



Mentoring and Assessing Student Teachers on School Placement: Integrating Theory and Practice

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This paper examines the extent to which School Placement (SP) maximizes opportunities for integrating theory and practice in student teachers' professional learning. Part of a larger project (Hall et al, 2018) the paper is based on a four-year longitudinal study, commissioned by the Teaching Council of Ireland, of a new policy initiative in which teacher educators are required to work in partnership with schools to equip student teachers to teach critically and reflectively. The paper briefly summarizes the current policy in Ireland against relevant international literature on SP. The main part of the paper analyses evidence on mentoring and assessment, and the respective roles adopted by Higher Education Institution (HEI) tutors and school-based staff, highlighting some alignments and tensions in these roles. It discusses the variability of experience and the implications for maximising the fit between theory and practice in the experience of the student teacher.

Introduction, Background Research and Irish Policy Context

The paper begins by summarising some key background literature and explaining the teacher education policy context in Ireland. It then offers a short account of the mixed empirical methods adopted for the study. The empirical analysis bearing on the mentoring and assessing of student teachers on school placement (SP) is presented under a number of related themes as follows:

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- Overview: Time on SP, Number of Lessons Taught, Tutor Visits, Feedback Templates
- Critical Reflection and Observation
- Opportunities to Observe Teachers Teach
- Variation in HEI Tutor and CT Feedback and Sources of Support
- Student Teacher Progress and Grading: Roles of HEI Tutor and Co-Operating Teacher
- Role of Co-Operating Teacher in Grading.

The Conclusion to the paper summarises the main messages and, crucially, draws out some important implications for future reforms and practice.

For many decades, there have been concerns about the lack of alignment of school placement (SP) with its college-based component (e.g. Bullough and Gitlin, 2010; Calvo and Wood, 2014) with higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking in various ways to obtain the best fit across both elements. The research of Cochran-Smith (2005), Zeichner (2010), Menter et al (2010), and Bain (2017) is illustrative of various perspectives and practices designed to integrate theory and practice. Fundamental across the literature is the idea that schools are not just settings where student teachers do their teaching practice or places where the theory, learned elsewhere, can be applied, but rather that the school itself is a setting for theory building, for understanding practice, for learning about curriculum, assessment, learning, and pedagogy through working with a range of students and adults (Clarke et al, 2014). This is a view that recognises that student teacher learning is not just an individual enterprise but is distributed across the school and HEI communities. Thus, the school itself is perceived as a professional learning community (Stoll, 2010) where student teachers learn by participating in all activities associated with it: teaching in classrooms, observing others teach, participating in staff meetings and being involved in meetings with parents about learners' progress, to name but some.

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in work on professional learning and distributed learning, captured in the view that knowledge of how learning happens, regardless of level, context or age of learner suggests that learners need guidance on how best to participate, interpret and use their experience which in turn implies having the opportunity to reflect on those experiences, to discuss them with more knowledgeable others as well as share with peers (e.g. Eraut, 2007, Boud et al., 2009). Darling-Hammond (2006) is among many researchers who has shown through empirical evidence that linking practicum experiences with ‘on campus’ or HEI-based work is a most powerful and effective way of preparing student teachers to teach. Similarly, Murray and Passy (2014, 502) note how SP is not just about ‘immersion in classrooms with knowledge of how to teach positioned as easy to acquire through fundamentally apprenticeship modes of training’. The notion emphasised by these authors of the student teacher as learner as well as teacher while on SP might seem an obvious and taken for granted principle but how that gets enacted in practice is far from straightforward.

While it has long been recognized that teaching is a complex activity, the changing and more diverse population of learners alongside the constant demand for higher standards gave impetus to the need to scrutinize how teachers in Ireland are prepared for their professional roles. Ireland is not unique in attending more critically than in the past to teacher education. Attention is being paid to policies and practices in countries that on various quality metrics are achieving very well. For instance, the emphasis in Finland on teacher professional knowledge and professional decision-making, on the high level of teacher training at the initial stage, trust in teachers, and sense of collegial professionalism (Sahlberg, 2011) was influential in shaping some of the reforms that occurred in Ireland. As the statutory body charged with regulating teaching as a profession in Ireland, the Teaching Council established a *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (updated 2016) which includes standards of teaching knowledge, skill and competence. In 2011, the Council set out expectations on the knowledge, skills and competences that STs should acquire on their initial teacher

education (ITE) programmes. This was the first time in Ireland that expectations were defined at national level. All ITE programmes now go through a rigorous professional accreditation process.

Three policy documents on the requirements for SP are especially noteworthy: *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Teaching Council, 2011a); *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* published (Teaching Council, 2011b); and, *Guidelines on School Placement* published in 2013 as an addendum to the *Criteria and Guidelines* (Teaching Council, 2013). Over the past six years, all programmes of ITE were required to extend the period of teacher education. All concurrent (undergraduate) programmes of ITE, must be a minimum of four years' duration and all consecutive (postgraduate) programmes of ITE must be of two years' duration. Since 2012/2013, all undergraduate programmes are four or five years in duration, and from September 2014, all postgraduate programmes have been of two years in duration.

Along with the extended duration of ITE is the nature of the educational experience itself. A key principle of the new provision across all programmes is the closer integration, than previously, of theory and practice and in this regard the SP element of the redesigned programmes is central. It is for this reason that this paper focusses on the matter of SP. Typically, a student teacher on an undergraduate programme spends about 24 weeks on SP. A student on a two-year postgraduate programme spends 30 weeks of that programme in schools. All programmes are required to include at least one block placement for a minimum of ten weeks. Experienced teachers are encouraged to serve as co-operating teachers (CTs) and school-HEI partnerships are essential to this agenda. Both the CT and the HEI tutor are expected to collaborate and share expertise in fostering the ST's learning. An important requirement in the new arrangement is that STs have the opportunity to observe experienced teachers teaching and to have opportunities to discuss their observations with CTs, HEI tutors and fellow students. The nomenclature itself – 'school placement' - replaces 'teaching practice' thus emphasising the need for STs to gain an

understanding and experience of the wider culture and practices in a school. A more broadly based experience is thus expected beyond direct teaching. The scale of the changes and new initiatives in teacher education in Ireland has been very significant and has been described in at least one study as ‘unprecedented’ (Harford and O’Doherty, 2016).

