility for placement between colleges and schools which the Council had envisioned has yet to materialise*' (p.65).

Given the evolution of the co-operating teacher role in such a short period of time, it is unsurprising that research in the Irish context suggests that some co-operating teachers feel under-prepared for their role, or certain aspects of the role, within school placement (Hall,

¹ Treoraí (plural Treoraithe) is the Irish word for 'guide' - a term introduced to replace the term co-operating teacher by the Teaching Council (2019).

Murphy, Rutherford & Ní Áingléis., 2018; O'Sullivan, 2020). The reasons for this could vary. For example, there is currently no requirement for co-operating primary teachers to undergo formal training for their role, with only some optional short courses being offered (DES, 2018). This lacuna is acknowledged by the Teaching Council's intention to create a formal, national programme for co-operating teachers in the coming years. The Report and Action Plan of the School Placement Working Group (Teaching Council, 2019), recommended the development of a national framework of professional development for co-operating teachers, though also acknowledged that neither the Teaching Council nor the DES can accurately state the number of student teachers who undertake placements each year, indicating difficulties in identifying the number of co-operating teachers nationwide. However, this acknowledgement of the need for professional development for Treoirthe is a response to the envisioned increase in dialogue between the student, the co-operating teacher and the HEI tutor. These partners are forging Zeichner's third space (2010), though not yet in a formal or coherent manner. The concept of the third space has evolved in recognition of the role of the co-operating teacher as a school-based teacher educator, who can support or hinder the transition between third level spaces and practicum placement for student teachers (Chan, 2019). As Martin, Snow and Franklin Torres (2011) point out, it has transformative potential as the teachers teach others to become teachers. However, as Daza, Gudmundsdottir and Lund (2021) conclude, tensions characterise the relationships in the third space and the needs, perspectives and interests of all partners need to be addressed. In moving away from engagements premised on a hierarchy of knowledge and expertise *'this new and expanded way to understand professional practice provides opportunities for learning about teaching in spaces where few hierarchies are permitted'* (Daza et al., 2021, p.11). In developing a model of professional development for co-operating teachers, it is essential to address that different knowledge communities have different perspectives and priorities. As Lillejord and Børte (2016) contend, partnerships are complex enterprises that require cross-institutional resources, infrastructure and knowledge sharing to truly support professional learning and engagement.

This understanding of differing perspectives is important as literature indicates that engagement is also influenced by the power dynamics within the relationship between the co-operating teacher and the student teacher with whom they work. Draves (2008) emphasises that co-operating teacher interpretation of the role can influence whether they view their role as power-balanced and collaborative with the student teacher, or whether they see it in terms of expert and novice relationships. This power imbalance may be unknown to both the co-operating

teacher and student teacher within the dyad at the time, yet could be at play nonetheless. Similarly, the focus of discussions and emphasis on particular areas of development can subconsciously exude co-operating teacher power, where student teachers may be influenced by what the co-operating teacher focuses on (Anderson, 2007; Parks, 2015; Matsko et al., 2018; Chan, 2019). These less obvious aspects of the relationship appear to influence the type of relationship that develops in this dyadic interaction, and hence the engagement that occurs as a result. In their research, McGarr, O'Grady and Guilfoyle (2017) seem to indicate the extent to which student teacher perception of important concepts or theories can be influenced by the interaction they have with their teacher educators and the authenticity of the relationships in this regard, suggesting that co-operating teachers play a powerful role in influencing student teacher knowledge and practice.

Terms like collaboration and engagement are embedded in contemporary Irish educational policy (DES, 2011, Teaching Council, 2011; Teaching Council, 2016), but what these mean for co-operating teachers in practice merits exploration. Literature suggests the centrality of relationships to successful school placement experiences and learning (Jones, Kelsey & Brown, 2014; Young & MacPhail, 2016). However, the development of such relationships may be a complex task, not least given the time constraints often associated with placements of this nature. It is suggested that devoting time to discussion and communication can foster trust to enhance the relationship and navigate issues as they arise during the process (Graham, 1993; Stanulis & Russell, 2000; Jones et al., 2014). Such discussion and communicative interaction would undoubtedly support the policy-advocated move towards increased collaboration and engagement. Yet, the existence of structural barriers, like limited time, preparation or lack thereof, and the idiosyncratic development of Higher Education Institution (HEI) and school guidelines seems to hinder full engagement with the process (Gardiner, 2009; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009; Young & MacPhail, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2017).

