

**Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development: A Comparative
Exploration of Policy and Practice Within a Shared-Vision of School
Placement**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this is entirely my own work, and it has not been submitted as an exercise for the award of a degree at this or any other University. I agree that the library may lend or copy this dissertation on request.



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Abstract

‘Reality simply consists of different points of view.’

Margaret Atwood, 1997

Central to Initial Teacher Education programmes in Ireland is the Teaching Council requirement for all Student Teachers to engage in school-based practice, commonly described as School Placement. The Teaching Council presents Initial Teacher Education and School Placement as a first professional step for Student Teachers, whereby they are welcomed into the teaching community, have opportunities to reflect on teacher identity and become socialised into the profession (TC, 2020a). Furthermore, the Teaching Council presents a partnership approach to School Placement as one that is mutually enriching for school communities, Higher Education Institutions and Student Teachers. In this research I probed and compared the interpretations and experiences of partnership in School Placement by partners across the spectrum of teacher education: Student Teachers, School Placement Tutors, Academic Faculty, School Principals, Co-operating Teachers and Newly Qualified Teachers. I did so within the context of teacher education at primary school level. I sought to deepen my understanding, as a professional working in this space, of how partners contribute to School Placement and interpret the contributions of others. Additionally, I aimed to identify whether there exists a fit for purpose system in the Republic of Ireland (hereafter referred to as ‘Ireland’) to facilitate their roles as partners. Furthermore, I sought to develop through this comparative exploration an alternative and well-scaffolded approach to the process of bringing members of the education community together for the purposes of School Placement. My research hopefully opens the gateways to enable educators working in this space to acknowledge and identify existing flaws in the partnership model and to start to address them at a system level which facilitates input at different points and for varying purposes.

This research explored the experiences of partnership through School Placement in initialising a career long continuum of professional development for educators at primary

school level. The 3 Ps of Partnership, Perspectives and Professionalism/Professional Development in SP functioned as a tripartite framework, guided by linking the research questions to the Teaching Council's 3 pillars of Innovation, Integration and Improvement (TC, 2021a). In doing so, the research explored the ill-defined and variously interpreted shared- vision of School Placement as a partnership-based first step in the continuum of professional development. Policies and guidelines on School Placement present a slowly evolving ideal of a partnership model through a shared-vision (TC, 2020a, TC 2021a). However, it has been my lived professional experience that the reality on the ground has remained resolutely unchanged for many years. Within the context of Ireland, the practice of School Placement saw its most rapid and unprecedented change recently, when modifications were forced at an accelerated speed by the restraints on site-based experiences imposed during and by the COVID pandemic. As an overarching premise, this research explored how fit for purpose the partnership model of School Placement currently is, post COVID adaptations, as a mode of preparing Student Teachers for the challenges they will face in their early professional lives as Newly Qualified Teachers in a rapidly changing social context and as a first step in their continuing professional development.

In throwing the spotlight on the experience of School Placement rather than the assessment of it, the research is situated within the potentially fractious spaces of the dichotomy between the Teaching Council vision of School Placement and the perceptions and lived experiences of the partners themselves. A pragmatic, interpretivist approach was employed, guided by a social constructivist framework. An Iterative Thematic Inquiry approach to the process of review and engagement with initial themes, supported a highly reflexive level of engagement with the emerging themes. The data generated from questionnaires, focus groups, reflective accounts and semi-structured interviews was analysed primarily through narrative analysis and the development of a series of vignettes; thus preserving and focusing on the voices of the participants. This multi-layered research approach enabled me to actively acknowledge and plan for my role as an insider within the research space and the impact that role had on my interactions with the participants and interpretations of the data generated.

Four overarching themes emerged from the research: 1) the lack of clarity and agreement on the fulfilment of roles and responsibilities in School Placement, inclusive of a mis-understanding and distrust of the roles of others 2) the unfulfilled potential for School Placement to support developing professionalism and the impact of a continuum approach to professional development 3) the role of School Placement in enabling and supporting reflective practice and career decisions and finally 4) the lack of creativity and diversity in the facilitation of different aspects of School Placement. The findings indicated a need for a more embedded and systematic partnership framework if partnership is to be pursued as the route for facilitating School Placement going forward. I have proposed a staged framework, including the establishment of a Code of Conduct for Partners, a Community of Practice, the development of a Partnership Network, the creation of a Mentor and Professional Development Programme and a Review and Implementation Plan. To support this, a lexicon of common language for Partnership in School Placement should be established. A scheme of accountability to address power imbalances and how to 'be' a good partner and be verified as such will also be of value. A coherent improvement agenda focusing on the ideal of a shared-vision is proposed in my conclusion. This would hold the potential to result in a structured partnership framework with reciprocal gain to all partners.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	v
List of Figures	xv
List of Tables.....	xvi
List of Charts	xvii
List of Abbreviations.....	xviii
Chapter One: Introduction, Rationale and Research Context.....	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 The Research Questions: Innovation, Integration and Improvement	2
1.2 The Concept of Partnership	4
1.3 School Placement: An Overview	5
The Hall Report (Hall et al., 2018)	7
1.4 The Research Context	8
1.4.1 The WIL Context.....	8
1.4.2 The Professional Body Context	9
1.4.3 The Pandemic Context	10
1.4.4 Hibernia College Context.....	14
1.4.5 The Primary School Context.....	15
1.5 A Comparative Exploration: Policy, Practice and Partners	16
1.6 School Placement as Assessment, Teacher Agency and Professionalism	16
1.7 Aims of the Research and the Research Participants	17
1.8 Rationale and Background to the Research.....	18
1.8.1 Personal Educational Philosophy.....	19
1.8.2 My Professional Biography.....	20
1.9 The Chapters.....	23
1.10 Conclusion.....	25
Chapter Two: The Context Chapter	26
2.0 Introduction	26
2.1 The Rationale for a Context Chapter.....	27
2.2 The National School System	27