Methods/Data Sources

The evidence base for the overall longitudinal study derives from two rounds of fieldwork with student teachers, HEI tutors, and school-based staff. The study adopted a mixed methods design with quantitative and qualitative dimensions along with documentary evidence seeking to evaluate how the new arrangements were bedding down in practice. It is based in six different HEIs in Ireland that provide a variety of ITE programmes. These constituted the case study sites for the work. Fieldwork took place in both primary (Prim) and post-primary (PP) undergraduate (e.g. Bachelor of Education, BEd) and postgraduate programmes (e.g. Professional Master of Education, PME). Student teachers, HEI staff and school staff associated with these programmes were surveyed through questionnaires and interviews to establish their views and experiences over the first few years of the new policy.

The study spanned three years of data gathering over two major rounds of fieldwork in the chosen sites. The following numbers summarise the scale of interview evidence over two rounds of data gathering respectively which sought to capture a longitudinal element in the study: 51(R1) + 36 (R2) HEI tutors; 95(R1) + 67(R2) student teachers; 36 (R1) + 28 (R2) co-operating teachers; and 11 (R1) + 10 (R2) principals. In addition, the scale of questionnaire data in both rounds respectively was: 112 (R1) + 80 (R2) HEI tutors; 235 (R1) + 410 (R2) student teachers; and 17 (R1) + 50 (R2) co-operating teachers. SPSS was used to support the management and statistical analysis of the questionnaire data while interview data were transcribed and analytically themed, seeking to track the practices and experiences of the target groups.

The focus of evidence in this paper is on mentoring and assessment of student teacher (ST) and the twin roles of HEI tutors and CTs at school level. Among the questions addressed are: What elements of practice are focused on in observing and evaluating STs' teaching and in offering them feedback? What are the opportunities for student teachers to observe teaching? What are the sources of feedback for the ST? To what extent do CTs observe and offer guidance? How does the feedback from the HEI and the school align? What is the balance between feedback/formative assessment and the more formal summative assessment that results in a grade? How, in sum, are theoretical aspects of teacher education married up with the practical dimension?

As noted in the beginning of the introduction, the next sections present the main themes and findings of the study.

Overview: Time on SP, Number of Lessons Taught, Tutor Visits, Feedback Templates

This first empirical section describes some of the basic aspects of SP as a foundation for an examination of the more complex elements later in the paper. Table 1 offers an overview of the number of weeks in total that STs spend on SP during their programme of ITE. It also indicates the number of lessons they are expected to teach on their extended placement along with the number of visits from their HEI tutors on that extended placement.

All STs have an extended placement in the second half of their programme with varying but shorter periods of SP throughout the programme up to then. It does not follow that they are in the same classroom for all the time on their extended SP, although generally they are in the same school over the block. It is a continuous placement with the opportunity to build working relations with learners. There are educational / professional reasons for not being in the same classroom for the entire extended SP as well as practical aspects to do with not imposing too much on any one teacher's class.

Table 1: Time on SP, Number of Lessons and HEI Tutor Visits

Cases/Sites	Time in School in each year of programme (slight variation in totals due to observation days, school visits for planning)	No. of lessons STs are expected to teach on extended SP	No. of visits from HEI tutors on extended SP
Site A (Prim) Y1 BEd Y2 BEd Y3 BEd Y4 BEd	3 weeks 6 weeks 0 weeks 12 weeks (+2 weeks assisting in Infants while planning cross school/curricular work)	Teach all day	Min. 4
Site B (Prim) Y1 BEd Y2 BEd Y3 BEd Y4 BEd	6 observation days and 3 weeks SP 2 weeks' school experience and 3 weeks' SP 6 weeks (2 blocks of 3 weeks) 10 weeks	Teach all day	Min. 4
Site C (Prim) Y1 BEd Y2 BEd Y3 BEd Y4 BEd PME Y1 PME2	Additional school visits/assisting, planning 3 weeks 15 school days 15 school days 10 weeks 6 weeks + 9 days in Sem1 10 weeks + days for visits	Teach all day Teach all day	Min. 4
Site D (PP) Y1 BA Y2 BA Y3 BA Y4 BA	3 weeks' observation in primary school+ Jan-March(incl.) 2 hrs per week pp school 8 weeks (pair/team teaching) 15 classes in main subject+2 classes per week in resource support setting 11 weeks (individual/independent)	Range of levels 12-15 lessons pw	Min. 3 and 50% of STs have 4 visits in Y4
Site E (PP) Y1 BEd Y2 BEd Y3 BEd Y4 BEd Y5 BEd	3 weeks, 2 subjs; junior cycle 4 weeks, 2 subjs, junior cycle 4 weeks, 2 subjs, senior focus 4 weeks in non-mainstream e.g. PLC/FE 10 weeks, 2 subjects, all levels	10 hrs (under review)	Min 3 but almost half get 4 visits in Y5
Site F (PP) Y1 PME Y2 PME	2 days per week all year 3 days per week all year	6 per week 9-10 pw Y2	6 in Y1 4 in Y2, one with 2 tutors

While most of our case study sites operate an extended placement whereby STs are in the same school for its duration, site F's post-primary PME is different in that its structure requires students to be in the same school throughout the year for three days per week in the second year (and two days per week in the first year) while the remaining two days of the second year are spent on HEI-based work. Over the period of their programme, students in both primary and post-primary, have the opportunity to teach at all levels, from infants to upper primary in the case of primary STs, and from junior through senior classes in the case of post-primary students.