The Irish model of voluntary participation of schools and individual teachers in the school placement process is somewhat unique in the international context of teacher education. Jurisdictions like England, Scotland and the United States have seen more formal partnerships and placements develop between schools and teacher education institutions (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hulme & Kennedy, 2016; Murray & Mutton, 2016), while Northern Ireland has continued to rely on volunteerism, similar to the approach taken in the Republic (Clarke & O'Doherty, 2021). While the provision of professional development for *Treoraithe* is welcomed, should it be initiated, the developing tension between role requirements and the goodwill and

volunteerism of participating teachers in Ireland, raises questions about engagement with the role in the future.

2. Methodology.

The research reported herein stemmed from a larger study, guided by the key research question: What are co-operating primary teachers' experiences of school placement in the Midwest of Ireland? The aims of the study focused on the types of interaction and engagements experienced by co-operating teachers in their role, what was involved in these interactions, and how co-operating teachers learned about their role within these interactions. Accordingly, the study was located within in the interpretivist paradigm, based on a socially constructed approach to understanding the phenomenon of school placement from the perspective of those directly engaged with it – a selection of co-operating teachers (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Wahyuni, 2012). This demanded a qualitative methodology, utilising elements of qualitative inquiry, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and inductive content analysis. Given that interpretative phenomenological analysis is based on the premise of realising and interpreting participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under study (Smith, 2011; Smith, 2018), in this case school placement, it seemed an effective methodology to explore the aforementioned question posed. This methodology acknowledges the interpretative nature of qualitative research and emphasises that findings are '*...an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking*' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.80).

Qualitative research, including interpretative phenomenological analysis, is characterised by small sample sizes, where detailed understandings can be developed from participants (Cohen et al., 2011; Smith, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on this understanding, a small sample size of seven co-operating teachers (n=7) participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences of school placement, including their experiences of engaging and collaborating with student teachers. The study's sample inclusion criteria were developed to ensure that those participating would be well positioned to answer the research question posed (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Bryman, 2016), and demanded that participating teachers be engaged in school placement within the last five years and be based in the Midwest region of Ireland. Participation in school placement, rather than knowledge or insight into current policy regarding the role of the co-operating teacher was the determining factor.

Ethical approval was granted from the third level institution under which the research was being

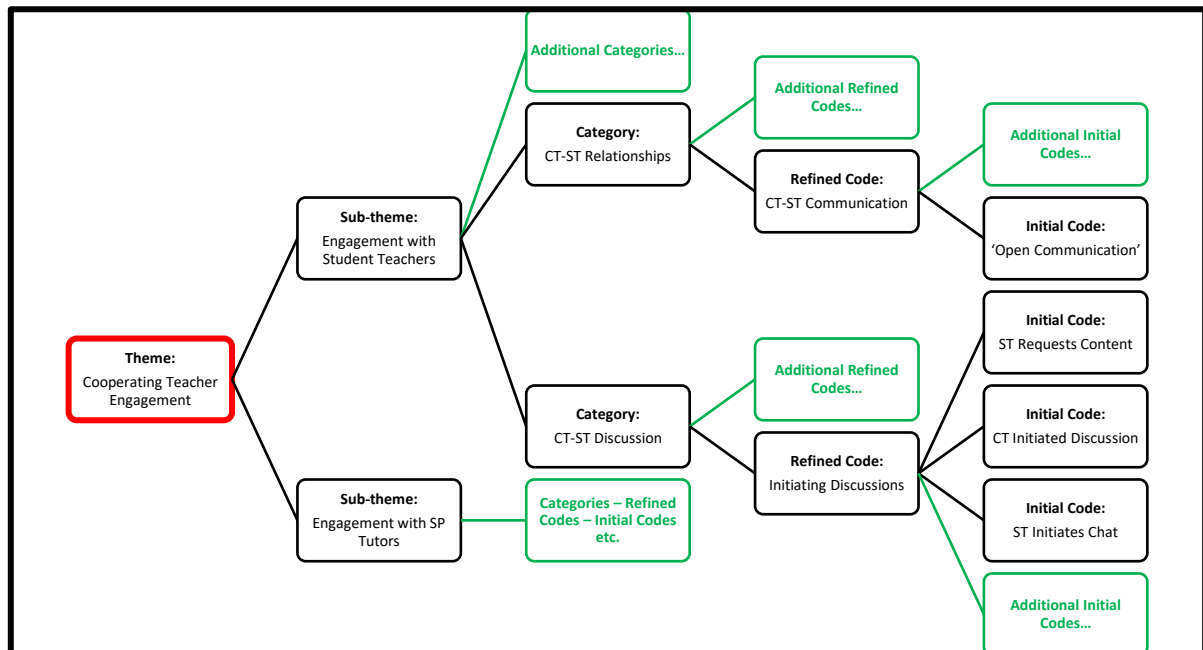
conducted, in line with recommended best practice (Bell, 2010; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018) prior to the commencement of data collection. This subsequently comprised semi-structured interviews with participants, the preferred data collection technique for studies employing an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology (Smith, 2017). Interviews were structured using an interview schedule, which outlined broad topics for discussion, prompting reflection on participants' experiences of engaging with student teachers, the types of interactions they shared and the participants' learning for their role as co-operating teacher.