2.2.1 The Origins Story.....	28
2.2.2 A Brief Introduction to National Primary Schools	29
2.2.3 A Changing Landscape.....	30
2.3 Initial Teacher Education in Ireland	31
2.3.1 The Chronological Development of Primary ITE within the Education System ..	33
The 1970s: A move towards a ‘profession’	33
The 1980s - 1990s: Education Off the Agenda	35
2.3.2 The Case Studies	37
Case Study 1: The White Paper on Educational Development (1980)	37
Late 1990s - 2000s: Debate and Discord	38
Changes in the Governance of Education	39
Case Study 2: The Green Paper on Education for a Changing World (1992).....	39
Case Study 3: The White Paper on Charting our Education Future (1995)	41
Case Study 4: The Education Act (1998), Teaching Council Act (2001) and The EPSEN Act (2004)	43
Case Study 5: The European Context, The International Context and the Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications	44
2010s to Present Day: A Reform Agenda	46
The Sahlberg Report (2012)	46
The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)	47
Sahlberg 2 (2109)	47
The Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement (2023)	48
2.4 The Teaching Council	49
2.4.1 The Establishment of the Teaching Council	49
2.4.2 Structure and Composition of the Teaching Council	52
2.4.3 The Teaching Council Mandate	52
2.4.4 The Teaching Council and Professionalising Teaching	54
2.4.5 Efficacy and Power of the Teaching Council.....	55
2.4.6 The Teaching Council Codes, Guidelines and Policies	57
Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2007, Updated 2nd Edition 2016).....	57
The Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011)	58
Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (2011) ..	58

Guidance for Registered Teachers About the Use of Social Media and Electronic Communication (2023)	59
Guidelines on School Placement (2013, revised 2021a)	59
2.4.7 Missed Opportunities: Updating the Guidelines.....	61
Changing Names to Denote Changing Functions	64
Relationship with Sites of Practice	64
Efficacy and Implementation	65
2.4.8 The Teaching Council and the Status of the Student Teacher	66
Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020a)	66
2.5 Towards Partnership in School Placement	70
2.6 Conclusion.....	71
Chapter Three: The Literature Review	72
3.0 Introduction	72
3.1 The Scope of the Literature Review.....	73
3.1.1 Grey Literature and Policy Documents included in Scope	74
3.1.2 Timebound with Search Criteria.....	75
3.1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	75
3.2 The 3 Ps: Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development	78
3.3.1 Partnership	78
The Different Models of Partnership	83
Student Focused Partnership.....	83
Institutional Partnership	85
Policy-Based Partnership	87
Partnership as Interconnectivity - A 'Shared-Vision'	90
The Third Space.....	92
3.3.2 Perspectives	94
The Perspectives of Student Teachers	97
The Perspectives of the Co- operating Teachers	99
Mentoring and the Role of the CT.....	101
The Perspectives of the School Placement Tutors (SPTs)	104
The Perspectives of Teacher Educators/Academic Faculty	105
The Perspectives of Newly Qualified Teachers and Principals	106
3.3.3 Professional Development	107

The Status of Teaching as a Profession	108
The Role of the Teaching Council in Developing the Profession	109
Selection Processes and Educator Retention	111
Professional Development of the Co-operating Teacher	112
3.4 Conclusion.....	114
Chapter Four: Methodology	116
4.0 Introduction	116
4.1 Research Aims.....	116
4.2 The Research Questions.....	117
4.3 The Research Paradigm	118
4.3.1 Pragmatic, Interpretivist and Constructivist Paradigms	118
4.3.2 Social Constructivism and Iterative Thematic Inquiry	121
4.3.3 The Insider/Outsider Status	122
4.4 Iterative Thematic Inquiry.....	124
4.4.1 The Fours Stages of Iterative Thematic Inquiry	125
Stage One:	125
Stage Two:	130
Stage Three and Stage Four:.....	130
4.5 Ethical Considerations	131
4.5.1 Confidentiality	133
4.6 The Conceptual Framework for the Research	133
4.6.1 Partnership Theory	134
4.6.2 Exploring Professionalism and Perspectives.....	136
4.7 The Research Design and Research Approaches	137
4.7.1 Single Case Study with Embedded Groups: The Rationale for Case Study	138
4.8 The Participants.....	139
4.8.1 Inclusion and Exclusion	141
4.8.2 Purposive Sampling	146
4.8.3 Research Tools with Different Participant Groups	147
4.9 Research Methods	150
4.9.1 Rationale for Choosing the Research Methods	150
4.9.2 Commonalities Across the Research Methods	151
4.9.3 The Questionnaires	151