The majority of students receive a minimum of 4 visits over the period of their extended, final SP, whether on primary or post-primary programmes and all students are observed a minimum of 3 times. Students who are struggling get additional visits and a moderation process means that samples of students on all programmes have additional visits beyond the regular ones. All students have a visit from at least two different tutors on their final SP. Individual HEI tutors have between 8 and 10 students so over a 10-week block this would involve between 32 and 40 visits to schools before counting any moderation visits.

HEI tutors use templates listing all the features deemed important to being an effective teacher. These are detailed in Student Handbooks and while the wording and level of detail varies somewhat across handbooks for different stages of the ST's training and on different programmes, all converge in attending to the elements listed below. These are the aspects that form the basis of feedback in discussions with STs about performance:

- what the pupils are learning and how they are learning it;
- working relationships with learners;
- actual evidence of children's learning and ST ability to comment on this;
- the ST's presence;
- planning (short and long term) including cohesion and progression in plans, lesson notes, file;

- suitability of objectives, learning outcomes;
- differentiation and inclusion and extent to which STs facilitate the participation of all learners;
- organisational issues;
- classroom management and safety;
- formative assessment of pupils;
- communication skills;
- subject knowledge;
- confidence;
- STs' own written evaluations of their lessons; and,
- responses to earlier tutor feedback.

Critical Reflection and Observation

A key element of the extended programmes is that it should facilitate 'an increased emphasis on portfolio work, reflective practice and research/inquiry-based learning (Teaching Council, 2011, 17) and STs are expected to have opportunities to learn to 'engage in data gathering' and learn 'to critically analyse and evaluate relevant knowledge and research' (25). The SP is expected to provide opportunities to 'integrate theory and practice' as well as opportunities 'to reflect critically on their practice' (13). The Teaching Council expects STs to 'conduct and apply relevant research' (25). The notion of reflective practice and a general research/inquiry stance permeates the discourse of the HEI tutors interviewed and is undoubtedly a fundamental feature of ITE in Ireland. It is evident in all the programme handbooks, in the planning and evaluation files of students, and in the feedback and assessment given to students about their practice. It begins early in the ST's life on the programme with a strong initial emphasis on students discussing their own learning processes, their histories as learners and their past experiences of schooling, leading them to reflect on and understand the kind of teacher they wish to become. The emphasis on reflection progresses over time to incorporate exploration of their own practice on SP in the context of set readings, specified themes (e.g. inclusion), policy statements (e.g. syllabus in a particular subject area), lectures on what constitutes

best practice in an area (e.g. teaching poetry) and especially in the context of their ongoing individual experience of being on SP. Throughout, it is clear that the notion of reflection that is promoted is one that is not about being critical in a negative sense of poor practice they may observe or have experienced, but rather of trying to understand what shapes practice, what can be changed and enhanced, and what the assumptions are underlying their own and others' practices. Thus, the overall thrust of reflection, as students develop over their programme, is towards making beliefs and attitudes visible in order to understand what influences practice and their own evolving identities as teachers.

According to HEI tutors, STs find reflection challenging and this is confirmed by the evidence from students themselves. Students are often reluctant to move beyond the task-oriented practicality of planning lessons, making and organising resources, organising activities, especially when their reflections are expected to be written up and incorporated into planning files for tutors to read. For some students this is seen as 'extra work' on top of an already busy schedule, thus it is not viewed as something that is an essential part of being a teacher. The following quotes typify the value HEI tutors place on reflection, their approach to its promotion, and how students find reflection a challenge:

Some feel you are adding to their very heavy workload and they do find all the reflection hard to grasp but for us it is integrated into the entire programme and runs across everything. (PP tutor)

For STs it is the biggest challenge – it is so vital; you cannot progress as a teacher unless you think about what you did / why, what went well – look back on it. (P tutor)

Interviewees talked about how they support STs to be reflective and how they seek to overcome the difficulties students experience in relation to reflection and self-evaluation of their practice:

It is difficult because they are reflecting after the event, they feel they are doing these reflective exercises for us rather than for their own developing competence ... There is good potential in video

material and we use that a lot, OK it's not in real time, not immediate reflection but it helps interrogate practice more. The same for micro teaching which is great because you can stop it; why did you do that ... what else could you do, have you seen somebody else do ... (PP tutor)

Students keep a reflective journal / portfolio – we start the notion of reflection in first year – this is guided and supported a lot around their own past experiences and they gradually move into more a critical phase. We give lots of support towards critical reflection in the third and fourth years... Students find it difficult. (P tutor)

Reflection is promoted by the HEI tutor in a way that supports the integration of theory and practice and is designed to provide students with the professional discourse necessary to talk about and analyse practice. In this respect the role of observation itself is a vehicle for this as the following extended quotation indicates:

We have a placement where they go out and observe, they don't teach, it's just observational training based and they come back and do reflections with the tutors in tutorials. Imagine the type of teacher you want to be and critically write about what you're learning about it in educational psychology and the sociology of education. Use the language, use the terminology to describe the type of teacher you want to be and that as a stepping stone to then move into the reflection side of it which is I'm out teaching...How am I doing things. It gives them a sense of technical language, educational language, not colloquial language.

The HEI tutor is the primary source of guidance on being critically reflective and becoming a reflective practitioner. Co-operating teachers tend to see critical reflection in the context of discussions about aspects of lessons that went well and not so well and were generally reluctant to claim that they supported students in evaluation and reflection. As one primary CT said: 'It doesn't really happen with the STs and me, I would not sit down and do that (critical reflection) with them it would be fairly superficial'. Tutors are conscious of the need for CTs to have training in how best to

support students in this respect. One post-primary Director of SP¹ perceived that that aspect of the CT role ‘has not advanced in the last 3 years’ saying how ‘it’s very patchy’ and not viewed by CTs as part of their role.