2.1 Data analysis.

Following data collection, interviews were transcribed and subsequently analysed using both inductive and interpretative analytical lenses. Smith et al. (2009) advocate that interpretative phenomenological analysis requires the reading and re-reading of transcripts, with emphasis on extracting meaning from the data. This was augmented by recommendations in the literature requiring that refinement of codes and categories supports the generation of meaning from raw data when implementing a qualitative exploration like this (Gibbs, 2007; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

The refinement process and subsequent analysis was multifaceted. The raw data was initially coded and re-coded, with the emergence of categories and finally themes ensuing. The process followed a hybrid model based on the coding strategies of Saldaña (2013) and Creswell and Poth (2018). This is summarised in the form of a coding tree (Figure 1 overleaf).

The methods of analysis employed allowed for the augmentation of validity and reliability within the study, from the constructivist perspectives of such validity and reliability. For example, the process supported negative case analysis, highlighting the uniqueness of each participant's experience, which is highlighted in the literature as essential in such qualitative endeavours (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Flick, 2010; Patton, 2015). Similarly, the repetitive nature of the analysis heightened the study's rigour of approach to ensure that data were represented accurately and interpreted fairly, arguably enhancing trustworthiness and quality within the study as a whole (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

Figure 1: Sample analytical coding tree derived from Saldaña (2013) and Creswell & Poth (2018).

3. Findings.

Reference to aspects of engagement and collaboration was frequent in the data generated and referred to in various ways by each co-operating teacher. Some participants highlighted their experiences of constraining factors resulting in limited engagement, while discussing an unwillingness to collaborate between both parties, primarily stemming from issues of awkwardness and uncertainty of role demands. The most prevalent engagements highlighted by the co-operating teacher participants were verbal pedagogic support and collaborative co-teaching engagement. It was clear that worthwhile pedagogic engagements were premised on good communication between the co-operating teacher and the student teachers, with the affective dimension and the sense of responsibility to the student teachers laying the basis for the professional dialogue.

3.1 Engagement constraints.

Although participants indicated a willingness to engage in the school placement process and support student teacher learning in their own individualised way, the data suggested that such engagement was influenced by a variety of constraining factors, which in some cases appeared

to deter meaningful engagement. The structure and timing of school placement was mentioned in this regard, with participants highlighting the difficulties associated with finding time to engage collaboratively and the informality of the feedback process:

'Literally, we were walking over to the staffroom at lunch, and they said, "Have you any feedback for me?"' (Co-operating Teacher 4).

'Like we had the discussion in the morning, then we discussed at break time and at lunch time' (Co-operating Teacher 2).

The depth of effective reflection in these haphazard scenarios is questionable, particularly when one considers whether the co-operating teacher might be prepared to give feedback in these unplanned instances, or whether the student teacher might be receptive to such feedback and engagement when presented in an unstructured and again, unplanned manner. This also extended to the structure and organisation of the placement and how this in itself might hinder engagement and learning:

'And it can be difficult sometimes, you know, sometimes you have two student teachers in. And one might be excellent, and one mightn't be so good, and it's very difficult then, to you know, to even nab them on their own, you know what I mean?' (Co-operating Teacher 1).

