



Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
*Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann*

# Joint INTO-St Patrick's College, Drumcondra Seminar

**Colleges of Education/Initial Teacher Education Providers and  
Schools**

**School Placement: Roles and Relationships – Challenges and  
Opportunities**

November 2014

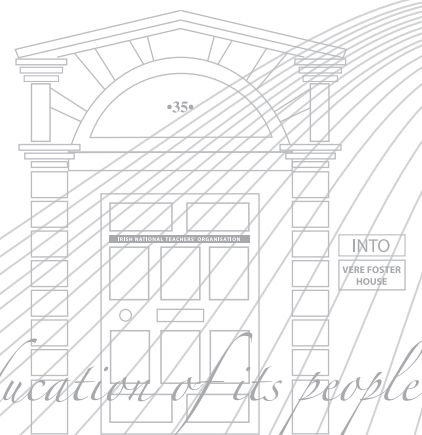


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School Placement: Roles and Relationships – Challenges and Opportunities

Saturday, 29 November 2014



*A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people*

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# Foreword

The INTO and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, were delighted to organise a joint seminar on the theme of roles and relationships between schools and colleges of education in the area of school placement. This seminar took place in the context of historic developments in teacher education, with the commencement of the four-year B.Ed and the two-year Professional Master of Education, long sought by the INTO and the colleges of education. A significant dimension of these developments is the progression of school placements where student teachers spend, in various settings, at least a quarter of their programme of studies. Roles and relationships are therefore of great significance in the context of school placement as a partnership process. The importance of good relationships and clarity around roles are not solely confined to school placement. The organisation of a joint seminar by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and the INTO on the topic of school placement is an example of the cooperation between the colleges of education and the teaching profession.

School placement replaces what has been more commonly known as teaching practice, where teachers spent short periods of time in classrooms to learn about teaching and learning and to practise teaching. Teaching practice has evolved over the years to become a much more holistic experience for student teachers. The Teaching Council has prepared guidelines on school placement with a view to enhancing the learning experience in schools for student teachers. The organisation of a joint seminar presented an opportunity to develop conversations around the issues pertaining to school placement from the perspectives of schools and colleges.

Dr Sara Bubb of the London Institute of Education was invited to give a keynote address on 'Working Together in Teacher Education' with a view to stimulating the debate. Perspectives on the relationships between schools and colleges were then offered by a principal teacher, Dr Déirdre Kirwan, Scoil Bhríde, Blanchardstown, Stephanie Crawford, a teacher in St Fintan's NS, Sutton, and by a student teacher, Racheal Kelly from Coláiste Mhuire Marino Institute of Education. Perspectives on the evolving terrain of school placement and roles and relationships within it from the perspective of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra were presented by Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis. Laura Thornton, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University offered views as a school placement tutor, and Geraldine O'Connor, Church of Ireland College of Education spoke of the particular challenges pertaining to school placement in small schools.

Our thanks are due to the organising committee: Professor Fionnuala Waldron and Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith and Elizabeth-Ann Kirwan from the INTO, and the students who assisted on the day. These proceedings include the presentations made during the seminar in addition to a report of the discussions which took place in the groups. Many views were expressed and a variety of perspectives were heard. Conversations and sharing of opinions will continue as the colleges and the teaching profession strive to ensure that school placement provides a valuable learning experience for student teachers, as part of the process of ensuring optimum learning conditions for our pupils.

Sheila Nunan  
General Secretary  
INTO

Professor Dáire Keogh  
President  
Dublin City University, St Patrick's Campus

December 2015



# Introduction

## Sean Mc Mahon, Uachtarán INTO

Ba mhaith liom fíorchaoín fáilte a chur romhaibh go léir maidin inniu go dtí an seimineár seo, comheagraithe ag Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann agus Coláiste Phádraig. Anseo linn inniu tá ionadaithe ó na coláistí oideachais, príomhoidí scoileanna, agus múinteoirí ranga chun ábhar atá an-tábhachtach dúinn go léir a phlé.

School placement is the critically important interface between initial teacher education and full responsibility for our young teachers. Given last Saturday's *Irish Times* endorsement of teachers and teaching in Ireland and the internationally high levels of teacher standing in the eyes of parents as evidenced in OECD reports, Ireland is doing something right in the preparation of its teachers. Great credit is due to our colleges of education for the calibre of teachers that they initiate and prepare.

The INTO is particularly concerned with getting the opportunity that a fourth year of initial teacher education presents right. Many of our members would like to see teachers completing their initial teacher education with full Teaching Council recognition. Many of our members are concerned with how to manage longer periods of school placement. Many of our members are worried about the responsibility of taking in teachers in formation and being accountable for their work. Many of our members would like to see initial teacher education as being the magic bullet in the preparation for the teaching life! Does such a bullet exist?

This morning presents us with a golden opportunity. The initial teacher educators, the people from the National Induction Programme and representatives of schools are putting their heads together to essentially brainstorm what 'getting it right' will look like.

It's a sign of our commitment to education that we are all here this morning to begin a conversation around school placement, and to discuss the challenges and possibilities around developing partnerships between schools and colleges of education. We hope today will provide an opportunity to tease out the roles and responsibilities of schools and of colleges of education in relation to supporting students on school placement and to identify the challenges that are arising in the context of revised initial teacher education courses.

We have come a long way from the old system of school monitors to become an all-graduate profession. Teaching practice for student teachers has changed along the way. We now have a Teaching Council at the centre of policy for teacher education. The Teaching Council has prepared guidelines on school placement which will bring us in to a new phase in relation to supporting student teachers. Today is an opportunity to discuss the evolution of the teaching practice experience for student teachers in the context of new developments. Today is about hearing the different perspectives of the colleges, principals, classroom teachers and students.



### Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Director of Education and Research INTO

Dia is Muire daoibh uile ar maidin. Tá súil agam go mbeidh maidin suimiúil againn ag plé ceist na comhpháirtíochta idir scoileanna agus na coláistí oideachais. Mar a dúirt Seán tá ré nua buailte linn mar a bhaineann le h-oiliúint múinteoirí. Tá Comhairle Múinteoireachta anois ann a bhfuil freagracht uirthi treoir a thabhairt sa réimse seo – socrúcháin scoile san áireamh.

In my brief introduction, I want to refer to some of the INTO's thinking over the years in relation to school placement and the role of teachers. It is in the area of school placement that partnerships between schools and colleges are most evident. Schools have a long history in supporting students to gain teaching experience in schools. The INTO has also been pro-active in seeking changes in teacher education. In our publication in 1995, *Educating Teachers – Reform and Renewal*, the INTO was critical of the term 'teaching practice' as being an unfortunate description of a young student's initiation in to the noble profession of teaching.<sup>1</sup> At the time the INTO suggested the terms 'school experience' or 'school internship'.

The INTO suggested that 'serious consideration be given to the concept of an extended school experience as part of initial teacher education.'<sup>2</sup> In the context of a four year B.Ed programme, up to six months could be considered, so that students would be introduced to more of school life than classroom teaching, in a spirit of a properly organised 'internship'. This was a far-reaching vision at the time. The INTO envisaged roles for mentor teachers working with college personnel in supporting students – a partnership that enables "dialogue between and a synthesis of different sources of knowledge".<sup>3</sup> The craft knowledge and practical wisdom of practising teachers should be shared with student teachers, and complement the knowledge and experience of colleges.

At the time, there was little, if any, professional development for teachers willing to host student teachers, and colleges had little, or no say, in the selection of host teachers. This is probably still the situation.

In our publication on the *Continuum of Teacher Education* in 2006, the INTO reiterated the view that "teachers should have a structured role as mentors to student teachers during teaching practice", and that such a role should be recognised and acknowledged<sup>4</sup> (p.28). The INTO also referred to the need for extended teaching practice, such as a term, or full year, in a school, working under the direction and guidance of an experienced mentor teacher. An extended school experience would allow for prolonged interactions and conversations about teaching and learning between class teacher and student teacher.

But aspirations don't become reality overnight. Change in the school experience for student teachers does not just happen. If class teachers are to have a more structured role in supporting students, we need discussions around what that means. We need discussions around how teachers are supported in their role as host or co-operating teachers. The system needs to invest in the process. Supporting student teachers is quite a demand on schools. We are still relying on the goodwill of schools and teachers to facilitate student teachers, and this brings its own challenges.

But we have a roadmap. The Teaching Council guidelines on school placement are a start on the journey of developing the school placement experience. The guidelines will inform the development of school placement but the realities of schools and colleges will shape the guidelines in practice. The guidelines will only become real when used, tried, explored and then revised based on experience. As Sean said in his introduction, today is part of the conversation, part of the dialogue between schools and colleges on the what and the how of partnerships around school placement. The INTO plays a key role in facilitating this dialogue. Today is about identifying the challenges. It is about identifying the opportunities, both for schools and for colleges. It is also about strengthening the teaching profession.

Tá súil agam go mbeidh plé agus díospóireacht suimiúil againn.

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<sup>1</sup> INTO (1995). *Educating Teachers: Reform and Renewal*. p. v

<sup>2</sup> INTO (1995). *Educating Teachers: Reform and Renewal*. p. 92

<sup>3</sup> INTO (1995). *Educating Teachers: Reform and Renewal*. p. 93

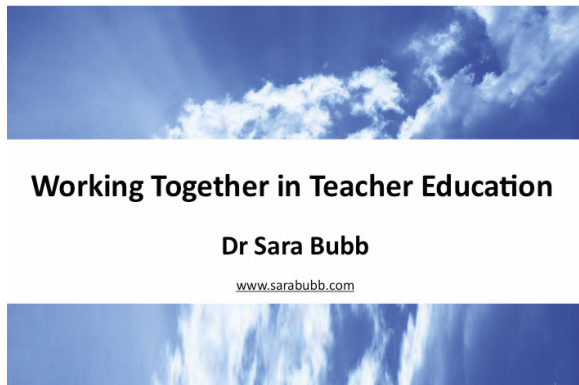
<sup>4</sup> INTO (2006). *Teacher Education: The Continuum*. p. 28

# Presentations

## Keynote address

**Dr Sara Bubb, London Institute of Education**

Dr Sara Bubb did not provide a transcript for publication but her presentation is available in slide format below.



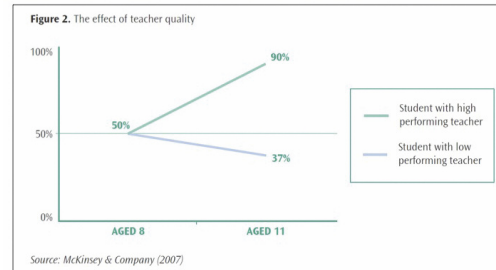
### Structure

1. Why it's important
2. Current picture
3. SWOT analysis
4. Partnership
5. Understanding Teachers' Standards
6. Theory and practice
7. Conclusion

### High-performing school systems consistently do 3 things well McKinsey, 2007

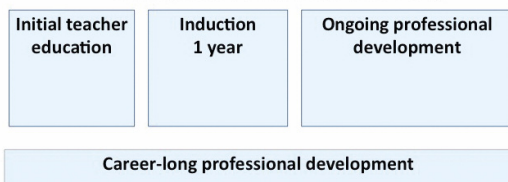
1. They get the right people to become teachers
2. They develop those people into effective teachers
3. They put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction.