Opportunities to Observe Teachers Teach

The opportunity to observe teaching is given strong emphasis in the new policy and has for some time been recognised in ITE as an important dimension of professional learning. In the past, the observation of teachers teaching was not always a feasible aspect of practice for various reasons, especially at post-primary level in Ireland. The majority of students surveyed and interviewed reported that they had some opportunity to observe teachers teach and the vast majority believe it is a good idea for student teachers to have a period of observation of teaching (see Table 2). Our evidence shows that 87% and 66% respectively of primary and post-primary teachers observed a CT teach in the first student survey we conducted, resulting in three-quarters of all students reporting this opportunity. The overall percentage increased by the round two survey to 91%, suggesting greater acceptance and importance being attributed to observation on the part of schools and also a greater willingness on the part of CTs to engage in the process. On all elements of observation listed in Table 2, primary student teachers had more opportunity to observe (and be observed) and were also more positive in their views about its merits. Of note, 10% of post-primary questionnaire respondents disagree with the statement that it is a good idea to observe classroom teaching.

A further dimension of allowing observation is the opportunity to team-teach with a CT. A substantial number (72%) of primary STs believe it is a good idea to team-teach with their CT but the

¹ The Director of School Placement generally oversees the entire placement process and has responsibility for liaising with schools and ensuring students have appropriate HEI tutor support. The Director of SP in the HEI has overall responsibility for the organisation of SP at programme level.

corresponding figure for post-primary students is 43% with over one-third of post-primary student teachers disagreeing that it is a good idea to team-teach with their CT. A related question in our questionnaire survey asked respondents to say whether or not they had the opportunity to team-teach with ‘another person’ i.e. CT or ST.

Table 2: STs Observing Classroom Teaching

	Primary Students R1(R2)	PP Students R1(R2)	Total R1(R2)
% of STs reporting that they observed their CT teacher	87 (99)	66 (79)	75 (91)
% of STs reporting that it is a good idea to have a period of observation of teaching on SP	100 (99)	85 (89)	92 (95)
% of STs reporting that they received guidance on how to observe	88 (89)	77 (94)	83 (90)
% of STs who believe it is a good idea to team-teach with CT	72 (79)	43 (47)	57 (67)
% of STs who had the opportunity to team-teach with another person i.e. CT or ST	66 (71)	53 (37)	59 (58)

N=235 (R1) N=394 (R2)

Overall the majority had such an opportunity with two-thirds of primary students and 53% of post-primary students saying they had this opportunity in the round one survey. Noteworthy is that the latter statistic reduced to 37% in the round two survey suggesting this is not a strong feature of post-primary practice.

STs, regardless of type of programme, have at least 12 to 15 hours of observation of teaching over the course of a placement period in a school. The vast majority of post-primary principals (95%, n=18) indicated that student teachers should have the opportunity to observe teachers teach, claiming that their teachers were willing to support STs in this way and on SP in general. According to our HEI tutor interviews, observation now features much more strongly that

it did in the past although it was always encouraged especially on primary programmes:

In BEd1 they would observe for one day at beginning of 3 week SP; BEd2s don't have formal observation days but they do have preliminary visits where they do observe. All students have 2 days of preliminary visits before SP. In the new programme they have a lot more observation than before.

HEI tutors see observation of teaching as vital for professional learning and they promote it enthusiastically even though they are very conscious of the fact that they cannot mandate it because ultimately they and their students are guests in the school. Tutors typically referred to the importance of focused observation where students are given guided tasks to support their observation so that their attention is drawn to such aspects as pupil/peer interaction, questioning, and resources used in lessons. In addition, observation can take place while student teachers help with a small group of pupils or an individual pupil. Tutors are aware of the possibility of students observing poor practice and rather than criticise teachers during discussion in College, the emphasis is on trying to understand practice and what happens in schools while becoming knowledgeable about what constitutes effective or 'best' practice. HEI tutors are very aware of the sensitivity and ethics surrounding students' experience of poor practice: 'we know that they're observing poor practice sometimes and what's good is that they recognise this but it requires sensitivity' (HEI tutor).

Interviews with student teachers allowed us probe in more detail than in the questionnaire what their experiences and views are in relation to observation. In interview, students themselves expressed mixed views about observation with about half of those interviewed saying they would value yet more opportunities for observation. As one first year PP PME student put it, 'I would have liked to observe my class teacher a lot more to learn from their teaching methods and management style'. Indicative of the findings in Table 2, not all students valued observation sufficiently and it may be that some teachers and principals under-estimate the potential of observation

for student teacher learning. The following two quotes from final year post-primary students on a concurrent programme are telling, even though they reflect a minority view:

We were observing teaching for 2 weeks at start of the SP but my Principal said it was better to start teaching straight away.

We had the option to observe and I chose not to... We were there for a few days at school meetings so we knew things. I had done it (observation) before in year 2. So nothing had changed in two years so it was easy to fit in. It would be a waste of time as I observed those teachers before when I was there. I observed all the different teachers in all the different disciplines which was great, to see all the different subjects and how they were taught.... All students were aware I was at the back of the room and a student and I didn't feel it was worth it. I'd learn more by teaching myself.

In primary programmes, our evidence suggests that observation of teaching would appear to also occur in the course of the student's own teaching practice insofar as the CT typically teaches some classes and the student observes and makes notes. Thus, this aspect of observation is more informal, opportunistic and *ad hoc* whereas the more formal specified type of observation occurs at pre-set periods and usually involves some note-taking and written commentary that is part of the student's teaching file and as such woven into reflection. It is clear that students appreciate the learning that accrues from observation but a significant minority of STs appear to place low value on it. Where observation was focused, task-oriented and linked to activities set by the HEI, then its learning potential was maximized and better appreciated.