This leaves much to consider in terms of how the process of school placement, without the necessary structural and temporal supports, can hinder the level of engagement evident between the co-operating teacher and student teacher, and accordingly influence the ways in which the engagement advocated in policy is or is not enacted in practice. Where these structural issues were addressed or overcome at an individual level, participants described their current engagement or lack thereof, in a number of ways.

3.2 Verbal pedagogic support.

Pedagogic support was identified as the primary form of engagement and interaction between co-operating teachers and the students with whom they worked. All participants (n=7) highlighted the necessity of engaging verbally with student teachers for a myriad of reasons. One such reason was to ensure the continuity of learning and classroom structures for pupils, with one participant noting:

'... we discuss how we have our timetable. We also have co-teaching and team teaching

classes going on. I explain to her when that happens and how it happens... because it's already planned' (Co-operating Teacher 2).

Similarly, another participant referred to explicit verbal engagement to ensure continuity and the sharing of expertise with the student teacher with whom they worked:

'...we go through what I need the student teacher to teach and different approaches that I use' (Co-operating Teacher 1).

The focus of these engagements was primarily pedagogic in nature, suggesting that the co-operating teachers were trying to strike the balance in the duality of their role as classroom teacher and as co-operating teacher, having to consider the needs of their pupils and the needs of the student teacher. This verbal engagement also seemed to be used to try and support student teacher understanding of the teacher's role in everyday practice. This idea of support perhaps stems from the aforementioned affective dimension of interaction between the two, with co-operating teachers willing student teachers to do well, and relying on their own knowledge of pedagogy to support them in this way. However, they also referred to other key aspects of this role beyond pedagogy, including classroom management and behaviour support:

'... they [student teachers] would be watching you and you would be telling them what works and what you find works well with it, how they should deal with the children and that' (Co-operating Teacher 6).

Many of the comments made by participants reverted to these interactions about practice-based topics, like the pedagogic and managerial focuses of the above quotes. Again, this may derive from their level of comfort discussing these aspects of the teaching and learning process, and their awareness of being able to engage authentically with student teachers on these specific areas. However, on occasion, the importance of verbally engaging the student teacher to praise the practical demonstration of their knowledge was also emphasised:

'As the class teacher, it is your responsibility to monitor what is going on and to pick up on anything that they're doing good on and praise it and to bring them along' (Co-operating Teacher 2).

'... praising things that I've found work well and what they have done that the children really reacted to and enjoyed...' (Co-operating Teacher 7).

These findings give insight into the emphasis placed on the verbal interactions had between these co-operating teachers and their student teachers. Evidently, verbal engagement seems

to be essential in discussing the class, the structures in place in the class and how co-operating teachers give feedback regarding how successful the student teacher is in demonstrating their knowledge relevant to these domains. The data excerpts above demonstrate that this engagement was built on co-operating teacher willingness to support the student teacher while also ensuring consistency for their class. However, aspects of the data also indicated that such verbal engagement is not always positive, and some co-operating teachers struggled when having to address issues in practice with student teachers. For example, Co-operating Teacher 4 discussed the dilemma she faced in having to balance the responsibility she felt for the student teacher's wellbeing, with the necessity of delivering negative feedback:

'... I wasn't going to be able to do that or cut somebody down if they weren't doing a good job. That might have insulted them...' (Co-operating Teacher 4).

This suggests that the aforementioned duality of the role of co-operating teacher can be complex for those faced with challenging experiences in working with student teachers, remembering that co-operating teachers have a sense of responsibility to their pupils, but also to the student teacher in their setting. This echoes many of the aspects of the role outlined in the national guidelines on school placement (Teaching Council, 2013), where an emphasis on introducing the class and student teacher to one another is central, as is the discussion of relevant topics to be taught and developing an awareness of learner needs in the student teacher. Essentially, these extracts highlight the complexity, but centrality, of verbal engagement between co-operating teachers and student teachers, and the nuances associated with such interaction in the practicum elements of primary teacher education in Ireland.

3.3 Collaborative co-teaching engagement.

A number of participants discussed their engagement with student teachers in terms of collaborative co-teaching interactions, where co-operating teachers and student teachers worked together explicitly on classroom initiatives. For example, Co-operating Teacher 6 discussed the inclusion of the student teacher as part of the already established collaborative workings of the staff in the school:

'...so we're used to working a lot together anyway, so a student teacher coming in just becomes part of that...' (Co-operating Teacher 6).