Selection of Questionnaires	151
Development and Design of the Questionnaires	152
Piloting the Questionnaire.....	157
Implementation of the Questionnaire	158
4.9.4 Semi - Structured Interviews.....	158
Selection of Semi-Structured Interviews.....	158
Development and Design of the Semi - Structured Interview	159
Implementation of Semi-Structured Interviews.....	160
4.9.5 Focus Groups	160
Selection, Development and Design of Focus Groups	160
Implementation of the Focus Groups	161
4.9. 6 Reflective Diaries: Drop Everything and Reflect (DEAR)	162
4.9.7 The Timeframe and Sequential Data Generation Process	163
4.9.8 Participant Engagement	168
4.10 Data Analysis.....	169
4.10.1 The Quantitative Analysis	169
4.10.2 The Qualitative Analysis	170
4.10.3 Narrative Analysis	170
The Researcher and the Participant in Narrative Analysis	171
4.10.4 The Grounded Theory Method.....	173
A Systematic and Replicable Coding Process: Establishing Rigour.....	173
4.10. 5 Transcribing and Coding.....	174
Phase One - Transcribing - First Review.....	174
Phase Two - Transcribing Second Review	174
Phase Three - First Cycle Coding	175
Phase Four - Second Cycle Coding.....	175
Phase Five - First Level Narrative Construction and Third Cycle Coding.....	175
Phase Six: Second Level Narrative Construction: The Vignettes	176
4.11 The Vignettes	177
4.12 Trustworthiness and Validity	179
Acknowledging the Challenges to Transparency.....	183
4.13 Reflexive Practice	183
4.14 Conclusion	184

Chapter 5 The Findings: Part One: The Characters and Narrators	185
5.0 Introduction	185
5.1 The Role of School Placement in the Continuum of Professional Development: Happily Ever After?.....	186
5.1.1 Supporting Developing Professionalism Through SP	187
The Continuum: A Guided Journey but who is the Guide?	193
5.1.2 Reflective Practices in SP Guiding Career Decisions.....	194
Reflection and Self -Conceptualisation	196
5.1.3 Encouraging and Facilitating Creativity and Diversity in Teacher Identity Through SP.....	197
5.2 Setting the Scene: Our Story Begins	198
5.2.1 Partnership: Part of the Environment or Part of the Language?	200
5.2.2 Partnership: The Ideal or the Reality: Student Teachers and Academic Faculty	203
5.2.3 Opportunities for Agency through School Placement Partnerships	206
5.2.4 School Placement: An Agile Model? The Pandemic	206
5.3 The Characters in School Placement	207
5.3.1 Perspectives: The ‘Others’ in SP	208
5.3.2 Key, Secondary and Minor Characters.....	209
5.3.3 A Complex Character Emerges	210
5.4 Meet the.... ..	213
5.4.1 Meet the Academic Faculty	214
The Perceived Value	215
The College Context of AF.....	216
The Academic Faculty Continuum	217
5.4.2 Meet the School Placement Tutors	220
The Perceived Value	220
The College Context of the SPTs	224
The School Placement Tutor Continuum	224
5.4.3 Meet the Student Teachers	226
The Perceived Value	226
The College Context and ST Continuum	227
A Homogenous Group and Diversity Constraints	228
5.4.4 Meet the Co-operating Teachers	231

The Perceived Value.....	231
The College Context of CTs	233
The Co-operating Teacher Continuum	234
5.4.5 Meet the School Principals	235
5.4.6 Meet the Newly Qualified Teachers - The Perceived Value	236
5.5 Conclusion.....	238
Chapter Six: The Findings: Part Two: The Story of Partnership in School Placement: The Vignettes	239
Part A: The Traditional Triad Partners	239
Chapter One: The Student Teacher	240
Robyn: The Strongest Will Survive	240
Chapter Two: The School Placement Tutor	242
Penny: The Big Bad Wolf and the Woodcutter	242
Chapter Three: The Co-operating Teacher	244
Cian: A Complex Character.....	244
Chapter Four: Summary of the Traditional School Placement Triad	246
Part B: The Partnership Triad	250
Oisín and Hannah	250
Chapter Five: The School Principal.....	251
Luna: A Busy Professional.....	251
Chapter Six: The Newly Qualified Teacher	253
Tadhg: Looking Back and Looking Forward	253
Chapter Seven: The Academic Faculty.....	255
Oisín: Partnership As Flawed	255
Hannah: All Going in the Same Direction.....	258
Chapter Eight: Summary of the Partnership Triad	260
Act One	262
Act Two	262
Act Three.....	263
Act Four	264
Overview.....	264
Epilogue and Conclusion	265
Chapter Seven: Discussion.....	266