Variation in HEI Tutor and CT Feedback and Sources of Support

The variation in ST experience in relation to their CT is a theme that featured strongly in our diverse data banks. The main reason for the difference between the nature of the feedback given by the HEI

tutor and the CT was articulated well by one ST interviewee and resonated with the thrust of our evidence overall: ‘the HEI tutor focuses more on us and our learning whereas the CT focuses more on the learners in the class. College attends to me as a learner-teacher and my impact on the students and their learning’. We highlight this point because it seems to be an explanatory factor in understanding the roles and responsibilities of the CT and HEI tutor. Entirely in line with the international literature on the relative roles of HEI tutors and mentors/CTs (e.g. Clarke et al, 2014), STs report that the HEI tutors are more attuned to the student teachers' concerns in supporting the process of professional development whilst the CT deals with more immediate practical aspects such as classroom routines, particular children and their special needs, and specific curriculum areas to be covered by a certain period.

Student teachers received detailed written feedback from their HEI tutors about which they feel highly positive. The general finding is that HEI tutors ‘comment on everything’ and ‘go into detail on every aspect’. As one post-primary ST focus group agreed: ‘my tutor reads every single word in the file, nothing escapes her’. The following quote, along with reflecting the experience of very many STs, exemplifies good practice on the part of the HEI support system:

My HEI tutor is much more in-depth-than my CT, she dissects everything and feedback is fantastic. She looks at my lesson plan and asks did I meet all the criteria... And she identifies things I should do to build up my skills in the next lesson so I can turn out really good lessons where the children are engaged. My CT is more looking at what I was just doing, whereas my HEI tutor is constantly dissecting my learning. My CT only comments on classroom management and didn't talk at all about the content I was teaching but my HEI tutor was talking a lot and commenting a lot on my content and how I was doing it. I got great advice.

And another student noted:

Feedback from my CT is less formal like ‘that is really good’, whereas the HEI tutor is much more specific; they deal with

subject content, concrete examples. What was really good in minute detail and what you need to do to improve. The HEI tutor sees you as a learner. . .

The quantitative evidence in Tables 3 and 4 extends the evidence base from the qualitative dimension, confirming the importance of feedback from a variety of sources. Overall, STs talk to and get guidance from a range of people about their SP, from their HEI tutor and CT through to peers and other teachers in their placement school. The Tables show how the HEI tutor is the primary source of feedback to the student teacher although it is noteworthy that the role of the CT is especially important in relation to guidance on planning and the vast majority of STs reported having conversations with their CTs about their progress. A minority of STs reported being observed and getting feedback from School Principals, with the incidence of this lower at post-primary level. It is noteworthy that ‘other teachers’ beyond the CT are more relevant for the post-primary ST with 69% saying they get guidance on planning from this source in the round one survey though this falls to one-fifth in the second survey. A significant number (72%) of STs said they get guidance on teaching and learning from ‘other teachers’ in the first survey, though again, the corresponding statistic falls to 9% in the second ST survey.

Table 4 also shows some differences across the experiences of STs at primary and post-primary level in both rounds of questionnaire surveys. The main difference, which is statistically significant, is the incidence of CT feedback on the quality of teaching of the ST. In both rounds of fieldwork, primary teachers appear to be much more likely to get feedback from their CTs than their post-primary counterparts. Unsurprisingly, related to this is that the same pattern applies to being observed by the CT, with a greater incidence of observation of primary students in evidence. However, as noted, the majority of respondents, regardless of sector, reported having some dialogue with their CT about their progress in both rounds of questionnaire surveys.

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Table 3: Sources of Feedback to the ST by Primary and Post-primary in Round 1 (R1) and 2 (R2) Fieldwork

	Source	Primary Students %R1 % (R2)	PP Students %R1 % (R2)
STs reporting they receive feedback on the quality of their teaching from:	HEI tutor	100 (71)	91 (85)
	CT	62 (73)	43 (42)
	School Principal	26 (12)	23 (9)
STs saying that they are observed by the:	HEI tutor	96 (100)	90 (100)
	CT	82 (97)	37 (60)
	School Principal	13 (34)	14 (10)
STs saying they get guidance on teaching and learning from:	HEI tutor	96 (67)	86 (80)
	CT	74 (68)	73 (38)
	Other Teachers	32 (12)	72 (9)
STs saying they get guidance on planning from:	HEI tutor	79 (51)	77 (69)
	CT	79 (73)	70 (52)
	Other Teachers	32 (13)	69 (20)
	Principal	22 (12)	24 (11)
STs saying they have conversations about their progress with:	HEI tutor	65 (98)	47 (94)
	CT	60 (93)	63 (85)
	School Principal	27 (78)	30 (69)

Table 4: Guidance on how to teach by primary and post-primary (round 2)

	N	HEI Tutor		Other teachers		Co-op teacher	
		Yes %	P	Yes %	p	Yes %	p
Class Management/Discipline							
Primary	234	45	NS	17	P< 0.001 ***	87	P< 0.001 ***
Post-primary	149	50		46		68	
Total	383	47		28		79	
Working with other colleagues							
Primary	235	32	NS	33	NS	43	NS
Post-primary	149	36		37		44	
Total	384	34		35		43	
The quality of my teaching							
Primary	233	72	P=0.002 **	10.	NS	73	P < 0.001 ***
Post-primary	149	85		8		42	
Total	382	77		9		61	
School/classroom planning							
Primary	234	51	P < 0.001 ***	13	NS	73	P < 0.001 ***
Post-primary	149	69		20		52	
Total	383	58		16		65	
My teaching and learning							
Primary	234	67	P < 0.007 **	12	NS	68	P < 0.001 ***
Post-primary	149	80		9		38	
Total	383	72		11		56	