While this signifies a move in the right direction regarding increased engagement between both parties, the mere inclusion of the student teacher into an already established initiative does not

in itself imply explicit learning or critical reflection on practice. One participant also referred to the collaborative process of co-teaching a lesson with the student teacher with whom they worked, demonstrating a level of engagement beyond the domain of discussion, as highlighted previously:

'It was a problem-solving lesson, and I intervened and the two of us taught it together'
(Co-operating Teacher 5).

While the connotations of the above statement, and the reference to intervening, suggest the collaboration was perhaps unplanned, it is important to note the shared responsibility of undertaking a lesson collaboratively and the possible learning arising from such an experience for both the co-operating teacher and student teacher involved. Similar can be said for the inclusion of student teachers in a team, like the one mentioned by Co-operating Teacher 6, where experience of shared responsibility for learning can also be developed. However, participants did not explicitly discuss whether there was an element of post-lesson discussion and analysis, where such opportunities for student learning may exist. The extent to which these collaborative interactions were augmented with critical reflection on practice, and collaborative planning for future interventions is unclear. This suggests that their influence on student teacher learning is questionable in the absence of these key elements of learning as part of the ITE phase of teacher development (Teaching Council, 2011).

3.4 Limited collaborative experiences.

While the findings thus far have highlighted the centrality of engagement, issues surrounding willingness to engage with the other party were highlighted, with some cooperating teachers commenting on their own awkwardness and uncertainty in initiating or maintaining these interactions, as well as their experiences of student teacher unwillingness to engage in some instances. For example, Cooperating Teacher 3 highlighted the latter, stating:

'They've a very set, focussed set of ideas and plans, so no matter how much you want to give, they may not want you to, you know... slip in' (Cooperating Teacher 3)

Inevitably, when the engagements are not supported by statements of shared understanding or collaborative principles, it is understandable that reticence may characterise the participants' interaction. This appears to have happened for Cooperating Teacher 3, with the idea of having to 'slip in' in order to engage with the student teacher and encourage reflection being dissonant with the vision for engagement described in policy.

Shifting further from the vision referred to above Cooperating Teacher 4 suggested that the role of cooperating teacher may even be more facilitative than collaborative, suggesting issues in role interpretation and the idiosyncrasies arising in the absence of formal training for the role. This interpretation had implications for the engagement evident between this cooperating teacher and their student teacher:

'... I feel the class teacher is nearly facilitating the student. Not observing them, not being their tutor, not really there as a source of help. We really shouldn't be. We're just giving you the opportunity...' (Cooperating Teacher 4)

This raises questions regarding how information about the role is communicated to those engaging with it, but also how and if such information is used to inform individual practice. It is apparent that the level of engagement required of both parties in the school placement process and what this engagement entails warrants attention, as evidently, there are different levels of engagement currently in practice, both verbal and more collaborative in nature. However, there also appears to be issues in such engagement, leading to questions about how these issues occur and where these issues stem from. This will be analysed further below.

4. Discussion.

The findings of the study represent the many forms of engagement the co-operating teacher participants recognised in their experiences and interactions with student teachers during school placement. The benefits and challenges arising from such engagements are evident, ranging from continuity of classroom structures, and collaborative initiatives, to positive and negative feedback, and the limited structures in place to foster such engagement and interaction.

Pedagogic Discussions

The data suggests that while there are examples of engagement and interaction between co-operating teachers and student teachers, much of what was reported by co-operating teachers did not fully achieve the vision of collaborative engagement and learning implicit in the national Guidelines on School Placement (Teaching Council, 2013). It is apparent that participants relied heavily on transmitting pedagogical and managerial advice about their class to the student teacher, rather than engaging more deeply in order to encourage student teacher critical