### The effect of teacher quality (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006)



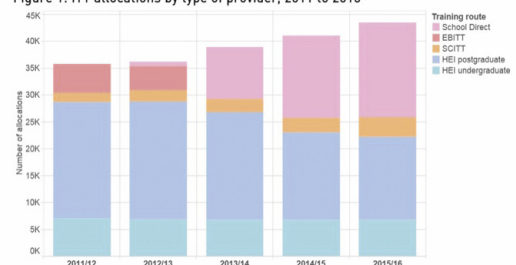
### Teacher development is a continuum

It is important to provide a strong professional base at the time of greatest receptiveness and willingness to learn and develop



### Move to school-led ITT

Figure 1: ITT allocations by type of provider, 2011 to 2015<sup>5</sup>



Source: National College for Teaching & Leadership

## 600 Teaching Schools - criteria

- a **clear track-record** of successful collaboration with other schools
- **Ofsted outstanding** for overall effectiveness, teaching and learning and leadership and management
- **consistently high levels** of pupil performance
- **an outstanding headteacher** with at least three years headship experience
- outstanding senior and middle leaders with capacity to support others.

## 2/3 of PGCE spent in schools

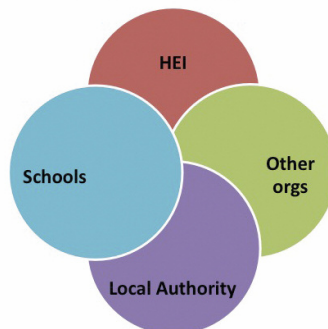
- 24+ weeks out of a 36 week-long PGCE are spent in schools:  
Autumn - 3 week observation; 7 weeks School A  
Spring - 5 weeks School A; 2 weeks alternative school placement  
Summer - 8 weeks School B

89% of new Primary and 90% of Secondary teachers think their training was good



<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better teachers</li> <li>Theory and practice</li> <li>Spiral curriculum</li> <li>Smoother transition to Induction year</li> <li>More adults for children</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional development</li> <li>Career development</li> <li>Schools stay up to date</li> <li>Research</li> <li>Recruitment</li> <li>Reflection on pedagogy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More organisation</li> <li>Sharing funding – less for HEIs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time for mentoring</li> <li>Assuring quality</li> <li>Training of mentors</li> <li>Trainees need to see good practice</li> <li>Inspection</li> </ul>

## Partnerships



## Partnerships need (Hargreaves 2011)

- **Magnets** - the forces, intentions and expected benefits that attract people
- **Glue** - the factors that keep the partnership together. When the partnership begins, the glue is strongest at the top but, glue is needed lower down.
- **Drivers** – to **focus** collaboration on learning. Without drivers, alliances lose focus, drift apart or become complacent.

- What are the ties and knots?
- Clear roles & responsibilities
- Partnership agreements, contracts, etc



## Partnership model

- All partners are involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of provision.
- Professional Tutors meet for half a day each term in the university and there is an additional occasional professional development seminar or conference.
- Mentors meet four times a year in curriculum groups.
- Partnership Committee meets every term.
- Review groups and working parties are set up in response to issues raised by evaluations, experience, research and external demands.

## Concept of professional development

It is an **on-going** process encompassing all **formal** and **informal** learning experiences that enable all educators, individually and with others, to **think** about what they are doing, **enhance** their **knowledge** and **skills** and **improve ways of working** so that **pupil learning and wellbeing are better**.

Helping Staff Develop in Schools,  
Sara Bubb & Peter Earley, 2010

## What's in a word?

### Student Teachers

- Trainee teachers
- Beginning teachers
- Interns
- Associate teachers
- Participants
- Students

### Cooperating teachers

- Mentors
- Supervisors
- School-based tutor
- School mentors
- Class teachers
- Lead teacher
- Advanced skills teacher

## Teachers' Standards 2012

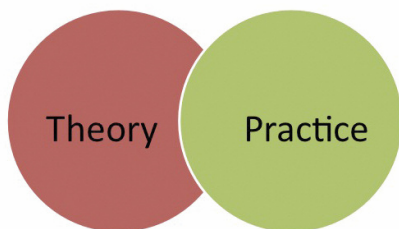
Same standards apply to ALL - people in training, new and experienced teachers.

Assess teachers against the standards- consistent with what should reasonably be expected of a teacher in the relevant role and at the relevant stage of their career

## Teacher Standards Sept 2012+

**PART ONE: Teaching, a teacher must:**

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons
5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities



### Research on teaching and learning



## Theory & practice integrated in assignments

What theories of learning and teaching influenced, and were developed by, your planning, teaching, assessment and evaluation of a unit of work?

What theories influenced your practice in order to improve the learning of two students with similar specific educational needs?



## Module learning outcomes

### *Knowledge and understanding*

- understanding current issues in teaching and learning
- knowledge of the key theoretical positions on learning
- understanding of the current education policy framework.

### *Intellectual skills*

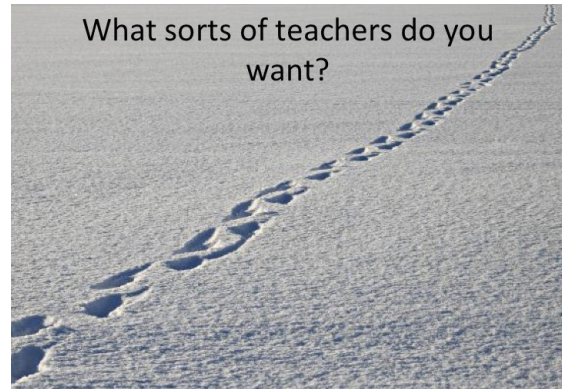
- improved critical reading and synthesis of literatures
- improved critical reading of educational texts and discourses, of school policies and classroom practices.

### *Professional / practical skills*

- enhanced practice through application of knowledge & research evidence to professional practice.

### *Transferable skills*

- critical reflection on their own beliefs, practice,
- skills in reading, analysing and synthesising literature



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## How new teachers feel

### **Love the job**

“Great supportive team of staff. Inspiring learning strategies have meant I've learnt loads.”

### **It's okay**

“Lack of support from mentor. Constant negative feedback and no positive encouragement.”

## Perspectives of a Principal Teacher

**Dr Déirdre Kirwan, Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni) NS, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15**

### Introduction

Teaching practice was always an important part of student teacher formation. School placement, as it is now known, belongs to a new model of teacher preparation where schools and colleges of education act in partnership to provide an experience of the wide range of responsibilities, skills and tasks that teachers deal with, on a daily basis, in their role as professional educators. The appointment of a 'link' person, a member of the school's teaching staff liaising between both establishments, helps to improve communication and ensure a positive, enriching experience for teachers, students and college personnel.

While student teachers on teaching placements continue to be allocated a particular class, time spent in schools now encompasses a broader experience. Students meet a variety of members of the school community and are introduced to the many and varied activities that make up the daily life of the school. Staff training, with regard to student placements, helps to build a collective ambiance that contributes to the broader educational development of students. Where the mentoring skills of teachers are recognised and used, the resultant benefits help, not only students, but empower practising teachers as well.

In this presentation, areas that have been identified by staff in Scoil Bhríde (Cailíni) as being important in determining positive outcomes to student teacher placement will be addressed. These are as follows: the school's expectations of the student; the benefits for schools; the role of the school in supporting students; challenges that may arise during school placements; ways in which schools and colleges can enhance the experience of teaching placements for students.

### The school's expectations

Practising teachers who host student teachers understand that students are in a process of learning. However, when students are in classroom situations, it is expected that they should have:

- ⌘ Well prepared lessons where content/time/length of lesson is appropriate to the age group and class level being taught.
- ⌘ Their own resources: relevant to the lesson and designed to support pupils' learning.
- ⌘ A concept of the curriculum and how it should be delivered to the class in question.
- ⌘ The required number of lessons prepared and ready to teach.

Students' level of both English and Irish languages should be of a sufficiently high standard. In both languages, attention should be paid to accuracy of:

- ⌘ Grammar.
- ⌘ Punctuation, capital letters, etc.
- ⌘ Spellings on interactive white boards/black boards/posters.

It is important that the student teachers recognise that being appropriately dressed is an important outward appearance of respect for themselves, the children they will teach and their professional colleagues too.

When the structure of the teaching day is such that students are not engaged in teaching, they should actively help the teacher with classwork or undertake small group work with pupils.

## Benefits of having a student teacher in school

Where teachers are open to learning, the new ideas and innovative teaching methods that student teachers bring with them can be a great asset in the classroom situation.

Where the student has a particular talent, this can be an opportunity for the teacher to observe and learn how to incorporate such an approach or skill into supporting teaching and learning in their classroom.

Observing someone else teaching their class, can provide insights for teachers with regard to how pupils respond to different personalities, approaches and methodologies.

In overcrowded classrooms a student teacher can be a very welcome extra adult.

## Role of the school in supporting the student teacher

Students' school placements can be enriched and developed by ensuring that they are given access to the wide variety of experiences, skills and personnel that combine to create the ethos and ambience of particular schools in which they are placed.

Working and learning from professional teachers, and the children for whom they are responsible, can be an enriching experience for student teachers and provide much material for reflection.

In terms of the classroom situation, working with a practising teacher who appraises their work, advising and recommending where appropriate, can provide affirming support for inexperienced students. Of particular benefit is the situation where the class teacher will observe students' lessons and subsequently provide helpful, practical feedback.

The Wednesday Experience, an informative session on some aspect of school life, delivered by the principal, support teachers, or teachers with particular expertise or responsibilities can initiate the student teacher into an understanding of the broader picture that is school life. Of course, students' primary function is to improve their skills and expertise with regard to teaching and learning. However, insights gained into issues pertaining to teaching in DEIS schools, approaches to language learning with English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils, special education, roll books and the myriad topics and concerns that form part of school life, are crucially important for student teachers.

## Challenges that arise on student placement

Depending on the student and the length of placement involved, a class teacher may have difficulty re-establishing discipline and reinstating a good working routine.

Teachers may also experience difficulties where students are un-cooperative; do not listen to advice; do not follow through on advice or instructions given by the teacher.

Occasionally, teachers express concerns about their interactions with supervisors. They stress the importance of meaningful dialogue in such situations. Good communication is crucial where sensitive information is being exchanged with regard to student issues and performance, e.g., hardworking students who under-perform in the presence of a supervisor contrasted with less diligent students who shine on the day of evaluation.

## Enhancing the experience of teaching placements for students

### **School**

Prior to the teaching placement bloc, students should have increased observation time spent in the class they are to teach.

It would be more beneficial for all concerned if lessons were prepared in conjunction with the class teacher rather than alone.

Teachers need to support students in all areas of the teaching process, i.e., discipline, teaching strategies and classroom management.

## College

### *Pre-Service*

Students should experience a range of placements during their time spent in a college of education, e.g., DEIS; EAL; multi-grade teaching; special education. Crucially, they should have access to programmes that prepare them for teaching in these situations. This is vitally important for those they will teach and for the students themselves. These courses should be core components of the teacher preparation programme, not merely options.

In order to teach successfully one must be at home with the material to be taught. The primary school curriculum stresses the centrality of language in the learning process:

Much learning takes place through the interaction of language and experience. Language helps the child to clarify and interpret experience, to acquire new concepts, and to add depth to concepts already grasped (Government of Ireland, 1999: 15).

Increased emphasis needs to be placed on the study of language – the conduit through which all school learning is channelled. This is not a new idea. Forty years ago, the *Bullock Report* proposed that all preparatory courses for teachers should have “at least 100 hours, and preferably 150 hours” devoted to language in education (Bullock, 1975: 338).

Preparation of students is also needed in the area of communication, with emphasis on, for example, presentation, articulation, interaction. Communication is central to the professional work of the teacher whether that be with pupils, parents, colleagues or associated professionals. To neglect this part of students’ preparation is to leave many of them seriously unprepared for the work they are expected to do.

### *In-service*

The concept of ‘consultant’ or ‘master’ teacher should inform the area of student teacher placement. The facility of career progression is important for practising teachers who are suited to the role of mentor and who wish to develop their skills. This could take the form of a further education programme that would prepare teachers for a professional, instructional role. Several routes to such a qualification could be proposed.

## References

- Bullock, A. (Lord Bullock) (Chairman) (1975) *A language for life: Report of the Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science*. HMSO.
- Government of Ireland (1999) *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction/Curaclam na Bunscoile: Réamhrá*. Dublin: Stationery Office.