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Table 4 (continued): Guidance on how to teach by primary and post-primary (round 2)

	N	HEI Tutor		Other teachers		Co-op teacher	
		Yes %	P	Yes %	p	Yes %	p
Assessing learners							
Primary	234	62	NS	6	P = 0.002 **	57	NS
Post-primary	149	65		17		51	
Total	383	63		10		55	
My professional portfolio							
Primary	234	75	NS	3	NS	14	P = 0.044 *
Post-primary	149	76		1		7	
Total	383	75		2		12	
Critical reflection of practice							
Primary	234	85	NS	3	NS	30	P = 0.010 **
Post-primary	149	87		4		18	
Total	383	86		4		25	
Discipline Issues							
Primary	226	54	NS	12	P = 0.004 **	85	P < 0.001 ***
Post-primary	145	51		24		64	
Total	371	53		17		77	

Some items were incorporated into the second ST survey that did not feature in the first one. Table 4 provides further quantitative evidence of the guidance available to STs based on their responses in the second survey. Here percentages have been rounded up to enhance readability and statistically significant differences, where they occurred between primary and post-primary, are highlighted. A significant minority of STs (34%-43%) report that they get guidance about working with other colleagues from their HEI tutors, CTs and other teachers. The vast majority get feedback on the quality of teaching from HEI tutors and CTs with primary STs reporting more input from their CTs than their post-primary counterparts. This bears out STs' experience as reported in interviews. The CTs associated with primary STs tend to be in the classroom almost all the time while the ST is teaching. That varies more for post-primary STs, the latter CTs tending to be involved in other work elsewhere in the school and not necessarily always in the classroom. However, when it comes to guidance on how to assess learners, there is no difference between primary and post-primary with over half the STs surveyed in each case saying they receive guidance from their CT about this.

In line with the international literature about the role of the HEI tutor in the promotion of reflective practice and research, STs in our survey depend primarily on their HEI tutor for guidance on developing professional portfolios/files and critical reflection and this is so regardless of sector. Once again insofar as there is a sector difference, primary CTs tend to play a greater role in this than their post-primary colleagues. Table 4 again confirms the importance of CTs in offering guidance on discipline/classroom management issues for STs and once again there is a significant difference by sector with the primary CT more involved.

As already noted the incidence and nature of feedback from CTs varied much more than in the case of the HEI tutor. This variation was particularly evident in post-primary programmes where perhaps the tradition of class teacher presence/involvement was

relatively more limited. However, STs also referred to what they perceive as variation in the feedback they get from HEI tutors. In interviews with STs there was much commentary about getting ‘conflicting advice’ from tutors and this is a concern to them and is perceived as a matter of equity. In one case students spoke passionately about their wish not to have one particular HEI tutor as their SP tutor since that tutor is perceived as ‘harsh’, ‘confrontational’ and ‘far too demanding’. As a result of agreement in the focus group expressing this view, they put forward the view that STs would welcome greater standardisation in how HEI tutors interpret observed practice.

The evidence overall points to the significance of the HEI tutor’s role in feeding back to the ST accounts of how they can continue to make progress as a teacher. However, it is important to note the additional significance of the CT role and feedback revealed in the above Tables and in the qualitative interviews. Bearing in mind the international literature again, this profile of involvement in feedback is what we might expect. Mindful too of the still very early stage at which the language and role of ‘co-operating teacher’ exists in ITE policy in Ireland it would appear that the CT is already playing an important role in the support of the ST. The greater variation in the nature of the input of the CT is to be expected given the diversity of practices in schools and the variation in the extent to which CTs are available and willing to take on the task.

ST Progress and Grading: Roles of HEI Tutor and CT

This theme is part of school-HEI partnership in developing the ST and we consider it in the context the ST’s progress in learning. We asked our participant HEI tutors to tell us about their engagement and conversations with CTs (and principals) about the student teacher’s progress. Most said they would seek to meet the CT when they visit the school though it is not always possible, especially at post-primary level, as the CT may be involved in other duties and not be available. On being asked about the nature of the conversations, a common response at post-primary level was the

following: ‘It’s very light actually unless there is an issue. If the CT has engaged with the student, then the conversation can be deep but often that’s not the case’ (PP HEI tutor). Another common response was the following: ‘it is very important to get the perspective of the CT, if they are willing to give it. It’s not necessarily about assessment in the case of the CT. We need assessment but the CT has a vital role - often a student will listen to a CT more than someone who is assessing them’ (Primary HEI tutor). In general, the phrase ‘hit and miss’ seems to capture the communication between HEI tutor and CT during visits at post-primary level, as suggested by this post-primary tutor:

I’ve met principals, I’ve met teachers who’ve just come up to me, oh, are you supervising this student, I just want to say he or she is excellent and they give me all the feedback. That’s for students that are excellent, you know, but sometimes the teachers, the co-operating teachers really want to pass that information on. But it’s a bit hit and miss with the co-operating teacher, I have to say. They might be in class. I might have met the principal one time, the deputy principal the next time. I’m always trying to make the connection but, you know, without disturbing their routines, they’re very busy people, but it is a bit hit and miss.

All HEI tutor interviewees, regardless of sector, said that where possible they would speak with the CT when visiting their students. And this is a point that many said was different to the ‘old teaching practice days’:

Yeah and this is only a new thing like from my perspective. In the old days you would say hello teacher, goodbye teacher, that’s it and none of your business but that’s totally changed and it has to change.

One HEI tutor suggested that the relationship between the ST and CT is “generally a more benign relationship” whereas that which exists between the ST and HEI tutor is “a bit more a business relationship”, suggesting a complementarity in roles, if not clear division, between the school-based supportive role and the university-based, evaluative one.