reflection on practice, echoing research on the influence of co-operating teacher focus and discussion on student teacher learning (Matsko et al., 2018; Chan, 2019). It has been proposed that a shared understanding of both roles and having complimentary personalities or teaching styles might support this interaction between student teachers and co-operating teachers (Young & MacPhail, 2016; Ronfeldt, Brockman & Campbell, 2018). Therefore, one might question whether the absence of these two factors might hinder efforts towards deeper engagement, and instead, maintain the interaction at the more superficial level reported herein. This might also be influenced by the fact that current guidelines (Teaching Council, 2013) tend to revert to practice-related discussion recommendations, rather than emphasising the important role co-operating teachers can play in linking theory with practice for student teachers during practicum (Black, Olmstead & Mottonen, 2016) which can thus 'dismantle barriers' between HEIs and schools (Chan, 2019, p.8). It remains to be seen if the reconceptualization of the teacher as *Treoraí* will be accompanied by specific professional development relevant to this deeper engagement and what that will look like in practice, which this research indicates is necessary as a first step in creating a shared vision of learning from school placement.

Engagement and Feedback

While the findings demonstrated the centrality of verbal engagement through discussion, they also demonstrated the tensions arising in the role of the co-operating teacher, and their ability to give feedback to student teachers. As Co-operating Teacher 4 highlighted, addressing challenging issues with student teachers can prove difficult. Given the current system of volunteerism in co-operating teacher practice in Ireland, paired with limited availability of, and optional engagement with professional development opportunities associated with the role, it might be suggested that some co-operating teachers may simply not have acquired the necessary skillset to engage in student teacher feedback of this nature. It has been noted that explicit training in developing these skills can enhance feedback effectiveness in practice in international jurisdictions (Ball & Forzani, 2010; Salm & Mulholland, 2015). Perhaps expecting co-operating teachers to give feedback, either positive or negative, regardless of the level of informality of such feedback, is unfair in the absence of training for the skills required. With such training and regular practice in giving feedback, the ability of the co-operating teacher is more attuned to intervene before issues spiral, hence increasing the effectiveness of the practicum experiences for all parties involved (Killian & Wilkins, 2009).

Barriers to Engagement

The fact that some of the co-operating teacher participants discussed their experiences of co-teaching is welcomed. This is an advocated approach to teaching and learning in Irish educational policy (Teaching Council, 2013; Circular 13/17), and supports authentic interaction between co-operating teachers and student teachers. However, given that current discourse emphasises the importance of putting supports in place to develop the relationship between co-operating teachers and student teachers (Nielsen et al., 2017), it is unsurprising that not all co-operating teachers referred to this level of collaboration. There is no specific time allotted to intentional, planned interactions between co-operating teachers and student teachers in the current system of school placement in Ireland, indicating that any interactions encroach on either parties' personal time, or on the time allocated to teaching and learning when the class is present. This was evident in the participants references to informal, unplanned discussion during break and lunch times. Hobson et al. (2009) suggest that these kinds of sporadic arrangements are insufficient to sustain co-operating teacher motivation to engage with the role, and instead more formal supports are required. This is worrying in the context of the aforementioned volunteerism on which co-operating teacher participation in school placement is built in the Irish context.

Understanding of Roles

A final important factor worth exploring in the engagement and interaction between co-operating teachers and student teachers is the level of understanding of the co-operating teacher role. As evident, the findings suggest that each co-operating teacher has their own way of working with student teachers, some valuing discussion, others valuing collaboration for the benefit of their pupils, and some unsure of the need for feedback and support at all. Clarke et al. (2014) propose a spectrum of co-operating teacher participation in the role, some heavily involved in the process, others physically present but socially removed from the student teacher's learning. While this may be influenced by the jurisdiction in which the co-operating teacher operates, and the requirements in that regard, it may also stem from the way in which the role is interpreted in the absence of specific guidance. In recalling that Ireland has yet to establish a formal, widespread process of preparation for the role (Hall et al., 2018; Teaching Council, 2019), the idiosyncratic descriptions of engagement seen in the findings suggest that the role envisioned, and the role enacted continue to diverge in some cases.

5. Conclusion.

While the findings herein are tentative and solely based on the experiences of a select number of co-operating primary teachers currently engaged in the school placement process in Ireland, they offer insight into how the role is engaged with and interpreted by those most familiar with it. In many ways, the findings echo and extend those by Hall et al. (2018), in demonstrating that co-operating teachers, while willing, are often reliant on their own experiences and interpretation in how they engage with student teachers and how this in turn affects the experiences of those involved in the process. With plans to create a more formalised, national professional development programme for co-operating teachers in progress (Teaching Council, 2019), the role of the co-operating teacher is at an important juncture in how school placement will operate in the future.