7.0 Introduction	266
7.1 School Placement as Working Integrated Learning	266
7.3 A Summary of the Key Findings to Inform Discussion and Themes	268
7.4 An Informal Model of School Placement-Struggling to Meet Changing Needs	272
7.5 An Inconsistent Model of School Placement	273
7.5.1 Collaborative Practices Across Groups	273
7.6 The Role of Policy in School Placement	274
7.7 The COVID Pandemic: A Missed Opportunity	275
7.8 The Research Questions: Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development	276
7.8.1 Partnership	276
7.8.2 Perspectives	281
The Agency of the Student Teacher	282
Agreeing a Model of Partnership Going Forward	284
7.8.3 Professional Development	285
7.9 Characters in a Story	286
7.9.1 Perceptions of Roles and Responsibilities of Characters	286
7.9.2 The Groups Paradox	288
7.9.3 The Intriguing Case of the Co -operating Teacher	288
7.9.4 The Unexplored Potential of the NQT	290
7.10 Conclusion	291
Chapter 8: The Conclusion	292
8.0 Introduction	292
8.1 My Research Journey: Implications for the Researcher	293
8.2 Implications for Informality of School Placement	295
8.3 The Alternative 3 Ps: The Implications for Process, Policy and Practice	295
8.4 Implications for Roles with School Placement	296
8.5 Implications for the Partnership Triad	297
8.6 The Four-Step Partnership Framework	298
8.6.1 Step One: The Community of Practice	300
8.6.2 Step 2: Establishing a Code of Partners in School Placement	302
8.6.3 Step 3: Partnership Network	304
8.6.4 Step 4: Mentor and Professional Development Programme	305

8.6.5 Implementation of the Framework in ITE Contexts	307
8.7 Limitations of the Research and Cultural Barriers	308
8.8 Future Research Direction.....	310
8.9 Conclusion.....	311
9. References.....	313
10. Appendices.....	357
Appendix 1: List of Policies, Guidelines and Acts	357
Appendix 2: List of Common Terminology	360
Appendix 3: Semi -Structured Interview Guide	361
Appendix 4: Focus Group Guide	364
Appendix 5: Memo Template	367
Appendix 6: Sample Completed Memo Template.....	369
Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheets	373
Appendix 8: Letter of Introduction (Pilot).....	377
Appendix 9: Consent Form.....	378
Appendix 10: Online Questionnaires.....	381
Pilot Questionnaire	381
Student Questionnaire	384
Academic Faculty Questionnaire	388
School Placement Tutor Questionnaire	392
Appendix 11: Sample of Coding Process and Key	395
Appendix 12: Storying a Vignette: Robyn	400
Appendix 13: Frequency of Use of Words to Describe Partnership.....	402
Appendix 14: Normalised Words to Describe Partnership.....	403
Top Ten Words - Partnership	404
Bottom Ten Words – Partnership.....	405
Appendix 15: Emerging Themes, Launch Pads and Sub-Categories	406

List of Figures

Figure : 1-1 The 3 Ps Partnership Framework (Casey, E., 2025)	2
Figure : 3-1 The School Placement Partners.....	73
Figure : 3-2 Student Teacher Focused Genre of Partnership Models	85
Figure : 3-3 Institutional Level Genre of Partnership Models	87
Figure : 3-4 Tensions within the Policy Model.....	90
Figure : 3-5 Shared-vision model.....	94
Figure : 3-6 Interpretations of the Role of the Co- operating Teacher	103
Figure : 4-1 The Iterative Thematic Inquiry Process.....	131
Figure : 4-2 Characteristics of Partnership and the Inhibitors (or Facilitators?)	136
Figure : 4-3 The Case Study Structure	139
Figure : 4-4 The Research Participants: Number and Data Generation	141
Figure : 4-5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Participants	145
Figure : 4-6 Steps to Mitigate Against Inaccuracies	157
Figure : 4-7 Structure of the Focus Groups	162
Figure : 4-8 The Timeframe	166
Figure : 4-9 Abridging the Narrative	175
Figure : 4-10 Narratives into Vignettes	176
Figure : 4-11 Narrative Structure of the Vignettes	177
Figure : 4-12 Detailed Narrative Structure of the Vignettes	178
Figure : 5-1 The Continuum of Professional Development	189
Figure : 5-2 Positive and Negative Use of Descriptive Words.....	203
Figure : 5-3 The Characters: Describing the ‘Other’	208
Figure : 5-4 Meet the Characters	214
Figure : 5-5 The AF Continuum: Background.....	218
Figure : 5-6 Characteristics of SPTs	223
Figure : 5-7 The SPT Continuum: Background	225
Figure : 5-8 Cohort by Geographical Location (HC Online Database Resource, 2024).....	230
Figure : 5-9 The Student Teacher Continuum	231
Figure : 5-10 The Co -operating Teacher Continuum.....	234
Figure : 6-1 Partnership in SP: The AF	265
Figure : 7-1 Partnership in School Placement-Adaption of Halvorsen Model to Include New Criteria	279
Figure : 8-1 The Four Step Partnership Framework	300
Figure : 8-2 Step One: The Community of Practice	301