## Perspectives of a Cooperating Teacher

**Stephanie Crawford, St Fintan's NS**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here this morning to offer you an insight into my experience as a co-operating teacher for school placement. I am a class teacher in St Fintan's National School, Sutton, and have worked with student teachers on many occasions.

I am in quite a unique position as I have been both the student teacher and the co-operating teacher within a structured programme. In 2006 I was among a group of final year B. Eds to pilot the 'Teacher Professional Development Partnership with Schools Project' here in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, under the direction of Bernadette Ní Áingléis.

It was at this stage that I first got a taste of the more structured, formalised model of placement, or teaching practice as we called it then. I worked closely with the class teacher and felt a real sense of mutual respect from him. He observed my lessons, and gave me invaluable feedback, both verbal and written. This feedback was key, as I had something to work from and improve upon. I really enjoyed that teaching practice and it gave me a confidence boost for the following September when I would acquire my own class.

I have been delighted to build upon those skills in my role as a co-operating teacher. It has been a positive experience for many reasons, both professionally and personally. In my experience, supporting the student teacher in a structured role really opens up the lines of communication, and the relationship is built on from the very first observation day.

After the student has had an opportunity to observe my teaching, we sit down and discuss our expectations for the school placement, and how we can work together to realise them. What I want from the student is a commitment to plan and teach a scheme of work to the best of their ability, but to ask for help and guidance when they need it. I make it very clear from the beginning that I am not there as a supervisor or inspector, but as a support and mentor, and to help them in any way I can. I encourage the student to try out new ideas, take chances and step out of their comfort zone. Finally, I remind them that I have been in their position and that I am still learning every day myself. We exchange email addresses and correspond a few times before placement begins. I feel this really helps to build a good rapport with each other.

During the placement, I observe the student for a selection of pre-agreed lessons each week, and give verbal and written feedback. This feedback session is key, as it is a forum for discussion of the lesson, and reflection on its strengths and opportunities for improvement. Clear areas where the student could work on are highlighted, and they can ask my advice on certain teaching aspects.

Working with the placement tutor is extremely reassuring for the cooperating teacher. While school placement is generally a very positive experience for all involved, there are times when a student teacher is struggling and needs extra support. From the teacher's point of view, it is important to have someone to assist in mentoring and giving them advice. Equally, it is fantastic to have an opportunity to let the tutor know when a student is doing a great job in the classroom.

The benefits of hosting a student teacher in the classroom are far reaching. Firstly, there is a real feeling of teamwork and collaboration for those weeks. There is scope for team teaching, projects, and station teaching, all of which would not be possible otherwise. The children feed off this buzz and really enjoy having two teachers to work with. In my experience, the student teacher is highly motivated, they plan fun, engaging lessons, and bring lots of energy and enthusiasm to the classroom.

Furthermore, I relish the opportunity to see new methods of teaching and ideas that the student employs, especially in their use of IT. For example, my most recent student gave me a number of mini lessons on different functions and programmes of the IWB which I really appreciated. This sharing of resources and ideas is of enormous benefit to the student, the teacher and the children.

Finally, there is a personal satisfaction that comes from mentoring a student, and seeing their confidence grow as they hone their skill. It is rewarding to know that you have had a hand in fostering that, or that you have helped them improve in some small way, especially a student who has struggled during placement. The whole

experience has given me a new perspective on my profession, and I would really welcome the opportunity to up-skill in developing my mentoring skills. Even better, perhaps a structured mentoring programme could be developed to form credit towards a Masters or Doctorate programme down the line.

As well as the benefits of hosting a student, there are some challenges that I can see arising through the school placement system. Firstly, there is a growing need for additional support in how to mentor the student teacher in a proper and professional way. Further guidance on the appropriate language and methods of support would be welcome. The view of other teachers is that a structured mentoring programme, at a time when we as teachers can access it, would be desirable.

A further challenge for the teacher is how to balance the welfare of the children with the pressure that we can sometimes feel under to take a student teacher. With so many students needing a placement, we would like to open our classroom door as often as possible. But we must remember that the welfare of the children is our key concern, and that sometimes we cannot accommodate a student more than once in the year.

Looking forward to the future of school placement, I think there are some areas that could be developed further in order to improve the opportunities for the student teacher to learn more during their placement. In my view there needs to be more structured experience for the student in the area of special educational needs/ resource teaching. I also see the need for all student teachers to have an opportunity to meet with school psychologists, SENOs and other therapists that they will inevitably encounter when they begin working. The student needs to develop their understanding of these disciplines and their roles within the school. I would also like to see a more formalised experience for the student in meeting parents, discussing test results, and other non-teaching activities.

I look forward to seeing how the new model of student placement develops, and I would like to thank you for your attention.

## Perspectives of a Student Teacher

### Rachael Kelly, Marino Institute of Education

My name is Rachael Kelly and I am a primary teacher originally from Co Donegal. I began my training in Marino Institute of Education back in 2010 and am currently working as a shared learning support teacher in Mary Mother of Hope Junior and Senior National Schools (MMOH) in Littlepace, Clonee. This is my second year working in the junior school, where I completed my Diploma last year. Now in my second year of teaching, while also completing the fourth year in Marino, it may seem that my days of being a student teacher are over, but I would disagree. As teachers, we're always learning, and the role is constantly changing.

I have always had a keen interest in music. I have been playing piano since the age of four, and singing since the age of ten. I've carried this love of music with me in to the workplace and I'm currently involved in the (wonderful) school choir in MMOH as well as teaching my own piano students. I have had a love of drama since my days in secondary school, taking parts in musicals, and continuing with taking part in the drama society in Marino.

I'm going to talk to you today about life as a student teacher during what I knew as Teaching Practice – now known as School Placement.

In my role as student teacher, my experience has been a varied one. When I began my teacher training, I lacked confidence, and was unsure of my abilities within teaching. I will never forget my first lesson, my heart pounding and a feeling of "What am I doing here" running through my mind. I had a perfectly planned lesson, but there were 17 pairs of little eyes staring up at me, and I was terrified. It went fine, but it wasn't going to set the educational world alight with hope and joy at my new found teaching methodologies on my first day.

Since that first lesson, and that first school placement, I have gone on to have experience in many different schools, ranging from special education schools, DEIS schools, two-teacher schools and so on. Over the years, I have seen the benefits of the wide range of experiences that our college encouraged us to seek out, as I have grown as a teacher thanks to the help of professionals such as yourselves. My most positive stand out moment on school placement has been, when teaching a particularly challenging class a gymnastics PE lesson, I felt my eyes tearing up as I realised I was losing the run of the class. I turned to my mentor as it were, and told her how I was feeling. She stopped the class, brought us all back to the room, and sat down with me. Later that evening, she gave me another chance to practice teaching the subject I dreaded teaching above them all, probably stemming from my own PE experience at school! With her guiding me, and allowing me to practice the lesson as such, I felt more secure. She supported me without making me feel helpless, and at no point made me feel small. She used constructive criticism to show me the areas in which I could improve, and since that point, I have always enjoyed teaching PE. I realise now that I was so lucky to have had such a supportive class teacher – one who could guide and encourage and not criticise me at that early stage of my journey.

She, for me, is an example of the benefits of school placement. In first year, you're almost like a lamb, shy and tentative, needing encouragement and support every step of the way. As your confidence grows, so does your need to challenge yourself. When I found myself using papier-maché with fifth class boys on my final school placement, I knew I had come a long way! With the right school environment, and a teacher who will let you run the class, but knows when to quietly step in with some helpful constructive criticism like "I like the way you did this, maybe you could try doing that this way next time", student teachers don't feel threatened or discouraged.

I know that for every teaching practice, I didn't sleep on the Sunday night before we started. The nerves were just too much. "What if my teacher doesn't like me? What if the children won't listen to me?" We student teachers can be a sensitive lot, and we tend to overanalyse and worry (Excuse the generalisation here).

*Benefits:* Putting in to practice the theory that we have been learning about – Making sense of our learning

- ✎ Meeting other teachers and gaining expertise and ideas from them.
- ✎ Developing professional relationships, and getting practice at how to work a staffroom!
- ✎ Growing in confidence as things go right, and being guided as to how to fix things when they go wrong.

*Challenges:* Personalities, power struggles, classes with a lot of needs, paperwork

***What we need:***

I understand that our jobs are becoming more challenging, more paperwork, and less pay, but it really is amazing to have a supportive teacher on Teaching Practice. It makes such a difference to the life of their student – not just their TP experience but their life for those three weeks and beyond.

Teachers that I have admired and enjoyed working with have all taken an interest in me both personally and professionally, got to know me over the course of the three weeks, and naturally, I got to know them. Your student is looking for someone they can impress, but also someone they can rely on, someone who cares about them and someone who will help with their fifteen day examination!

I really feel that with a supportive class teacher within the classroom, someone who knows when to step up (quietly, and not cutting someone down in front of the class in the middle of a lesson) or when to step back (When you really feel that the lesson is taking off, the children are engaged), a student teacher will feel supported that they actually can do this and the class teacher will have contributed to the development of another future colleague.

## Perspectives of a HEI School Placement Tutor

**Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, Education Department, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra**

### Introduction

St Patrick's College, Drumcondra is delighted to co-host with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) a structured opportunity (such as this seminar provides) to reflect on how well we believe systematic partnership-with-schools in school placement is developing since the launch of the *Guidelines on School Placement*.<sup>5</sup> Critically, this seminar offers an important forum to articulate some of the challenges and possibilities which are emerging for schools and for teacher education providers in the roll-out of the new model of structured involvement of schools in various school-based experiences for student teachers. As convenors of the seminar, our hopes are that through discussion and dialogue around roles and responsibilities in school placement, we will learn from each other, be in a position to respond more fully to any emergent concerns and in the process build an even stronger collaborative way-of-being with each other in the area of school placement. Ultimately, as professionals, we share the same common ground – we want the children in our schools to be the ultimate beneficiaries of rich, deep learning experiences provided by innovative, reflective, caring student teachers. We are all learners therefore in this process.

My presentation will offer some broad, 'canopy' observations on the subject matter from the perspective of a teacher educator who has leadership responsibilities in school placement in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Given the time constraints which pertain, I have chosen to look at some of the tensions which are part-and-parcel of implementing innovation and change in school placement. The structured involvement of schools in school-based experiences for student teachers is an innovation and must be conceptualised and understood as that – i.e. as innovation and change. Change requires scaffolding and support over a sustained period of time but particularly in the early stages of implementation. Otherwise, are we giving 'partnership-with-schools' in initial teacher education a fair chance to root and blossom?

### An infusion of 'Partnership'

It's worth reminding ourselves how and why a partnership approach between schools and teacher education providers needs to infuse so many aspects of school placement if student teachers are to feel supported on school placement and to do well. At the heart of this entire process is the person of the student teacher who is learning to be a professional and to bring into the profession a deep knowledge base, a range of important professional competences and attitudes in addition to his/her own unique personality and humanity. When a student teacher feels that there is a sense of connectedness in expectations e.g. in the expectations of the co-operating teacher and of the college placement tutor, it is infinitely easier for the student to respond positively and enthusiastically to feedback and advice. Martin's (2011) evaluation of student teachers' experiences of partnership captured a sense of that seamless connectedness wonderfully well.<sup>6</sup> In saying that the learning student teacher is at the heart of school placement processes around which roles and responsibilities are built, this is not to say that children's learning needs are somewhat less central. Quite the contrary. Children's learning needs and student teachers' learning needs are inextricably linked and both provide the fulcrum for a dynamic learning community of teachers, placement tutors and others who bring school placement roles and responsibilities to life in a way which is manageable and meaningful for that specific learning community. Student teachers and children are active participants in that dynamic space.