We are not aware of any programmes in the State that do not grade SP – the main SP results are not on a pass/fail basis (like they are for instance on most programmes in England) but are graded such that the results influence the student’s degree classification. The HEI tutors we interviewed accept that practice has to be observed and eventually summatively assessed/graded in the interests of transparency and assuring the quality of the teachers who emerge from their programmes. The HEI is solely responsible for summatively assessing a ST’s performance of SP and for allocating a grade. HEI tutors do not grade individual lessons on single visits, rather they typically adopt a more holistic stance and determine a mark at the end of the SP module based on all the visits, on progression of learning against the criteria, and incorporating planning, reflection and evaluation as well as direct class teaching.

Assessment results of SP are ‘high stakes’. This is so because they are perceived by students and prospective employers as indicative of the competence of the teacher. Students themselves perceive their results in SP as hugely significant and they pay very close attention to the entire formative and summative assessment process. In the student handbooks in all our case study programmes considerable space and detail are devoted to the assessment process and students tend to be very clear on the procedures. As one Primary Director of SP told us:

Students themselves are aware of criteria from which we base our assessment, reports that we complete; college is very exact and precise and demands certain standards in those reports. We are highly organised in this, we are very professional but still, all the time, we all have the opportunity to accommodate and facilitate individuality that we constantly see in schools: classrooms, teachers, and schools as different.

Students are not graded on every single SP – as they progress through their programme and as the SP gets more extended they are graded. For instance, PME’s are mostly graded on a pass/fail basis at the end of year one but are graded at the end of year two. In our

interviews over the two rounds of fieldwork HEI tutors said that a small minority of students fail to progress because of not meeting the criteria and not making enough progress to give the HEI confidence that they could make good the gaps in their competence as NQTs. However, it is not possible to specify a particular percentage here since the approach is also one of ‘counselling some students out’ during (as opposed to at the end) of their time on the programme’. And as one tutor observed: ‘some students know themselves by Christmas that teaching is not for them and so they deselect themselves’.

There is recognition that there has to be a balance between demonstrating competence for grading purposes and getting an opportunity to experiment and extend oneself in new directions as indicated by this quote from a primary tutor:

In our second year students have a supported visit, there is no marking or grading during that SP, so they take risks, they experiment, try something out, they teach a subject – I had a student who was not comfortable with teaching Irish she said, I’m not too good at the Irish and I said let’s use this time to prepare and she did because she wasn’t concerned about the grade.

The grading of students on SP is based not only on performance in the classroom but also on their wider professional engagement which is mainly evidenced through the classroom planning, resources, reflections, evaluations, and accounts of contribution to the school which are detailed in the student’s files. The following is a typical tutor response:

They get a grade which is also based on their written evaluation, their interpretation of the feedback they get from us, it’s based on their learning; it’s based on performance, but not only performance, they have to make a lot of the feedback they get and write about that. We manage it, there is a lot of work.

It is noteworthy that assessment of performance on SP is through direct observation. Unlike other dimensions of student teacher

learning that tend to be assessed more indirectly i.e. through written assignments or perhaps timed, written examination, SP is truly a performance assessment. This means that validity is high: what is assessed is what is intended to be assessed, it is the actual, authentic performance itself that constitutes teaching and that constitutes its assessment.

Role of CT in Grading

It is clear that a key part of the evolving partnership between HEI and school bears considerably on the role of the CT in shaping the ST for the profession. While CTs offer very important guidance to the ST, it varies a great deal and it varies across sectors.

As we already pointed out above, HEI tutors are exclusively responsible for the summative assessment of students on SP. We specifically asked if CTs play any role in summative assessing or grading students and currently they have no role in allocating grades. However, in line with evidence already presented above, the vast majority of HEIs surveyed (98%) said they engage with the CTs and principals in relation to student ST progress and at least one of our cases invites CTs to complete and return a template on various aspects of the ST's contribution. There are mixed views about the merits of CTs being involved in grading. Some student teachers themselves tend to want their CT to have a greater say in grading than currently but it must be said this varies a great deal with other students resistant to this idea.

Interviews with CTs lead us to the conclusion that, while they are keen to engage with HEI tutors and offer their professional judgment on the progress of the STs in their classes, they are less enthusiastic about having a say in their actual grading, believing that this role would entail considerable additional work, would require intensive training, and interfere with the nature of the relationship they may have with the ST. HEI tutors and indeed CTs themselves recognise that the HEI and therefore the HEI tutor has the ultimate responsibility for the ITE programme and as such has

ultimate responsibility for the student's grading. Moreover, there is recognition that the HEI tutor has the benefit of the 'bigger picture' in that s/he sees a wide range of students and practices and is usually accomplished in mentoring student teachers and has the balance of theory and practice, including awareness of all the other aspects of the student's learning across the programme. This experience is recognised, by all the stakeholders, as endowing the HEI tutor with the broader and deeper comparative and 'good practice' lens that is not always available to the CT, particularly at this stage in the development of the new policy on SP. Such arguments are persuasive. However, not all HEI tutors share the view that the CT need not play a role in grading. For example, one senior HEI tutor with long experience of mentoring students on SP was of the view that CTs should be involved in grading students' performance on SP. Not unlike this view, a Principal of a large primary school said having the CT grade the ST's performance would be the ideal but how it would require considerable investment in CPD for CTs:

Perhaps teachers should be more involved. And this (grading) happens in other professions, indeed it may be the host professional only and then if there's a problem the College gets involved. Yes I think the teachers should have some role in assessment. But it's a time and resources issue. We see the students a lot more than the inspector- you might only see the student a few times. ...It's a whole package, you (i.e. the Principal) are looking at the ST everywhere in the school, the staff room and so on and checking. The CT needs to see the whole package We should be more involved in grading and have more autonomy in that ... danger is though if we got the autonomy for grading it would inevitably change the relationship you have with the student...more CPD would be needed.