List of Tables

Table : 2-1 Comparison of 2013 and 2021 Teaching Council Guidelines on SP	63
Table : 2-2 Core Elements of ITE, Céim (TC, 2020a)	67
Table : 3-1 Inclusion Criteria.....	76
Table : 3-2 Exclusion Criteria	77
Table : 3-3 Quality of Literature Assessment: Adapted from ‘Weight of Evidence’ Scale (Gough, 2007)	78
Table : 3-4 Requirements for ‘True’ Partnership (Halvorsen, 2014).....	81
Table : 4-1 Bourdeu’s Concepts of Habitus, Field and Capital	123
Table : 4-2 Tools for Addressing Potential Bias.....	123
Table : 4-3 Stage One: From Preconceptions to Launch Pads	129
Table : 4-4 Rationale for Choice of Data Generation	149
Table : 4-5 Table adapted from Roopa, S & Menta Satya, R., 2012	154
Table : 4-6 Closed and Open Questions in the Questionnaire	156
Table : 4-7 Steps and Actions in Semi-Structured Interviews.....	160
Table : 4-8 Diary Entries and Themes	163
Table : 4-9 Criteria of Trustworthiness (Adapted from Tracy, 2010)	182
Table : 7-1 True Partnership Criteria (Halvorsen, K. 2014).....	277
Table : 7-2 New Criteria for True Partnership	278
Table : 8-1 Membership of the Community of Practice	302
Table : 8-2 Proposed Structure for Code	304

List of Charts

Chart : 5-1 Raw Frequency of use of Words to Describe Partnership	201
Chart : 5-2 Normalised Words to Describe Partnership	202
Chart : 5-3 Normalised Top 10 Words.....	202
Chart : 5-4 Normalised Bottom Ten Words	203
Chart : 5-5 Best to Worst Version of Partnership: Ideal V Reality	205
Chart : 5-6 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (SPT)	212
Chart : 5-7 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (AF)	213
Chart : 5-8 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (STs)	213
Chart : 5-9 The Academic Faculty Participant Profile	219
Chart : 5-10 The School Placement Tutor Profile	226
Chart : 5-11 Cohort by Gender	229
Chart : 5-12 Participants by Geographical Location	230
Chart : 5-13 Co-operating Teacher Profile.....	233
Chart : 5-14 School Profiles: Principals	236
Chart : 5-15 School Profiles: Newly Qualified Teachers	237

List of Abbreviations

AF	Academic Faculty
ASP	Advanced School Placement
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland
B. Ed	Bachelor of Education
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Management Association
CT	Co-operating Teacher
DE	Department of Education
DEd	Doctorate of Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EU	European Union
FTP	Fitness to Practice
FtT	Fitness to Teach
GenAI	Generative Artificial Intelligence
GOI	Government of Ireland
HC	Hibernia College
HCQF	Hibernia College Quality Framework
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
H. Dip	Higher Diploma in Education
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network

ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITI	Iterative Thematic Inquiry
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCAD	National College for Art and Design
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PMEP	Professional Master of Education (Primary)
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Programme
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SoP	Site of Practice
SP	School Placement
SPT	School Placement Tutor
SPWG	School Placement Working Group
ST	Student Teacher
TA	Teacher Agency
TC	Teaching Council
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TEG	Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge
TE	Teacher Educator
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
UCD	University College Dublin
VSBL	Virtual Scenario Based Learning

Chapter One: Introduction, Rationale and Research Context

1.0 Introduction

This research explored the perspectives on partnership in School Placement (SP), across the spectrum of teacher education and through the lens of the policy-practice divide. The research setting was the Irish primary education context. Guided by Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI), the research addressed foundational, experiential and developmental aspects of SP. These included how partnership is defined and conceptualised, assumptions and values around it, spaces for innovation, relational dynamics and the potential for professional growth through SP. The Teaching Council (TC) presents Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and SP as a first professional step for Student Teachers (STs), whereby they are welcomed into the teaching community, have opportunities to reflect on teacher identity and become socialised into the profession (TC, 2020a). This research probed the multiple interpretations and experiences of partnership in SP by those identified as 'partners' across the spectrum of primary teacher education, from ST to the academic faculty (AF). In doing so, the research addressed whether current SP practices within a model defined as partnership are experienced by participants as fit for purpose and are perceived as facilitating STs in developing the professional competencies, skills, and identities that sow seeds of early professional development. The 3 Ps of Partnership, Perspectives and Professionalism in SP functioned as the tripartite framework around which the research is structured. The research highlights a need for an embedded and systematic approach to collaborating across SP, to ensure all participants can experience reciprocal gain. In the Conclusion Chapter I propose a framework designed to support a structured, scaffolded, sustainable and inclusive strategy for partnership going forward.