The notion of student teachers as active agents in their own learning during school placement is critical and central to their role and learning responsibility as articulated in the Guidelines. Within the context of collaboration, when student teachers are regarded as bringing capacities to mentoring relationships e.g. new methodologies and

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<sup>5</sup> The Teaching Council (2013, 1st Ed) *Guidelines on School Placement*, Dublin: Author. Hereafter known as the Guidelines for the purposes of this article.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, M (2011) *Teacher Professional Development Partnership with Schools Project: Evaluation Report*, Dublin: St Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

ways of thinking about curriculum, they become important sources of transformational potential for classrooms and schools. The mentoring relationship between a co-operating teacher and a student teacher then becomes one in which both parties bring something to the learning and teaching space. We are finding in the new structured partnership model of school placement an increasing number of principals and teachers who are articulating the important role which student teachers have in enriching teachers' lives and professional practices within the school and ultimately the learning experiences of the children in the school.

As part of the new model of school placement, there are designated roles and responsibilities as outlined in the *Guidelines*. We are also finding that the most important variable in structured school-college partnership is the quality of professional relationship and the nature of the communication which exists between a school and the college and between a co-operating teacher and a student teacher. Where the communication is two-way, frank and open, there is a far greater willingness on the part of a school to articulate concerns at an early point in school placement where the 'solution' can be worked out between the school and the college in a respect-filled collaborative way. Each school seems to be growing-into the new roles and responsibilities in a way which is manageable for the particular school and customised by the school to suit its own unique context and stage of development. It is an approach which allows for a continuum of growth-into structured partnership in school placement and one which respects each school's culture and trajectory of development. In this way, a greater sense of ownership of partnership processes seems to be developing at the natural pace of the specific school.

Where there is a strong sense of openness to learning e.g. how best to support a student teacher who may be experiencing difficulty in classroom practice, everyone gains most especially the student teacher. In the last few years, we can cite numerous examples of a whole school approach to mentoring student teachers in which student teachers are expected to be active contributors in their own professional development including devising a menu of options to be explored in helping them to improve and grow as emergent professionals. We can cite examples also of instances when possible solutions to issues which may have arisen during school placement were arrived at through sustained and patient dialogue between the principal, the co-operating teacher, the college placement tutor and the student in question. It was in the very process of working through the issue that the core foundational elements of partnership i.e. trust, care, respect and integrity, were calibrated in a meaningful way and which in turn strengthened the partnership.

Unquestionably, working through puzzles in professional practice takes a great deal of time, energy, patience and skill and one has to balance the learning needs of children and the learning needs of student teachers throughout the school placement period. It is a deeply complex element of structured partnership roles and responsibilities in school placement. The very rationale for the structured school-college partnerships in initial teacher education is equally complex; the whole purpose of partnership is to provide the conditions and contexts which enable student teachers to become competent teachers, critical thinkers, open to learning and open to change. This draws on the role of the placement tutor in helping student teachers to bring their college course work to bear on how they plan, teach, assess and reflect. So, what are we finding one year on from the launch of the *Guidelines*?

### Some canopy observations

There is a deep reservoir of professional goodwill and commitment in schools to welcoming and supporting student teachers in various systematic ways throughout school placement. Our students are benefiting greatly from the wealth of professional expertise and professional craft knowledge in schools through structured mentoring arrangements and also from informal interactions during the course of the school day. Our students are benefiting also from the diversity and range of learning and teaching experiences being provided by schools across the country including multi-grade, special educational needs, large urban and small rural learning settings. The key role of the principal teacher is mentioned frequently by our students in helping them to feel welcome, supported and affirmed during placement.

Increasingly, we are finding that schools are initiating communication with us much more than ever e.g. wanting to know more about course work which student teachers are following in college so that schools can help students link their course work with how they are actually planning, teaching and assessing over the course of

school placement. Schools welcome hearing about new approaches and methodologies in teaching curriculum. We are also receiving an increasing number of requests for school-based support in developing partnership structures and processes e.g. how to observe and give feedback to student teachers commensurate with their stage of development. In many instances, opportunities to do so have been created through the structure of Croke Park hours. Quite a number of schools have asked for school-based CPD in specific subject areas which might be delivered by college tutors in supporting school self-review, planning and development. We have found overall that schools are working through the roles and responsibilities in their own way as outlined in the *Guidelines* and this is a process which cannot and should not be rushed. We are in the very early days of creating the conditions necessary for structured college-school partnerships to root, grow and mature. One is mindful also that new developments in school placement are among multiple new developments and innovations taking root in schools at this time, all of which have to find their place in the dynamic continuum of change. All change has to be managed and mediated sensitively for all sorts of reasons. In managing structured approaches to partnership in school placement, school leaders manage both the possibilities and the tensions which are integral to change.

### A sense of the tensions

At this early stage of development of structured school-college partnerships, some understandable tensions would seem to be coming to light. Firstly, there is the tension between placement supply and demand. With the reconceptualisation of initial teacher education programmes and extended periods of school-based experiences, there is now an ongoing demand from colleges seeking placements right throughout the year whilst heretofore a college may only have sought placements at one or two particular points in the year e.g. spring and autumn. A number of questions arise e.g. will the system be able to sustain the supply of the range and variety of types of placements which the new school placement model requires? What are the variables which might influence a school in its decision not to offer placements at any point and how does this situation impact other schools and partnership endeavour? Traditionally, the provision of school placements has always been built on a spirit of professional goodwill and volunteerism within schools. It is worth protecting and nurturing this spirit and to do so, we will need to reflect on ways in which the tension between placement-supply and demand might be creatively managed on an equitable basis across the system.

A second tension mentioned at an earlier point lies in the realm of balancing the time, effort and expertise needed to meet the learning needs of children on the one hand and simultaneously the learning needs of student teachers on the other hand. It is a tension perhaps germane to involvement in initial teacher education and mentioned often by individual teachers mentoring student teachers, but one which eases itself out once roles and relationships are worked through and when good communication and supportive structures are in place in partnership arrangements. Student teachers do need experience in teaching the full range of curriculum subjects over the course of school placement.

Whilst schools have broadly welcomed the possibilities for systematic involvement in how and what student teachers do and learn during school placement periods e.g. through the design of whole school learning experiences for student teachers during a placement period, there have been calls for structured support and professional development for schools in order to build school-based capacities and skills required in working with student teachers. The tension between a willingness on the part of schools to take on new structured roles and responsibilities in school placement and having the capacities and skill set to do so is one which can be eased considerably when framed within an overarching plan to support schools in their new roles. The content of the *Guidelines* comes to life in a meaningful way for whole school staffs when it is integrated into continuous professional development (CPD) in an incremental manner allowing time for participants to grow into a whole new language around school placement and to experience collaboration in initial teacher education.

Balancing the need for frankness in mentoring relationships and managing the vulnerabilities of being a student teacher is a tension which can be explored through ongoing CPD also. Student teachers need to know in a frank manner and at an early point if difficulties are becoming evident in their practice and ways in which they might respond positively and improve. The formative developmental potential of school-based mentoring requires



open two-way communication between a student teacher and a co-operating teacher which can in turn be scaffolded by the role of the school placement tutor. The provision of regular feedback to a student teacher (be it verbal or written) must emphasise an active participatory role for the student teacher in which he/she is developing critical reflective capacities. Getting the balance right between information and inquiry is important. Getting the balance right between expectations of a student teaching and a student learning is equally important for a student teacher learning to be a professional. Notwithstanding the natural tensions which occur in change processes, where might new possibilities lie to ease the kinds of tensions mentioned above?

### A sense of the possibilities

There are rich possibilities ahead in building into new CPD frameworks the structured involvement of schools in the new partnership model of school placement. A range of CPD models will be required e.g. some school-based and on a whole-staff basis, some blended approaches, some summer/autumn courses. The possibilities for accredited CPD around structured partnerships are also worth exploring. Drawing on the mentoring capacities built up through the National Induction Programme should be explored in the context of a continuum approach to teacher professional development. Many teachers have enquired about these possibilities and would welcome opportunities which might open up for them to work in the area of initial teacher education. The potential for rich school-based research involving teachers, college-based teacher educators, and student teachers is enormous. There is now a real opportunity in the new model of school placement to build research capacity in a learning community/partnership context whilst simultaneously addressing priority areas for schools. The quality of relationships will be of the utmost importance in this process as it is in all school placement processes. The understanding is that trust and respect permeate throughout and roles and responsibilities in school placement are given due time and appropriate support in the unfolding growing-into partnership. Any bumpy moments can be worked out and worked through within an encouraging and learning-oriented research community.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, our experience has been that the roll-out of structured roles and responsibilities in school placement is taking its own course to the significant benefit of student teachers. Existing resources have been creatively utilised in this early phase of structured partnerships. There is enormous goodwill and commitment in schools towards structured involvement in school placement matched by a complementary skill set and knowledge base in colleges to ensure that student teachers grow and develop in a holistic sense during school placement. The ultimate beneficiaries will be the children and the quality of learning experiences provided for them. Opportunities like this joint INTO-St Patrick's College, Drumcondra seminar enable us to affirm and confirm significant progress and achievements in partnerships in initial teacher education, and specifically in the area of school placement. Sustaining these achievements will require planned and systematic investment.



## Perspectives of a HEI Tutor

**Laura Thornton, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University**

Froebel, Friedrich (1782 – 1852)

Friedrich Froebel was an educational theorist, philosopher and practitioner. Born in Germany, in 1782 his principles of child-centred education underpin the education courses in Maynooth University, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. When presented with a posy of flowers gathered by a child a few hours prior to his passing, he said “Look after my flowers – and my weeds – for I learned from them both”, (Froebel cited by Liebschner, 2012).

### School placement supervision

It is with this quote, my core values, and my love of teaching to the forefront of my mind that I approach my role as a teacher educator and school placement supervisor. Taking the tenets of child-centred education, and adapting them to a learner-centred approach more suitable to a third level setting, tends to the needs of all students, as advocated by Froebel. Although this proves to be challenging, the supervisory structure within the department provides a very supportive framework for staff and students alike (Fig.1).

Fig.1. Structure of Supervision Programme

Students	Supervisors
Each student receives a minimum of three visits during SP (1 hr duration)	Pre & Post Supervisors' meetings of approx 2 hr duration each <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grades and quality issues discussed</li> <li>• Ongoing CPD for supervisors</li> </ul>
Each student meets the SP Supervisor on two occasions Pre-Sp and once Post-Sp	
Extra supportive visit as required or requested	Professional dialogue between Supervisors during and Post- SP
Post-SP tutorials	

Being afforded the opportunity to review a student’s teaching file prior to placement at incremental stages of planning is critically important. It allows for guidance and direction to be offered and discussions regarding planning, resulting in a better understanding of the individual student’s teaching style and needs. Meetings should help students to relax, ask questions and begin a constructive relationship with his or her supervisor. Extra meetings as required can be held at discretion of the supervisor. In consultation with the Head of Education students may be withheld from commencing placement if their preparation is deemed unsatisfactory.

While on placement, students are supervised while teaching. This is followed by a meeting in the school and a reflective meeting in the university setting on completion of placement. Students are encouraged to identify their personal strengths and areas in need of improvement to assist them in setting goals for future placements. Where there is a dearth of content knowledge, or lack of methodological approaches students may be offered post-placement tutorials. This structure, while learner-centred, also acknowledges the need for ongoing professional dialogue between supervisors. A programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for supervisors on a broad range of curricular, assessment and policy issues further supports this work.

While, the structure outlined is beneficial to all, there are still challenges to be addressed if we are to remain true to Froebel’s basic premise of tending to the less and more able. It is vital that we remain cognisant of the necessity to balance the needs of the student teacher, against their strengths and talents, while also being mindful

of the greater demands presented in primary teaching and by the children we teach.