However, another HEI tutor, however, expressed a different perspective:

We have to be careful about CTs being involved in grading- that would mean considerable movement for teacher as primary assessor and while in theory and in principle it looks good, the reality is it produces a huge amount of problems. It would mean

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spending too much time with teachers rather than with student teacher... if you are trying to deal with the teacher, broker the teacher into assessment, the reality is the teacher as assessor can complicate experience totally...it is difficult as it is but add teacher into this mix and it complicates the picture. I've watched it in operation where tutor from college engage / placate the teacher rather than deal with student.

The above comment was offered in the context of the difficulties often encountered in discussion about weaker students where the CT takes up the role of advocate for the student and is often reluctant to tackle more critical feedback about the student. This is a view that HEI tutors in all our case study programmes expressed and are very aware of. Cases where a ST is well known or related to staff in a school can present a set of complex issues in relation to how the ST is mentored and supported, and ultimately assessed. As one HEI tutor observed:

To give independent advice is something that I would have found is an issue and particularly because we are now asking the students to find their own SP. It takes a very brave teacher I think to come to a supervisor and say, 'I'm not happy with this student and I know she is a daughter of whoever in the staff.

On being asked about offering oral and written feedback and assessing students the typical response is that CTs are very willing to offer oral feedback on observed lessons, to support student teachers informally and formatively, rather than systematically and to a formal template. The following extract is very typical of the responses of CTs about assessment of STs in their classes. It derives from a focus group in a large school in a provincial town, a school which has a tradition of taking STs from all the HEI primary providers:

Interviewer: Oral feedback? Written? How open to written?

Interviewee: I prefer oral.. verbal feedback. The ST should expect to get oral feedback and they do; we don't want to feel we are knit picking. We shouldn't be overly judging. We don't want to be seen like we're assessing them, making their time difficult

with us. We want to feel we're on their side. We want to be seen as having a supportive role, not as an inspector, we don't want to be in inspecting role.

Interviewee: Grading is a matter entirely for the university. We have to remember that these students are our neighbours, they are our ex pupils, so grading them would be very difficult indeed.

Interviewee: It's good though to be able to talk to you guys, and you guys do ask us when you come in if there are any problems anything of concern.

Interviewee I'm happy enough as things are without having an evaluative/grading role. I would hate to have responsibility for grading. Better left with the College.

The next section summarises, draws conclusions and specifies some implications from the analyses presented in the paper.

Conclusion

STs are typically observed and get detailed feedback from their HEI tutor on all aspects of their teaching during their extended SP and all students are observed and evaluated by more than one tutor on their extended SP. Feedback and assessment are given against fairly predictable professional criteria. HEI tutor feedback tends to be very detailed, criterion-referenced, challenging, focused and bearing on professional performance including lesson planning and critical reflection and evaluation. There is considerable consistency across how HEIs formatively assess their students. Feedback is offered orally and in writing and the debrief provides for in-depth discussion and dialogue around pupil learning, and targets for the ST's own professional development. It is highly regarded by STs.

All students have some opportunity to observe teachers teach with greater opportunity for this in the primary sector. The CT guidance and feedback is more varied; it is not as 'standardised' as that of the HEI tutor since much depends on the context and especially the available expertise and time of the CT. In general, CT guidance is strong on planning, classroom management and teaching/learning and is usually informal and rarely if ever written down. It is also highly valued by STs. The CT plays an important role in the

support of the ST but there is considerable variation in that support. There are sectoral (primary/post-primary) differences with primary STs more likely to get feedback and be observed by their CT.

A key difference in the nature of feedback from the HEI tutor and the CT, apart from formality, is that the focus of the tutor is more strongly on the ST's learning whereas the primary focus of the CT is pupil learning and this partially explains the difference in orientation. HEI tutors focus on a wide range and in considerable depth on areas of professional practice and pay attention especially to reflective practice and students' own evaluations and responses to earlier feedback.

HEI tutors are exclusively responsible for grading and there is currently reluctance on the part of schools to share this responsibility but this is an area of some contestation. There is no consensus, even among HEI tutors, about the potential role of CTs in assessing/grading STs although the balance of evidence is away from such a role currently.

The evidence presented suggests that there are significant implications for the enactment of a more coherent and consistent approach nationally in relation to enhancing the integration of theory and practice for students. Training and time to support partnership working across HEIs and schools are inevitable elements in this respect.

One area that clearly remains a divide between school and HEI is that of critical reflection and research. There is much work to be done in bridging this divide with implications for the partnerships that are needed between schools and HEIs.

The issue of learning from observation and team-teaching is another potential area for development.

Yet another is the matter of variability in feedback. An inescapable implication is the need to build greater coherence across the system by providing training for CTs and in this respect there are inevitable

costs. The training of CTs is entirely under-resourced. One possibility, applied in Holland, is worth consideration in this regard: the potential for some school-based teacher educators straddling both school and HEI i.e. some teachers/teacher educators to have contracts that enable them be involved in class teaching and in ST support. Another is the potential for clustering of schools or cross-school collaboration for training as well as release time for CTs to plan and feedback with their STs, to meet with HEI tutors, and engage in some 3-way conversations with tutors and students.

HEIs are not in a position, nor do they wish to be, to oblige schools to allow their students engage in such activities as observing CTs or team-teaching yet these are vital issues impacting the learning of the ST.

The bigger point here is that there is a need for greater clarity about the role of the CT. There may be considerable merit in HEIs and schools working together on joint inquiries. If reflective practice and an inquiry stance are to be valued by student teachers, they need to see this enacted in their placement schools as part of the socialisation process. HEI tutors have a role in supporting this process and would be well placed to provide the support to schools. This could be linked to induction and ongoing teacher learning and may support the continuum of learning over the teaching career.

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