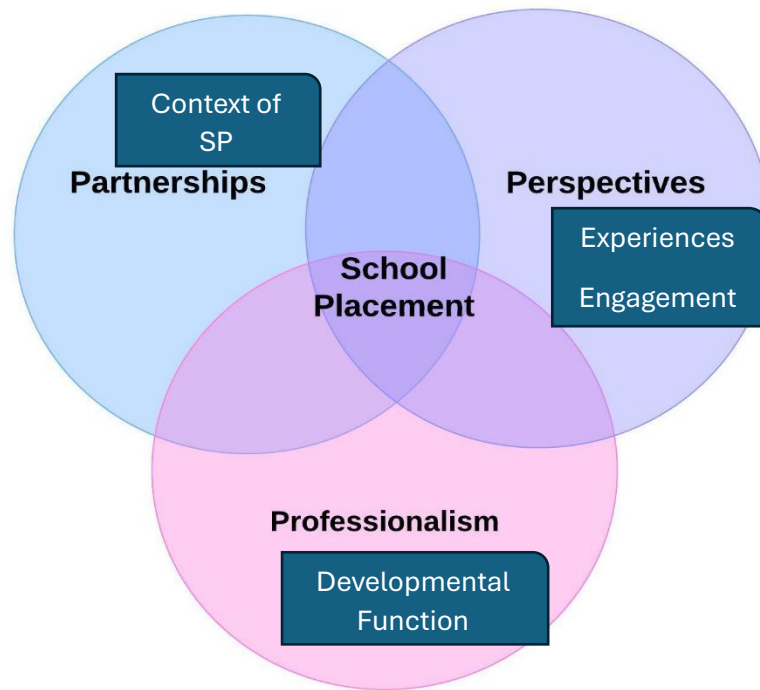


Figure : 1-1 The 3 Ps Partnership Framework (Casey, E., 2025)

1.1 The Research Questions: Innovation, Integration and Improvement

The approach taken to formulating the research questions was to connect them through the TC concept of a ‘shared-vision’ of SP through partnership (TC, 2020a). Scrutiny of this initial assumption of a unified vision was fundamental to the research. The concept of partnership was further explored through a comparison of the 3 Ps of Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development against the TC’s 3 I’s of Innovation, Integration and Improvement (TC, 2020a). The TC, in using the 3 Is to describe the continuum of teacher education, acknowledges that they have been adopted as the pillars underpinning all phases of the continuum of teacher education (TC, 2020a).

During my time working in education, at primary and ITE level, I engaged with SP from a wide variety of different professional stances along my own continuum of professional development; as a ST, Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), Co - operating Teacher

(CT), member of AF and in leadership roles. I was consequently mindful of the need to ensure that the research questions were clear, specific, and answerable (Siddaway et al., 2019) but that they were also relevant to all those participants along that continuum. While the broad scope of this study was evidently within the context of ITE and more specifically SP, and the research questions reflected this from their earliest iteration, they were not static questions but were shaped and informed by the Literature Review and Context Chapter through an iterative process of inquiry. Although research questions identify a pathway for the researcher, (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittaker, 2013) there are a multitude of alleys, tracks and trails deriving from them which need to be navigated carefully. My methodological framing of the research questions was informed by my professional and research experiences, interests and the challenges encountered throughout my engagements with SP.

This research addresses the following research questions:

- 1) **Partnership and Innovation:** Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?

An addendum to this question is 'and by whom is it defined?' I addressed the potential for partnership, the complexities around how it is interpreted by participants and how it impacts on SP to instigate or hinder innovation both in the profession and specific to SP. Accuracy was measured through an analysis of the credibility of the assumption that there is one uniformly identified, acknowledged and lived partnership model.

- 2) **Perspectives and Integration:** What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?

Understanding the diversity of perspectives of partners, how they interact with each other and how their experiences of SP impact on those perspectives, enabled an unpicking of the extent to which integration is possible across the groups of partners. It opened an exploration of how best to facilitate a more integrated

approach to SP and thus support SP in functioning as the first step in the continuum of teacher education.

- 3) **Professional Development and Improvement:** Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

The improvement of SP in its efficacy as a first step in facilitating a connected, purposeful and impactful model of professional development was investigated.

1.2 The Concept of Partnership

The concept and language of partnership are pervading presences in SP literature, theory and policy (Farrell, 2021a,b; Arhar et al., 2013; TC, 2020a, TC, 2021a). The term ‘partnership’ can be used to refer to a very wide spectrum of experiences, activities and theories (Handscomb et al., 2014). However, is partnership equally and tangibly evident in the lived experiences of participants in SP and do these ‘partners’ even self-identify as such? When the word partnership is used in relation to SP, it can vary in meaning depending on who uses it; whether site of practice (SoP), Higher Education Institute (HEI), professional body or student. Varying interpretations of partnership may also reflect distinct interpretations of SP or specific motivations shaped by the role the partner plays in the SP process. Professional identity within teaching and teacher education is linked to the level of experience of the teacher and the school context they work in (Edwards & Mutton, 2007). While partnership is associated with mutual gain, reciprocity (Martinez-Lucio & Stuart, 2002) and trust (Guest & Peccei, 2001), the word is often loosely used to describe something broadly believed to be positive and beneficial. Definitions of partnership consequently are susceptible to suffering from vagueness unless consensus is established on what partnership means, how it is practised and whether there exists a common language and tolerance for a specific interpretation (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Partnership also requires unambiguous and realisable shared aims (Terry, 2003). An unpacking of

perspectives of partners in SP of the concept and enactment of partnership sits at the heart of the research questions.

In recognition of the power of words, this research used the terms ‘partner’ and ‘participants,’ and at a later stage ‘characters’ instead of ‘stakeholder’ to avoid ambiguity around power imbalances, colonial connotations and notions from gambling of a mercenary ‘stake’ being held in the game (McGlinchey, 2022). The word ‘partner’ is not without its connotations and limitations; however, these were scrutinised through the research questions and the probing of the concept of partnership. All participants were asked whether they self-identify as partners; while the majority confirmed that they do, to varying degrees, it is noteworthy that some expressed ambiguity around the term, an ambiguity that sits at the heart of this research. While ‘participants’ could be suggested as a close enough label to include all and offend none, this is not universally applicable as not all partners were also participants in this research. Therefore, the word ‘participants’ can be used to refer to those directly involved in the research and ‘partners’ to describe the wider groups from which they were taken.