Trying to hold firm to quality and maintain standards, I bring the following questions into each supervisory process:

- ⌘ How can I nurture the less developed student teacher as well as cater for the requirements of the more able while balancing their needs against standards that must be achieved?
- ⌘ How can I maintain these standards and ensure that I am meeting the needs of the children, while protecting the profession and the Froebel name?



Two children with slate board: Anker

### Expectations...

On reflection, it is critical to address the expectations that are demanded by the university as part of the supervisory process. Further to these demands are the expectations of both supervisors and students involved in the process. Acknowledging that emerging student teachers are learning to teach, the fact that they are still novices within the profession can be overlooked by all stakeholders e.g. (supervisors, student teachers and co-operating teachers). Darling-Hammond posits that “developing the ability to see beyond one’s own perspective, to put oneself in the shoes of the learner and to understand the meaning of that experience in terms of learning, is perhaps the most important role of universities in the preparation of teachers” (2000, 170).

In the Froebel Department, we strive to continually recognise student teacher stages of development in a variety of school placements and settings, with the ultimate aim of imbuing a newly qualified teacher (NQT) with the confidence and ability to plan for, teach and reflect on the children in their care. We also endeavour to promote a desire for life-long learning in graduates which will “lead to engagement at a broader and deeper level as the teacher grows in confidence and experience” (Teaching Council, 2011, 22).

As a supervisor, I expect a high level of professionalism from the student teacher at all times. They are responsible for communicating with, and planning in response to, the expressed needs of their co-operating teacher. Long-term and short-term plans must pay attention to the needs and interests of children in their class, while they establish and manage a creative, stimulating learning environment. Student teachers need to show flexibility and willingness to take advice and implement recommendations. In order to develop teaching and learning throughout their respective placements, they are encouraged to use an appropriate range of assessment strategies to support and inform plans. Student teachers in their final year are expected to be capable of differentiation at a high level, and are aware that “teachers in differentiated classrooms accept, embrace, and plan for the fact that learners bring to school both many commonalities and the essential differences that make them individuals” (Tomlinson, 2014, 4).

However, I feel it would be unfair to set such high standards for the students without also giving due and sincere consideration to the expectations they have of me in my role. Student teachers expect supervisors to be approachable, available and willing to offer support. School placement can be a very isolating, challenging and worrying time for students, especially if they are living away from home and close friends. They are often under huge financial constraints which can have implications for their health and general wellbeing. Acknowledging the joy, along with the stresses they may be encountering, can lead to a nurturing partnership, where they feel comfortable to ask for guidance. Sometimes accepting a phone call can settle a simple query, prevent a sleepless night, and allay anxieties prior to attending school the following morning.

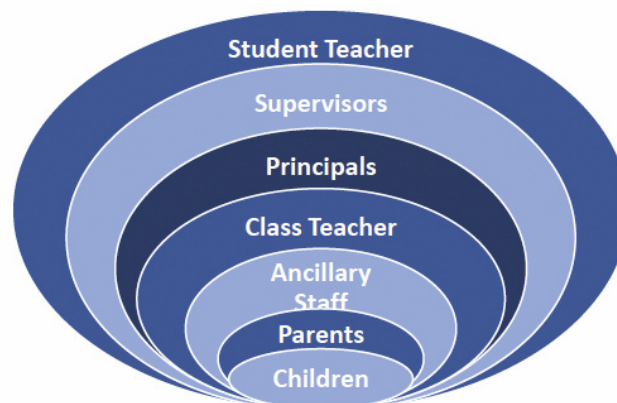
Student teachers are generally grateful for honesty, as they are usually very conscious if lessons or visits have not gone well. I believe they deserve to have congruent feedback delivered in a fair and just manner, which “is a characteristic of being transparent, real, and honest in a helping relationship” (Gatongi, 2007, 206). Often taking a few minutes to reflect on the situation can allow them to process and formulate their own solutions to issues that have arisen. I am mindful of the value of silence in supervision, while still offering advice. Korthagen et al. state that supervisors “should only help when it is really needed... let students think for themselves and to help themselves... In supervision, the pace should be based on the student’s needs” (2001, 26). No longer is the relationship a “one –

way transfer of skills and knowledge from expert to novice [rather it is an] opportunity for challenging those things that create personal philosophies and modes of operation" (Walkington, 2005, 33). It is vital to remember that student teachers are mindful that the supervisor holds power over grading and potential progression opportunities in the course, irrespective of how positive the relationship is.

### Importance of relationships

For me, teaching is ultimately about relationships, and when thinking about them I began to reflect on the multiplicity of layers that are present in a standard school placement (Fig.2). I am not convinced that we factor into account the expectations placed on student-teachers to develop, maintain and nurture such complex connections over a three or four week period. It is clear from practice that student teachers are successfully managing this aspect; however it is important to acknowledge this as a significant achievement for them during placement meetings.

Fig.2 Multiplicity of layers



### Contribution of school community

The student teacher, the supervisor and the school community comprise a triad in Initial Teacher Education. Without this carefully honed triangulation of relationships, successful placements would not exist. As a supervisor, I have found the contribution of primary schools, within the voluntary capacity in which school placement operates, to be extremely positive. Student teachers, in my experience, have been welcomed in a supportive and inclusive manner. Principals and co-operating teachers willingly share their combined wisdom of school life and their teaching expertise with student teachers. This is an invaluable aspect of the placement experience as it offers tangible links between theory and practice.

### Supervisor/school relationship

Co-operating teachers in some cases must balance the needs of the children against the impact a less able student teacher may have on the children's learning. The role of the co-operating teacher is pivotal in mentoring and development of student teachers, and one in which they are often unsupported. It is my responsibility to discuss with the co-operating teacher the student teacher's:

- ✎ willingness to plan for children's needs /attainments;
- ✎ development of plans based on initial guidelines offered on Observation Days;
- ✎ ability to receive feedback on teaching / planning / management;
- ✎ approach to working collaboratively;
- ✎ areas of success or matters of concern identified during placement;
- ✎ performance during visit, and in doing so often acting as a support to the co-operating teacher.

## Reflection on supervisor/student relationship

As I near conclusion, I wish to revisit the analogy of the "flowers and weeds", and the responsibility it places on the supervisor in the decision making process. Taking into consideration previously mentioned concerns; we must remain cognisant that the success or dilemma a student teacher may experience can have an effect on the supervisor after the visit or conversation. We must also be mindful that how a message is delivered is often as important as what we have to say, especially when we may not be privy to student's individual circumstances. This is the most difficult aspect of the supervisory role for me, as I am always conscious of my struggle to hold quality and standards, while considering the human element of the role. Despite this, the role of school placement supervisor is incredibly rewarding and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to be part of the development of the next generation of primary school teachers.

Having represented the complexities of the role of a supervisor, I think it appropriate to finish with a student teacher response to school placement. Despite all the challenges encountered, they still see it as a very real, tangible and invaluable aspect of the course and an integral element of their preparation for a career in primary teaching.

"This is my favourite part of the course. I love my placements and look forward to next year's one. This was the place where I learned the most about teaching. I feel that I learn a lot from being out in schools".

*Student Testimony, Year 2 SP evaluation 2014*

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## Perspectives of a HEI School Placement Tutor

**Geraldine O'Connor, Director of School Placement, Church of Ireland College of Education**

### Small schools and school placement: perceived benefits and challenges

School placement is an essential component of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and is central to the professional development of student teachers. The revised four-year B.Ed has extended the duration of school placement from 15 to 30 weeks (Teaching Council, 2011, p. 11). More placement in itself is not, necessarily, of benefit to student teachers. School placement should offer students varied learning contexts so that they can “learn for practice but also from practice” and provide space for reflective discussions with experienced teachers and teacher educators (European Commission, 2014, p.5). The revised BEd encourages a greater role for the cooperating teacher to engage in discussion and formative feedback with student teachers (Teaching Council, 2013, p.19). Constructive feedback from more experienced teaching professionals has the potential to improve the teaching of novice teachers (OECD TALIS, 2014). School based interactions, particularly when accompanied by some form of mentoring and discussion, can increase student teacher understanding of experienced teachers’ practices, as well as assisting them to analyse what is happening in the classroom (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006).

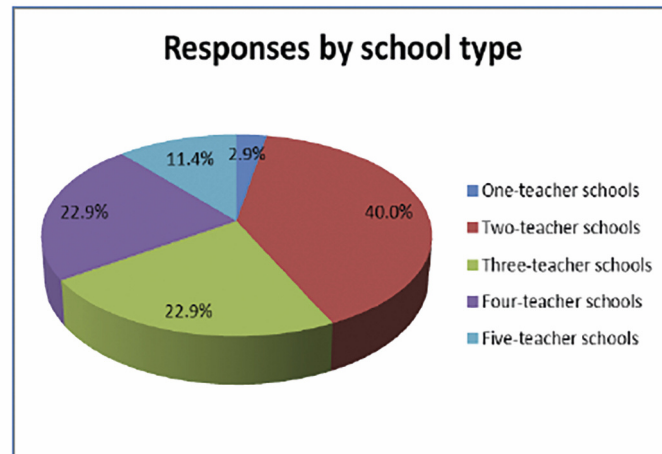
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) seek to offer student teachers a variety of settings for school placement, a practice recommended by the Teaching Council (Teaching Council, 2013, p.14). In the Church of Ireland College of Education (CICE), student teachers frequently undertake school placement in multi-classes in small schools, particularly those within the Protestant tradition: Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist and Society of Friends schools (throughout the rest of this article these schools will be referred to under the umbrella term ‘Protestant schools’). For example, during November 2014, 73% of CICE third year students on home school placements taught multi-classes, while 30% taught in classrooms with more than two class groupings. During the Autumn, placements of 2011 and 2012 over 30% of CICE second and third year students were placed in schools with an enrolment of between 50 and 100 pupils, while a few were in schools of less than 50 pupils (CICE, School Placement data 2014, 2012, 2011). This high frequency of placements in small schools is unsurprising, given that currently about two thirds of the 200 or so Church of Ireland and other Protestant primary schools have fewer than four teachers (DES, 2013). Coupled with this is the fact that CICE students are required to undertake at least one home placement in such schools. A further motivation is the fact that, when qualified, many CICE graduates will teach in small schools. The frequency of such student placements has enabled teacher educators in CICE to have regular exposure to many Protestant small primary schools while visiting students during placement, both in rural and urban areas across the State. This in turn has promoted a particular emphasis on multi-class teaching within the ITE programme in CICE.

Evidence suggests that teachers traditionally perceive teaching multiple classes as more challenging (INTO, 2003; Mason & Burns 1995) and that multi-classes can be associated with higher teacher stress levels (Darmody & Smith, 2011, p.41). It is likely that some student teachers may view these settings as challenging. There is no agreed aspect of teacher education, including specialist professional knowledge and pedagogies, for student teachers to master to enable them to teach successfully in small schools or in multi-classes. However, there is evidence of a need for particular emphasis on instructional strategies, which enable flexible grouping, timetabling and planning to cater for a wider age span and a multiplicity of maturity and ability levels within such class groupings (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). The same key questions should be applied to teaching, planning and assessment within multi-classes as those applied to single classes, namely, “Who are my learners?” and “How do I plan instructional strategies, resources, assessment methods, timetables and the physical environment to facilitate learning for all?” However, when addressing these questions in multi-classes an emphasis on flexible grouping and timetabling as well as independent learning is especially relevant, particularly in classrooms with three or more classes.