With plans currently underway in developing this programme, it is important to consider the ways in which future research might contribute to the broader discourse and understanding of the nuances of the role in the Irish context. For example, research exploring the dyadic relationship between student teachers and co-operating teachers will be useful in determining whether the experiences of both parties are similar or dissonant in what is expected of the interaction and how these expectations might shape the way in which it occurs in a particular setting. This is particularly pertinent given arguments about the necessity of addressing the perspectives and interests of all actors involved (Daza et al., 2021). This may have wider implications in determining models of engagement and interaction between both parties going forward. It is also important to consider and explore what a suite of learning for co-operating teachers might look like. Given the challenges associated with the role in terms of time, volunteerism, and motivation, designing a programme that is flexible and responsive to teachers' needs will be essential in promoting engagement with the role and subsequently, deeper engagement with student teachers.

In the Republic of Ireland, as elsewhere across the world, since early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted schools and colleges, however placements continued to be integral elements of teacher education programmes. As placement schedules and supervision arrangements were adapted to the prevailing schooling situation (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) and limited in-school tutor supervision was feasible, co-operating teachers assumed a most valuable and vital mentoring and guiding presence for the student teachers. Recent policy impetus (Teaching Council, 2019) and placement students' experiences with

teachers throughout the pandemic (Teaching Council, 2021), makes this an opportune time to establish research-led support networks which will sustain impactful engagement between these two players who are at the heart of the school placement learning-to-teach process.

6. References.

- Anderson, D. (2007). The role of co-operating teachers' power in student teaching. *Education*, 128(2), 307 – 323.
- Ball, D.L. & Forzani, F.M. (2010). What does it take to make a teacher? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(2), 8 – 12.
- Bell, J. (2010). *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education, Health & Social Sciences (5th Edition)*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Black, G.L., Olmsted, B. & Mottonen, A.L. (2016). Associate teachers' perceptions of effective mentorship professional development. *The New Educator*, 12(4), 322 – 342.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods (5th Edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chan, C. (2019). Crossing institutional borders: Exploring pre-service teacher education partnerships through the lens of border theory. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, 102893.
- Clarke, A., Triggs, V. & Nielsen, W. (2014). Co-operating teacher participation in teacher education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 84(2), 163 – 202.
- Clarke, L. & O'Doherty, T. (2021). The professional place of teachers on the island of Ireland: truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(1), 62 – 79.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education (7th Edition)*. London: Routledge.
- Coolahan, J. (2003). *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers: Country Background Report for Ireland*. Paris: OECD Publishing, available: <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/19196740.pdf>
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five*

- approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124 – 130.
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research in Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (4th Edition)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). Teacher preparation and development in the United States: A changing policy landscape. In L. Darling-Hammond & A. Lieberman, A. (eds.), *Teacher Education Around the World – Changing Policies and Practices*. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 130 – 150.
- Daza, V., Gudmundsdottir, G.B. & Lund, A. (2021). Partnerships as third spaces for professional practice in initial teacher education: A scoping review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 102, 1-14.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Department of Education and Science (DES) Inspectorate (2006) *Learning to Teach – Students on Teaching Practice in Irish Primary Schools*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2011) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 – 2020*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017). *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation*. Circular 13/17. Dublin, available: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0013_2017.pdf
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2018). *Cúrsaí Samhraidh 2018*. Dublin: Drumcondra Education Centre.
- Draves, T.J. (2008). “Firecrackers” and “Duds” Co-operating music teachers’ perspectives on their relationships with student teachers. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 18(1), 6 – 15.
- Education Act (1998)*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, available:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html>