1.3 School Placement: An Overview

SP, as the putting theory into practice of teacher education programmes, functions within a space of recent overall reform of ITE in Ireland (Sahlberg Reports, 2012, 2019). While the merits of creating learning experiences of good quality for STs are widely acknowledged in the literature (McNally et al., 1997; Zeichner, 2002), it is in the details of how quality is recognised and enacted that opinions differ. Hall et al. (2018) present SP as sometimes struggling to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners while attending to growing statutory and societal requirements for higher standards in teaching. Although the reform agenda has resulted in a restructuring of ITE courses to improve reflective practice and integration of theory with practice (Coolahan, 2007), it has also raised questions as to how to best proceed with SP. These questions become pertinent in a post-pandemic context of rapid but potentially reactive changes in ITE.

Much of the literature emphasises that SP is crucial to ITE, but often neglected by HEIs in terms of innovation or creativity, putting it at risk of not meeting the needs of STs in a global, digital and post-pandemic era (Beck and Kosnik, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2023; OECD, 2021; Doyle et al., 2024). National level changes in the SP landscape include the introduction of the School Placement Working Group (SPWG), Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020a), Cosán Framework for Teachers Learning (2016) and Droichead Professional Induction Framework (2017). The revision of the SP Guidelines in 2021, discussed in the previous chapter, represents a missed opportunity to bring clarity to SP for all partners. The efficacy and potential for innovation have been hampered by a lack of clarity in the roles of key partners in SP, particularly that of the CT (Mitchell et al., 2023) and inconsistencies in SP practices across different settings (Hall et al., 2018). Suggestions for addressing these inconsistencies in SP range from establishing structures for SP to take place in centres of innovative practice, partnered with universities (Whitford & Metcalf-Turner, 1999, Beck & Kosnik, 2002) to models which promote a collaborative and team-teaching approach between the ST and the CT (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 2005) thus providing tangible benefits to both sets of partners.

One aspect of SP which has garnered increased attention and deliberate planning as part of the reform of SP is the place of research on SP. The SPWG (2019) recognises action research on SP as key to bridging the gap between research, policy and practice in order to enable these elements to directly influence and support one another. Furthermore, the Hall Report (2018), detailed below, emphasises the role of joint inquiry and research as fundamental to SP. This report describes the shared-vision of SP as incorporating an embracing of engagement with and in research by all teachers. The SP Guidelines (2021a) hold that SP provides opportunities for STs to engage in their own research, refine their own practice in the SoP and thus strengthen links between the two. Moore et al. (2023), in their paper examining the inhibiting factors on STs engaging in action research on SP, describe the TC goal to create greater collaboration across stakeholders in education (TC, 2023) as complex due to the lack of responsibility of the TC to disseminate policies

regulations and re-search. This creates a gap in implementation of research through SP due to inconsistent levels of support and engagement from SoPs.

The Hall Report (Hall et al., 2018)

It is beneficial to situate this research within the findings of the Hall Report, a piece of research into the implementation, bedding down and impact of the TC reforms commissioned by the TC. The Hall Report (Hall et al., 2018) outlines several key implications for enhancing the effectiveness and consistency of School Placement (SP) in Initial Teacher Education (ITE):

1. **Universal School Participation:** All state-funded schools should provide access to STs for placements, meeting TC requirements.
2. **Support and Training for Cooperating Teachers (CTs):** More resources are needed to train CTs in offering feedback, assessing performance, and supporting STs, especially in schools with no tradition of hosting placements.
3. **Reducing Variability:** Enhancing clarity on CT roles and responsibilities and fostering meaningful school-HEI partnerships to reduce the variation in ST experiences.
4. **Joint Inquiries and Reflective Practice:** Promoting joint inquiries between HEIs and schools to support reflective practice and continuous teacher learning.
5. **Resource Consideration:** Addressing the pressures on schools from SP requirements and encouraging better communication and collaboration between schools and HEIs.
6. **Framework Flexibility:** Revisiting the national framework to allow flexibility for specific school needs and contexts, such as encouraging team-teaching during placement blocks.
7. **Continuum of Teacher Education:** Integrating school placement with other teacher education processes like Droichead and Cosán for a coherent continuum of teacher education.

8. **Alignment with Policy:** Establishing a Working Group to align SP policy with practice, focusing on roles, responsibilities, resources, and continuous professional development (CPD).

These implications aim to foster a more integrated, supportive, and effective approach to school placements within teacher education.

1.4 The Research Context

1.4.1 The WIL Context

SP is the work integrated learning (WIL) aspect of teacher education. WIL can be defined as the act of engaging students in authentic industry or profession-based experiences to prepare them for the challenges of work, including professional socialisation (Jackson et al., 2023). Within the context of ITE this is specific to the school as the SoP.