To what extent do small schools participate in hosting school placement? In October 2014, CICE conducted a survey to establish some of the views and experiences of small schools relating to school placement. In particular, information was sought about the perceived challenges and benefits of hosting students on placement, as well as the frequency of such placements. The survey was sent to 60 Protestant small schools. The schools contacted ranged

in size from one to five teachers, with the majority in rural areas. Some had recently hosted CICE students whilst others had not. Of the 35 anonymous responses received, the largest number, 14, was from two teacher schools, with eight responses from both three and four teacher schools, four from five teacher schools and one from a one teacher school, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Response to CICE survey by school type - October 2014



Schools which indicated a frequency of hosting student teachers by choosing 'most years' or '1 year in 3' were all, with the exception of one school, three, four and five teacher small schools. By contrast, eight of the fourteen two-teacher schools, (57%), stated they had never had a student teacher on placement. The reasons given for the absence of student placements ranged from stating that the school was "never approached" by student teachers, to the view that the school was too small or in a remote area. While most of the responses commented on the frequency or otherwise of placements of CICE students, some schools also indicated that they had been contacted by students from institutions other than CICE. Again, two teacher schools indicated less demand for placements from other providers than schools with three or more teachers. The remote location of small schools, particularly Protestant small schools which serve a geographically dispersed community, could certainly be a restrictive factor where there may be few student teachers from a particular area. However, it is likely that other factors may be reducing the number of students undertaking placement in such settings. For instance, it was indicated that in some cases a school had had an initial enquiry from a student teacher but that the placement had not been confirmed. There was little evidence from schools to suggest that the infrequency of student teacher placement was due to the reluctance of small schools to host students, although one three-teacher school noted that they only facilitated past pupils. Schools did express concerns relating to the extended school placement proposed for fourth year B.Ed students, but the majority indicated a desire for student placements. The lack of student placements in two and three teacher schools may therefore be due at least in some part to student teacher reluctance to seek such placements due to a perception of the challenges of these settings. As CICE requires its student teachers to do at least one placement in a small school, it is likely that this encourages students to teach in multi-classes, even where a student might otherwise be hesitant about choosing such a placement.

The survey results revealed that small schools were seen by many of the teachers within them as being more complex for student teachers to teach in, not least because of the demanding planning workload. They were sympathetic to the plight of the student teacher and their possible lack of enthusiasm for placement in small schools. For instance, a respondent from a rural three-teacher school stated:

I think multi-classes of three or four classes are off-putting for student teachers who prefer one or two class groupings which are easier to plan and work with. They also prefer the support of being part of a larger staff in a school. When asked to indicate challenges posed for small schools when hosting a student teacher, schools noted a variety of reasons as indicated in the following table:



**Table 1: Sample of teachers' and principals' views about the challenges faced by small schools when hosting a student for school placement.**

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The combination of classes can be difficult - infants with First/Second (four teacher urban school).
Four class arrangement means notes for preparation are onerous because of multi-class differentiation (two teacher rural school).
Inexperienced teachers have difficulty differentiating (two teacher rural school).
Students tend to be ill-prepared for teaching three classes in one room (three teacher urban school).
The skills required to teach a dual class take time to acquire and can be a challenge for a student to learn so many skills in a short period. Much teacher support, guidance and time is required. (five teacher urban school)

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One respondent noted that the change of routine which student teachers inevitably bring might be disruptive for younger children or for pupils with SEN. Some teachers indicated a perception that the calibre of the student teacher was a significant factor in determining the positive effect or otherwise of placement. An underprepared and underperforming student teacher was seen to have the potential to negatively impact on the multi-class. This could prevent the curriculum being adequately taught, which in turn could result in the class teacher having “a lot of catching up to do” to “cover lost ground” after placement (respondent from a four teacher urban school).

### Perceived benefits and challenges of having student teachers on placement in small schools

All schools indicated potential benefits for themselves and their pupils in having student teachers on placement. In relation to informing their own professional practice, teachers stated that it was refreshing to see new ideas and innovative teaching methods and resources, to learn from students and to generally keep up-to-date professionally. Some indicated that they valued the opportunity to pass on their experience. Other teachers pointed to school placement being a time for self-evaluation and reflection on their own practice or an opportunity to observe their pupils, engage in small group support, one-to-one work or to carry out pupil assessments. Some teaching principals indicated that student placement was an opportunity for them to catch up on administrative work. Responses also indicated a perceived social benefit in having extra staff resulting in a more lively and interesting staffroom. The benefits perceived for pupils being taught by a student teacher ranged from having an opportunity to experience a variety of teaching styles to “having a different teacher than their own teacher who may have had them for three – four years” (respondent from three teacher rural school). Teachers saw small schools as offering student teachers learning opportunities for developing teaching and organisational skills and affording them time to gain valuable experience. They noted how some student teachers had developed their teaching whilst in their classrooms and how they had effectively used peer work, group learning and differentiated learning with the multi-class.

Student teachers on placement in small schools also indicated the benefits of teaching in a small school. Feedback questionnaires from students in such settings drew attention to a positive school climate and its perceived benefits, namely a positive environment for both pupils and student teachers:

“All pupils know each other, friendly atmosphere.” (Student teacher, three teacher school).

“The staff and students in the school were close so this meant that they could help each other with lesson ideas and with sharing resources.” (Student teacher, five teacher school).

There was evidence of student teachers having to overcome their initial reservations about teaching in a small school setting, particularly where there were three class groupings or more.

“I was very nervous about teaching four classes.” (Student teacher, two teacher school).

"I found that there was a big difference between fourth and fifth class both in maturity and behaviour." (Student teacher, five teacher school).

Planning for a multi-class was seen as challenging by both host teachers and student-teachers. One student who compared planning for a multi-class with three classes to that for a single class considered that it was, "much more time consuming especially as the maths curriculum is very different in each class" (Student teacher, three teacher school). Some teachers suggested that to compensate for the larger planning workload there should be different expectations at college level for written plans for students teachers on placement in multi-classes compared to those in single settings. Some student teachers stated that they found managing teacher time with the various classes a problem. However, students also indicated that they had developed practices during placement to overcome some of the challenges. One such response stated "Once I gave the opportunity to the class to offer peer support when working independently and had tasks for the classes to do, this was fine" (Student teacher, two teacher school). There was some indication that good practice operating in the school was being observed and utilised, such as, "Letting the older classes offer support to the younger classes and putting them working in mixed groups" (Student teacher, two teacher school).

Multi-classes are not the only setting where student teachers observe and apply differentiated approaches to teaching and learning. Students are expected by HEIs to adopt differentiated approaches to planning and teaching in all class settings, whether single class or multi-class. However, there is evidence from student feedback that small schools may offer particularly rich opportunities for student teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the rationale for and methods of differentiation. This may be due to the intricate types of differentiation necessitated by working in multi-class settings as exemplified by this comment: "I had to differentiate for each class, then again for the levels within each class" (Student teacher, three teacher school). The multiple aspects of differentiation in multi-classes was seen by some students as challenging but, nevertheless, containing opportunities for learning which were developed over time as instanced in this comment:

"At first I found it very difficult to differentiate for such a wide range of abilities. However I adjusted to it and became quite comfortable with it...this was helped when I began to create different sets of questions for the class groups and became more aware of each child in the class." (Student teacher, two teacher school).

There was also an indication of a transfer of learning to future teaching situations: "I feel like I learned a lot about differentiating by having this experience whether it would be a single grade or multi-grade class" (Student teacher, two teacher school).

Evidence from student feedback also suggested that a small school setting enabled profitable discussions to occur between the college tutor and the student teacher in the context of teaching in that setting, particularly around differentiation. One student in a small school stated, "My first tutor helped me to improve my differentiation dramatically" (Student teacher, two teacher school).

### Teachers' views on offering student teachers support and feedback

Small schools viewed advice and support from the cooperating teacher as vital experiences for student teachers while on placement. It was seen as especially important to discuss classroom management and curriculum planning and to communicate information about pupil abilities. However, there were challenges identified by teachers regarding discussions and feedback with student teachers. Some teachers indicated that feedback could be hard to pitch at the appropriate level and difficult to undertake if the student lacked confidence. Others questioned whether they had the skills to undertake the task. There was some evidence that teaching principals were more comfortable with the role than other teachers, due to their experience in using feedback in other school situations, as evident in this comment, "As a principal it's my job to feedback to teachers and so I feel I'm getting better at it. I don't think that all the classroom teachers would share that opinion" (Principal, three teacher school). The difficulty with having



professional conversations around teaching was not confined to working with student teachers as indicated by this response: "Classroom teachers sometimes find it hard to critique each other" (Ibid.).

Many schools saw the timetabling of feedback with the student teacher as problematic, due to the fact that, in a small school, there were no other staff to take over while this occurred. It was also seen as difficult to arrange such discussions outside teaching time, particularly where the cooperating teacher was the principal. The provision by HEIs of guidance criteria for observation and teaching expectations were noted as helpful when these were supplied.

### Responses to extended placement in B.Ed fourth year

The small schools surveyed were asked to indicate any barriers they perceived to hosting a fourth year student teacher on a ten-week placement, due to occur for the first time in the 2015/16 school year.

A range of challenges were noted, including:

- ⌘ Classes were seen as too small for such an extensive placement.
- ⌘ Schools were reluctant to have a student teacher in any one class for more than four weeks.
- ⌘ Fourth year placement was seen as presenting some serious challenges in terms of school planning and also parental concerns.
- ⌘ Schools could only host one student teacher for school placement during that school year.

Schools indicated that they anticipated particular challenges in relation to placing student teachers for a longer block of practice, such as dealing with parental concerns as well as possible BOM or DES opposition to a lengthy placement. If the student teacher was involved in non-teaching tasks in the school, such as engaging in aspects of school planning and assessment, there was a view from some schools that parents and the DES Inspectorate might not be happy with this arrangement. The confusion about what students could or could not be permitted to engage in indicates a need for a more coordinated approach to communication about fourth year placement between the DES, the Teaching Council, HEIs primary schools, management bodies, unions and advocacy bodies.

### Summary and conclusions

Despite the changes which are being applied to school placement in the revised B.Ed the majority of small primary schools who participated in this survey expressed an interest in hosting a student teacher for school placement. However, many schools, particularly two teacher schools, indicated a lack of opportunity to do so. Responses to the extended fourth year school placement were more hesitant due to the length of the placement and the potential difficulties which the non-teaching elements within it could create for the school.

The number of positive teacher responses to school placement may seem surprising at a time when demands being made on schools are perceived to be ever increasing. This willingness may well be due to the fact that the survey was sent from the Church of Ireland College to Protestant small schools, some of which have a history of hosting students from CICE or which may have a desire to do so. However, the indication of connections which some schools had with students from other HEIs would also seem to indicate an openness to student teacher placement more generally.

There was evidence that some student teachers experienced what might be termed 'pre-placement anxiety' about undertaking placement in a small school and noted challenges experienced during such placements. However, students also noted that they had gained opportunities for professional development in very supportive settings.

Although this school survey was small and limited to Protestant small schools, the responses are likely to convey some common perceptions which small schools more generally hold about school placement. A number of conclusions may be drawn from the findings:

- ⌘ Small schools have the potential to offer rich experiences to student teachers on school placement.
- ⌘ Small schools see benefits for themselves and their pupils in having student teachers on school placement,

- however, many small schools do not host student teachers on placement or host students very infrequently.
- ⌘ Student teachers indicated that they found small schools a positive environment due to the warm atmosphere and personal attention they experienced.
  - ⌘ Student teacher placements were seen to pose challenges for the cooperating teacher as well as the student teacher. Some of the perceived challenges may be preventing some student teachers from undertaking placement in small schools. This may be particularly so where there are more than two classes in the multi-class grouping on offer and in instances where students are self-selecting placement schools.
  - ⌘ HEIs may need to consider additional ways of increasing student teacher interest in undertaking placement in small schools, particularly those which have three or more class groupings within the one classroom. For such placements HEIs may need to be open to smaller class groupings and to ease or adapt the planning format used by student teachers. Additional support may be needed to allay some of the transport costs for student teachers attending schools in remote areas.
  - ⌘ Developing specific modules within ITE around methodologies and approaches for teaching, learning and assessment in small schools may further increase student teacher confidence for teaching in such settings.
  - ⌘ School professionals need training to be available at national level for the task of supporting and mentoring student teachers.
  - ⌘ Greater consideration needs to be given to utilising the expertise of the cooperating teacher in small schools, through documenting and sharing good practice.
  - ⌘ The benefit of granting some form of recognition to schools which host student teachers on placement should be considered by HEIs, the DES and the Teaching Council. This could assist schools in promoting the value of placements within their school community and enable the inclusion of issues such as mentoring and reflective practice to be included in school CPD, WSEs and school self-evaluations.