- Flick, U. (2010). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gardiner, W. (2009). Rudderless as Mentors: The challenge of teachers as mentors. *Action in Teacher Education*, 30(4), 56 – 66.
- Gibbs, G. (2007). *Analysing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage Publications.
- Graham, P. (1993). Curious Positions: Reciprocity and tensions in the student teacher/ co-operating teacher relationship. *English Education*, 25(4), 213 – 230.
- Hall, K., Murphy, R., Rutherford, V. & Ní Áingléis, B. (2018). *School Placement in Initial Teacher Education Final Report*. Available:
<https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/Website/en/Publications/Teacher-Education/Documents/School-Placement-in-Initial-Teacher-Education.pdf>
- Hobson, A.J., Ashby, P., Malderez, A. & Tomlinson, P.D. (2009). Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(1), 207 – 216.
- Hulme, M. & Kennedy, A. (2016). Teacher Education in Scotland: consensus politics and 'the Scottish policy style'. In The Teacher Education Group (eds)., *Teacher Education in Times of Change*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 91 - 108.
- Jones, C.K., Kelsey, K.D. & Brown, N.R. (2014). Climbing the steps toward a successful co-operating teacher/student teacher mentoring relationship. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 55(2), 33 – 47.
- Kellaghan, T. (2002). *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century: Report of the Working Group on Primary Preservice Teacher Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Killian, J.E. & Wilkins, E.A. (2009). Characteristics of highly effective co-operating teachers: A study of their backgrounds and preparation. *Action in Teacher Education*, 30(4), 67 – 83.
- Lillejord, S. & Børte, K. (2016). Partnership in teacher education – a research mapping. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(5), 550 – 563.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Martin, S., Snow, J. & Franklin Torres, C. (2011). Navigating the terrain of third space:

- tensions with/in relationships in school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62 (3), 299 – 311.
- Matsko, K.K., Ronfeldt, M., Nolan, H.G., Klugman, J., Reiningger, M. & Brockman, S.L. (2018). Co-operating teacher as model and coach: What leads to student teachers' perceptions of preparedness? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 1, 1-22.
- McGarr, O., O'Grady, E. & Guilfoyle, L. (2017). Exploring the theory-practice gap in initial teacher education: moving beyond questions of relevance to issues of power and authority. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 43(1), 48 – 60.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (Edition 3)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Murray, J. & Mutton, T. (2016). Teacher education in England: Change in abundance, continuities in question. In The Teacher Education Group (eds.), *Teacher Education in Times of Change*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 57 – 74.
- Nielsen, W., Mena, J., Clarke, A., O'Shea, S., Hoban, G. & Collins, J. (2017). Australia's supervising teachers: motivators and challenges to inform professional learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(4), 346 – 368.
- O'Sullivan, J. (2020). An exploration of teachers' perceptions of the role of the co-operating teacher as part of the school placement process in three primary schools in County Cork in the Republic of Ireland. *Irish Teachers' Journal*, 8(1), 73 – 91.
- Parks, S. (2015). Maximising target language use in a pre-service practicum: Tensions, power and identity-formation. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 19(1), 1 – 12.
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (4th Edition)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ronfeldt, M., Brockman, S.L. & Campbell, S.L. (2018). Does co-operating teachers' instructional effectiveness improve preservice teachers' future performance? *Educational Research*, 47(7), 405 – 418.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2nd Edition)*. London: Sage Publications
- Salm, T. & Mulholland, V. (2015). Building a sustainable structure to support the Adaptive

- Mentorship model in teacher education. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4(1), 53 – 68.
- Savin-Baden, M. & Major, C.H. (2013). *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Sepulveda-Escobar, P., & A. Morrison. (2020). Online teaching placement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile: Challenges and opportunities', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 587–607.
- Smith, J.A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 9 – 27.
- Smith, J.A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Getting at lived experience. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 303 – 304.
- Smith, J.A. (2018). "Yes it's phenomenological": A reply to Max Van Manen's critique of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(12), 1955 – 1958.
- Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Stanulis, R.N. & Russell, D. (2000). "Jumping in": Trust and communication in mentoring student teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(1), 65 – 80.
- Teaching Council Act (2001)* Dublin: The Stationery Office, available: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/8/enacted/en/html>
- Teaching Council (2011). *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council (2013). *Guidelines on School Placement*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council (2016). *Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council (2019). *Report and Action Plan of the School Placement Working Group*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council (2020). *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.

- Teaching Council (2021). *School Placement Innovation Report (online)*, available: <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/teacher-education/school-placement-innovation-report-2021.pdf>
- Teddlie, C. & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed method sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77 – 100.
- Wahyuni, D. (2012). The research design maze: Understanding paradigms, cases, methods and methodologies. *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research*, 10(1), 69 – 80.
- Young, A.M. & MacPhail, A. (2016). Cultivating relationships with school placement stakeholders: the perspective of the co-operating teacher. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3), 287 – 301.
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61 (11), 89 - 99.