To conclude, the study indicates that the typically close community within small schools has the potential to create very positive and supportive teacher-student teacher relationships as well as classroom environments which are conducive to the professional development of student teachers. There could be benefits to recognising more formally the contribution of small schools, and indeed of all schools, which consistently engage in school placement. One positive gesture might be to identify schools which embody the practice of frequently hosting and mentoring student teachers on school and HEI websites. Whole-school reports might also indicate such professional engagement. By noting and thereby valuing the participation of small schools in school placement, and by articulating particular supportive practices, opportunities could develop to cultivate a sharing of good practice about multi-class teaching and mentoring. This in turn may encourage further student teacher placement within such settings, particularly where ITE programmes include specific reference to approaches that would assist student teachers to teach in such placements.

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# Report from discussion groups

## Introduction

The following report is a collation of the opinions and ideas arising from the discussion groups. It emerged very clearly during discussions that in all respects of delivery of services and in consideration of any changes thereto that the children we teach must come first. The questions discussed are available in Appendix 1.

## Themes

The following key themes arose from the discussion within the groups:

- ⌘ Colleges of education
- ⌘ Partnership with schools
- ⌘ Cooperating teachers
- ⌘ Professional development / Career progression;
- ⌘ Student teachers
- ⌘ School placement
- ⌘ Challenges for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- ⌘ Multi-grade placements

## Report of discussions

### Colleges of education

It was suggested that colleges of education could upgrade facilities/resources/equipment and perhaps a grant to do same could be sourced.

It was felt that the content sent out from the colleges needs to be further explained to partner schools and not simply disseminated as literature. It was suggested that this might be done via Continuing Professional Development (CPD) during Croke Park Hours.

Since the introduction of the fourth year in the Bachelor of Education more clarity is needed for hosting teachers as regards the changes from both the pedagogical and content/expectation perspectives. All teachers need to be educated regarding the changes in colleges particularly if students are going to be in schools for longer periods.

The number of colleges from which students are approaching schools at varying times of the year is causing a concern. There needs to be a clearer and more expanded partnership between colleges and schools. Clear communication is key going into the future.

Schools can feel under pressure to get the right balance where they are hosting past pupils as well as the pre-arranged number of students from a college.

Where colleges look for small schools to host students on placement, varying models of placement can pose a challenge for implementation. The feasibility of these models in small schools needs to be looked at.

It was felt that accountability needs to be structured and formalised. Currently, the placement of students is at the discretion of individual principals. With the onset of longer placements this was raised as being a huge concern for principals. It was noted that we are only at the beginning of the process. The guidelines for a new model of placement were finalised in January 2013; it is at a very early stage for all partners. For partners to understand and be more familiar with the guidelines, a greater undertaking should be put in place to:

- i) Disseminate the guidelines;
- ii) Clarify their use through an in-service-type model.

The question was then raised as to who the best facilitator for this in-service would be. There was no overwhelming agreement on who could best provide this training for schools but it was suggested that it would fall under the school – college partnership.

### **Partnership with schools**

A question that emerged from one group was 'What are the central principles underpinning a partnership approach that can shape the future regeneration of the profession?' It was submitted that in order to answer this question, greater clarity is required around the roles of the different actors in possible partnerships.

It was noted that in order for real partnerships to develop, relationships must be developed at a range of different levels, with clear expectations around roles and responsibilities. Colleges are aware that currently schools host students on a 'grace or favour' basis. Schools are operating under a variety of constraints: resources, time, space and large class sizes. That these factors may act as obstacles to hosting student teachers on placement was also noted.

Enhanced partnerships between providers and schools should be seen as beneficial to the school as well as the student teacher. It was suggested, for example, that Higher Education Institute (HEI) tutors could provide CPD during Croke Park hours.

The group noted that in order to develop partnerships, dialogue between schools and colleges should be encouraged through clear communication systems and engagement across a wide range of projects and initiatives.

In cases where schools host students from multiple providers, it was felt that the development of real partnerships would be challenging. It was felt that it would be difficult to develop real partnerships with the range of multiple providers that currently operate in the system and the range of types of placement that are required.

Some members of the discussion groups suggested that schools should align with one provider for school placements. However, there was not general agreement on this point as some schools saw benefits from engaging with different providers and the different strengths that they may offer.

It was suggested that as part of any partnership between colleges and schools, teachers who would be acting as cooperating teachers could be invited to colleges in advance of placements. This would be designed to inform students of the good practice that is already happening in schools and which would be expected of students on their school placements.

The question as to whether one school could deal with more than one college at the time was briefly addressed. Should there be more than one college involved with the same school, it was suggested that there should be a commonality of approach between the colleges with regard to school placement.

Some participants raised the point that in some schools written feedback is against school policy. So, where schools are asked for written feedback and are concerned about this, they would welcome clarification around their data protection obligations.

Finally, participants felt very strongly that student teachers need to be made aware of the profile of DEIS Band schools or schools with a high EAL population. Colleges need to be alive to this and be familiar with the current range of interventions that are used in those schools. Before being placed in such schools, students need to be specifically trained and prepared for the particular needs of such schools and the children therein.

### **Cooperating Teachers**

#### ***Professional development/career progression:***

Participants highlighted the need for the recognition of cooperating teachers and that this could go towards establishing promotional opportunities, for example, re-establishing posts of responsibility. It was noted that the role of the cooperating teacher needs to be developed. Currently there is a wide variety of practice. Some schools have developed a protocol or charter around school placement which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities

in particular school contexts. Some schools are extremely supportive of school placement while other schools, for a variety of reasons, engage minimally in the process.

Teachers who take on the role of mentor of student teachers in schools should be provided with professional development, time and space to cultivate the role. This could be considered as part of any future CPD framework. It was pointed out that schools do benefit from hosting students but also need to gain from engaging in the practice. This gain was characterised as something which could be measured through CPD. Recognition should be given to class teachers who regularly host student teachers. This recognition may be manifested in career progression, and seen as a requisite for progression to a leadership role within the school or in other schools. It was agreed that formalising the structure would enable cooperating teachers to hone management skills.

It was asserted that there would need to be incentives to be cooperating teachers and/or that teachers would get 'credits' if they were to act as cooperating teachers. There would also need to be formal recognition for the role of cooperating teacher. Part of any formal recognition would also have to prioritise time as a resource. In other words, time to plan, release time and sub cover would need to be factored in in any formal structuring of the role.

A challenge exists in the system regarding the best way to encourage class teachers to host student teachers. A survey of teachers should be conducted to establish the constraints preventing class teachers hosting student teachers. Following such a survey, ways should be explored to empower and encourage teachers to host student teachers.

Dissemination of basic information regarding new structures has not happened as yet and this would be useful if not most important. It was generally agreed that cooperating teachers are sometimes unclear of their role and unclear of the expectations of student teachers as they progress from being a novice Year 1 student to an accomplished Year 4 student. Teachers can be reluctant to give feedback on students they are hosting as they are often not sure where to draw the line. It was felt that cooperating teachers, in a mentoring role, would welcome and benefit from inservice or further professional development in this area. The provision of CPD relevant to school placements for school staffs and principals was seen as both a challenge and a possibility. For some cooperating teachers, change can be difficult, particularly where they are unused to the new student placement system or where new methodologies are being taught to students to use in class. This issue raises hard questions. CPD would need to focus on 'coping with change' aspect.

It was noted that in 2006, inservice facilities were excellent but that now there is a vacuum and no apparent will in DES to fund same. No resources have been provided to colleges of education in order to provide such CPD. One college of education had piloted providing CPD to schools while their student teachers were engaged in teaching classes. They used Croke Park hours for the same purpose and it was seen as successful when provided in the school. Another college of education offered CPD on this area as part of its summer provision of courses but there seemed to be little or no demand/response for such a course. One principal suggested that the granting of EPV days for engaging in such a course would be seen as a valued incentive.

The profession has recently seen the changing nature of teachers' cooperating roles. It was felt that these changes of role need to be acknowledged by the DES. Acknowledgment of the professionalism of cooperating teachers and schools would be valuable also. This acknowledgment has to be sought and has to arise in some form.

It was generally agreed that a mentoring programme for student teachers needs to be established; this needs to be a structured programme and that is what is missing at the moment. The NIPT model of training for mentors of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) offers one model/structure/approach, but the training of potential cooperating/participating teachers must be differentiated from that of mentoring NQTs and given its own forum.

One group agreed on the idea of a recognised 'Master Teacher', someone who is acknowledged by all the parties including the school, the partner colleges of education, the Teaching Council, the NIPT, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and accredited as such. This teacher would be a recognised authority on on-the-ground practice, specifically for student teachers on placement.

It was felt to be important that the DES/State give accreditation to those teachers in a 'Master' role and that is a huge opportunity for the system to invest in professional excellence. To acknowledge cooperating or partner schools as 'Teaching Schools / Learning Schools' in the same way that there are teaching hospitals, would also feed back into that sense of professionalism. It was also felt that the term 'cooperating teacher' is perceived to be too

generic, and that it may mask the level of experience the person may have, for example, a cooperating teacher may have quite a significant amount of experience working with students.

Some felt that there are difficulties around communications generally. This has fed into the perception that there have been inordinate levels and amounts of change in recent years. There was general agreement that change is good, that it was and is necessary, but it has been happening too quickly and during a recession without adequate resourcing or professional recognition.

### **Student teachers**

Participants noted that school placement is recognised by student teachers as fundamental for learning in initial teacher education programmes.

As part of their initial teacher education programme, a student should receive input on communication skills and in the skill of receiving and giving constructive criticism. They would then be better equipped to engage on a professional basis with the host teacher.

Hosting student teachers in schools has many benefits for the school as well as for the student. Student teachers are often the conduit for introducing the latest methodologies and pedagogical approaches into the school setting.

It was felt that the term 'student teacher' is perceived to be too generic, and that it may mask the level of experience the person may have, e.g. the differing needs and development levels of Year 1 versus Year 4 students need to be appreciated and responded to formally.

It was agreed that the needs of students as learners and supporting their development is important. But, balancing their prerequisites with needs of the pupils as learners is of the utmost importance.

### **School placement**

It was felt that a national strategy around school placement should be developed and that the principles and initiatives emanating from such a strategy should be communicated to all relevant partners.

Numerous challenges exist which may prevent a school hosting a student teacher. Pressure from standardised tests and the reality of Whole School Evaluations (WSEs) sometimes cause teachers to refrain from hosting students on school placement. The DES should be encouraged to recognise the role that schools play in school placement and to give due cognisance to the role in WSE reports.

School placement should be seen as a positive experience for the whole school community, where teachers can build on their skills as mentors. Students should not be regarded as a 'hindrance' but as a positive addition to the school community and a resource that teachers can use to improve the quality of teaching and learning in school.

There was an indication that some younger teachers are less inclined to take students than more established teachers. This point was made by a rural principal who has a staff of seven to eight teachers but the point was contested by two principals of large urban schools both of whom had staffs of all age groups more than willing to take students. One of these urban-based principals made the point that the culture of the school regarding student teachers was of the utmost importance.

Another challenge highlighted was the length of the placement and was noted as the cause of rising concerns among schools. Many schools were experiencing a 'fear of the unknown' in relation to what is expected from hosting schools under the new provisions. There appears to be a resistance from teachers and schools to the concept of 'long' school placements as proposed by the Teaching Council. Few teachers would be willing to hand over their entire class for the full duration of a ten week placement. There was general consensus on this point. It was felt that were the framework to change to include joint teaching, shared teaching or co-teaching there would be a greater possibility of facilitating the ten-week placement. The group did not discuss the technical requirements for co-teaching.

One of the teacher educators present pointed out that their college had broken up the ten-week requirement



for their students into a slightly different model:

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School A	4 week classroom teaching placement
School B	2 week special education placement
School C	4 week classroom teaching placement

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This particular teacher educator advocated creative thinking on the part of the colleges of education.

A further challenge was highlighted whereby schools who had had negative experiences with a student or students and consequently refused to take on students. This was contested by participants as being unfair on the part of the school as it is essential to embrace all students' abilities on school placement. It must be recognised that everybody has to make a start at some point and may struggle initially.

The question arose in one group as to the extent that practicing teachers see themselves as the 'gateway' to the profession. It was suggested that this question requires further exploration and discussion on its own merits. It was strongly felt by participants that all schools had a responsibility to the development of the profession and to those within it and couldn't simply opt out and say, "We're too busy".

Another suggestion was for the development of a closer relationship between the colleges of education and schools. Observation is considered by schools to work very well. The creation of a space where feedback can be given by the teacher whilst staying outside the realm of assessment would be valuable. Perhaps one visit by the supervisor where there was no assessment requirement would allow for such a professional conversation.

The question of parental involvement was mentioned briefly but other than the practice of schools telling the parents what exactly was happening in a class with regard to a student teacher's placement there was no additional comment in this area.

It was agreed that school placement should be seen as a positive experience for the whole school community, where teachers can build on their skills as mentors. Students should not be regarded as a 'hindrance' but as a positive addition to the school community and a resource that teachers can use to improve the quality of teaching and learning in school.

Ideally, as schools are the hosts to any long school placement, it was felt that they need to be involved at all levels as this and any new initiative is rolled out. Successful implementation will require resourcing and high-quality communication.

### **Challenges for higher education institutions (HEIs):**

It was highlighted that there is a perception that different colleges have different criteria for grading and awarding student grades. Equally, when an issue arises with a student in terms of their progress or suitability there needs to be clarification on the steps to be taken and how to manage students.

A homogenised approach is required in order to effect a cohesive structure. As a professional body, teachers should be responsible for the high standards of new entrants.

It was noted that HEI tutors need time allocated for meeting with students and HEI tutors have busy schedules. Also noted was the fact that the HEI tutor is a new role and that HEIs can't adapt overnight, no more than teachers in a school can. Furthermore, the argument was made that there is a new set of language references within the guidelines and that HEI tutors have only been using the new language around the new system for around two years.

The point was raised that where HEI tutors engage with cooperating teachers it is a new role for the HEI tutor. It was mentioned also that a cooperating teacher plays a role as a mentor while the HEI tutor is both mentor and assessor. The nature of the relationship they each have with the student is different.

HEI tutors are often seen as 'Cigire' figures. Schools and colleges cannot allow themselves get into the role of 'shielding' students from HEI tutors' assessments. The school and most of all, children suffer in the long-term if parties are not honest about a student's level of ability or their difficulty/ies.



The HEI tutor - student relationship needs to be developed so that this honesty can be shared. It was submitted that HEI tutors are under pressure at present and cannot achieve this level of honesty. The question arose as to what would be more valuable to develop the relationship – time or money. It was submitted that two aspects are key when allocating HEI tutors – the quality assurance of the HEI tutor themselves and the personnel chosen for the role.

A key challenge is the number of placements required by a variety of teacher education providers on an annual basis. Schools report that they are being approached by large numbers of students seeking placements where there are a relatively small number of possibilities to accommodate them. It was submitted by some teacher educators that HEIs ideally would like to place students in a variety of settings, for example, DEIS, DEIS and EAL, EAL, multi-grade, urban, rural, but that this is not always possible.

There was a call to ensure that HEI tutors are aware of initiatives and strategies that are in place in schools and to be familiar with the latest practice 'in the field'.

### **Multi-grade placements:**

It was suggested that placement in small schools and partnerships with small schools should be encouraged, facilitated and actively developed. The advantage of school placement in small schools is that in reality they are where most students will get jobs in the future. In multi-grade situations children already have skills developed; it's the student teacher who needs advice on planning, differentiation and other skills.

Questions were raised such as:

- ⌘ Should there be a different form of mentor for small schools? Could this possibly involve clustering of students?
- ⌘ Should there be a different model of assessment for smaller schools?

At the initial teacher education stage it is essential that student teachers are supported through the challenges and difficulties of planning for different learning objectives across the multi-grade structure, particularly in maths. Student teachers need to be trained to have the flexibility required to take classes in a multi-grade situation. They could be supported through a structure which includes cooperative teaching. It was submitted that there needs to be a standardised approach to multi-grade experience and placement across colleges, and that colleges would have the same requirements, criteria and expectations in place for multi-grade placements.

### **Recommendations**

1. It emerged from and through discussions that this conversation is timely, needs to continue and that matters discussed would benefit from further dialogue.
2. It is suggested that colleges would benefit from funding in order to effectively develop their relationships with partner schools.
3. It is suggested that a survey is carried out among teachers in order to further identify enablers and barriers to school placement and to research the challenges for schools regarding the hosting of students.
4. It is suggested that further training and support in hosting students on placement, specifically for principals, could be developed.
5. It is suggested that a system of CPD should be devised to complement the work done by teachers hosting students on school placement and that such CPD would be accredited.
6. It is suggested that all students benefit from multi-grade settings on school placement as part of their initial teacher education.
7. It is suggested that a delegation meet with both the Department of Education and Skills and with HEIs in order to discuss the outcomes from the Seminar.

# Concluding remarks

**Professor Fionnuala Waldron, Dean of Education, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra**

Recognising the centrality of school placement to the process of becoming a teacher, today's seminar brought together a range of compelling voices and experiences to begin, collectively, the process of interrogating, refining and embedding across the sector the emerging national model of HEI/school partnerships. This summary comment will foreground a range of key ideas that emerged over the course of the seminar and suggest the need for continued dialogue. In the first instance, there was general recognition that school experience represents the most powerful site of integration for student learning across all aspects of their teacher education programme. While increasingly teacher educators are including rich and creative opportunities for practice within taught modules, opportunities for sustained engagement with classroom and school life characteristic of school placement are essential components of student teacher learning. As a number of speakers today reminded us, children, their welfare and their learning are also at the heart of school placement and there is an ongoing requirement to balance the needs of all learners, children and student teachers, and the needs of the system.

A second theme that emerged strongly over the course of the seminar was that of complexity. Teaching itself is a complex and dynamic process and learning to teach and to be a teacher in the context of school placement is necessarily complicated, dynamic, iterative and relational (Southgate, Reynolds and Howley, 2013). It draws on a web of intersecting roles and responsibilities which involves HEI tutors, co-operating teachers, principal teachers and school staff working together to provide student teachers with supportive environments in which to develop their practice. These roles were very well defined by a number of speakers; Déirdre Kirwan's presentation teased out, for example, the whole school implications of placement, the diversity of roles and responsibilities and the importance of dialogue in relation to expectations. Drawing on her experience and her practice, Stephanie Crawford shared with us the potential of the role of the co-operating teacher to make a substantial contribution to student learning while the changing role of the HEI tutor was explored by Laura Thornton. It is evident also that roles are changing within schools in ways that will add significantly to how schools and HEIs work together. Most importantly, recent developments within the sector in relation to newly qualified teachers have supported teachers in acquiring the range of skills and the competencies which inform the practice of mentoring; for co-operating teachers engaging with student teachers, many of the same skills and capacities are required, not least of which are those that allow experienced teachers to recognise and respond to the vulnerabilities of student teachers.

Student teachers experience ITE as "an affectively charged personal journey" (Hobson et al. 2008) and school placement has been seen to generate feelings of "joy, happiness, satisfaction and pride, as well as fear, uncertainty and frustration" (Dolan et al. 2015). Rachael Kelly's presentation today reminded us that for student teachers school placement is an emotional journey and that relationships are at the heart of it. The impact of a sympathetic and informed teacher on student teacher confidence and on feelings of self-efficacy was beautifully illustrated by Rachael's honest account of her experiences. All of the accounts of practice demonstrated that school placement is not just about skills and competencies, important though they are; it is also about identity, about what it means to feel like and act like a teacher. Of fundamental importance in that context is access for students to a whole-school experience, the implications of which were outlined in Déirdre Kirwan's presentation. This brings me to my final theme, the idea of structure.

The model of school placement that has emerged in the Irish system is one of partnership. In her keynote address, Sara Bubb reminded us that partnership is a process, not an event or a product, and of the importance of constructing a shared vision. This idea of a shared vision was developed by Bernadette Ní Áingléis who drew on her long experience of promoting partnership to present a view of partnership that empowers all actors, including the student teacher. The presentation presented a range of ideas, among them the relational nature of partnership;

the importance of listening to and honouring the voice of students (Ní Áingléis, Murphy and Ruane, 2012); the centrality of dialogue and open communication; the interconnectedness of student learning and child learning; the complexity of the process and the need for partnerships to be infused with trust, care, respect and integrity. Within an overall frame that foregrounded the potential of partnerships, Ní Áingléis went on to address the emerging practice of partnership and the tensions within the system which have become evident, such as issues of placement supply and demand resulting from newly extended programmes. How the benefits and the demands of placement can impact differentially on different parts of the sector was examined by Geraldine O'Connor, who presented a systematic analysis of school placement in the context of small schools. This research highlighted the rich potential for learning that exists in this context and the need to promote access to experiences with multi-grade teaching; it identified also the particular challenges presented by extended placements in a small school context, for both student teachers and schools.

In her analysis of school/HEI partnerships in the UK system, keynote speaker Sara Bubb cited Hargreaves (2011) in relation to the magnets that attract partners, the glue that holds the partnership together and the drivers that maintain the focus of partnerships on learning. She went on to ask what are the ties and knots that bind partners to each other and foregrounded the need for clear roles and responsibilities and for partnership agreements which outline roles, processes and practices. While partnership has been long established as a model in some contexts, its roll out as a national model is in its early days. It is also occurring in the context of new models of teacher education that are premised on increased interactions with schools and longer placements. The discussion groups that followed on from the presentations engaged in some detail with some of the issues that arise in this context and flagged a range of problems, as well as areas of potential, that have emerged. These include increased communication between the actors involved; clarity about processes and expectations; the need to recognise the pressures on schools and the need for early and structured engagement; the challenges posed by multiple providers; the need to recognise the role and contribution of co-operating teachers; the potential for continuing professional development; the need for ongoing engagement at strategic level with emerging models of placement to ensure that they were workable for all schools, regardless of size, and the ongoing need for HEIs to be aware of initiatives in schools. Underpinning all of these issues was a shared imperative relating to dialogue and communication.

In her introduction to the seminar, Deirbhile Nic Craith argued that change does not just happen, that you need to invest in change, in dialogue and in process. In calling for increased investment in resources to enable the development of school/HEI partnership models in school placement, our collective voice can go forward from this seminar to the Teaching Council, the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Skills. Calling for increased investment in dialogue and process, however, also places responsibility on our shoulders. Let us ensure that this seminar marks the beginning of a shared journey characterised by openness, dialogue and collaboration between all partners involved.

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# Appendix 1

**Five discussion groups were asked to consider and discuss the following questions:**

1. What are the challenges and possibilities in relation to enhancing partnerships between colleges of education (Initial Teacher Education Providers) and schools? How can the context for developing partnerships between schools and colleges be created?
2. What are the specific challenges for cooperating teachers in relation to supporting student teachers? How can the system respond to these challenges?
3. What are the challenges and possibilities for whole school communities in relation to hosting student teachers on school placement? How should the system respond to the challenges and create the contexts to develop the possibilities?
4. What are the challenges for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in relation to facilitating students to experience school placement? How can the system respond to these challenges?