While programme content and module design differ to some extent between ITE providers, SP is an area which has remained relatively consistent until recent times in terms of content, assessment and structure. To contextualise this statement; Donlon et al., (2020) note three key areas of SP which have undergone change in recent years:

- The requirement that Student Teachers (STs) undertake at least one extended placement (10 - week block) as part of SP
- The expectation that all STs participate in school life in a structured capacity
- A shift in language away from terms such as 'teaching practice' towards 'school placement' in order to reflect non-teaching tasks and the broader nature of school placement

However, given the high status designated to SP by students, teachers, the professional body and colleges alike, these are relatively minor changes over a long history of placement, indicative of a slow pace of change. Given the context that teachers often site SP as one of the most significant aspects of ITE (Grudnoff, 2011) and the fact that SP is viewed as playing a complex but critical role in the development of professional dispositions and career attitudes (Hanly & Heinz, 2022), the changes are underwhelming. The convening of The School Placement Working Group (SPWG) by the TC in November 2018 and the publication of reports and action plans on the implementation of SP (SPWG Report 2019, Guidelines on School Placement 2013, revised 2021a) on the surface mark a long-awaited move in the direction of a collaborative approach to SP and a nationally centralised SP system. Nonetheless, this has been hindered by several factors explored over the course of this thesis and consequently decisions regarding the structure, organisation and assessment of SP currently remain largely within the domain of the individual HEIs.

1.4.2 The Professional Body Context

The TC, as the professional standards body for the teaching profession, promotes and regulates standards in teaching. As such, it is integrally linked with SP, setting out criteria for all providers of ITE to meet in Céim (2020a) and the Guidelines on School Placement (TC, revised 2021a). However, as explored throughout this research, the vision of SP presented by the TC is open to scrutiny and not universally shared. A paucity of independent critical analysis of the TC and the existence of a significant body of research on SP commissioned by the TC, has resulted in an inertia in activating change in the system of SP. Engagement with TC policies on SP is not possible without an understanding of the TC as a professional body within the context of the Irish education system. Therefore, the development of the professional body, the debate surrounding its ability to fulfil its brief and its core documentation are investigated across the Context and Literature Review chapters. A picture of tensions within the profession subsequently emerges however

nuance pervades as to whether these tensions contribute to, hinder, or have limited impact on the practice of SP as a first step in the continuum of professional development.

1.4.3 The Pandemic Context

The COVID pandemic spawned an accelerated process of innovation and creativity in primary education, both in a school and ITE context (TC, 2021b). Prior to that, it remained one aspect of ITE programmes relatively unimpacted by technological advances. However, the pandemic offered opportunities for STs to experience classroom challenges in a controlled and structured environment (McGarr, 2021). It forced the hand of HEIs to adapt both the practice and assessment of SP and the TC to accept these changes (QQI, 2020). As the aspect of ITE which is most tangibly connected to the chosen profession of STs, students tend to attach greater significance to their own performance and experiences in SP than other aspects of teacher preparation programmes such as professional development studies or pedagogy (SPWG Report, 2019). While there is a paucity of research on the perspectives of STs on their SP and ITE experiences, the findings of Clarke et al., (2021) present a complex picture which raises questions for Teacher Educators (TEs) about how they currently develop, deliver and evaluate on their programmes post-pandemic. The innovations forced by the pandemic had the potential to herald great and far-reaching changes to ITE and specifically to SP. This research probed, through the perspectives of partners, the extent to which this opportunity has been fulfilled or not.

The participants in the data generation for this research were impacted in their experiences by the COVID pandemic during the research period, therefore it is fitting that the data generated was understood and analysed within the context of the pandemic. It impacted SP by altering the site-based contexts within which SP took place and the availability of such contexts. The pandemic forced the hand of HEIs to make rapid changes in practices without due time to reflect and consider. The 'virtualisation' of SP created opportunities for practical experiences which were at least to some degree supplemented by opportunities for reflection, reading and research (Newman et al., 2020). Possibly most

significantly, it changed the profile of the ST, the School Placement Tutor (SPT) and the CT, altering expectations, requirements and resilience. The TC School Placement Innovation Report (TC, 2021b) reflects on how the pandemic triggered radical departures in SP and profoundly changed many dimensions of it and concludes that, for better or worse, the impact of those changes cannot be ignored. The perspectives of partners as to how ‘radical’ those changes really were and how long term their impact has been, are of relevance to this research.

The COVID pandemic, and the need for immediate and decisive change it necessitated, represented an opportunity for the potential lack of innovation in SP to be addressed (Farrell, 2021a). O’ Ceallaigh & Connolly (2024, p197) describe this as ‘transformative shifts’ in the educational landscape, with particular opportunities to re-design and re-define formative feedback in SP. The impact of the pandemic was experienced deeply and immediately in the Irish educational space, and it had a disruptive effect on all levels and aspects of education (Flores & Gago, 2020; Young et al., 2022). As noted previously, disruption, while challenging, can prove positive and impactful, particularly at a system-wide level (Young et al., 2022; Lile et al., 2024). Farrell (2021c) describes the pandemic as a ‘*time of disruption*’ (165) with the power to generate new thinking and reinvention in the realm of ITE and school-university partnerships. Consequently, opportunities for experimentation and embedding of innovative work practices emerged (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Nonetheless, initial measures in SP were by necessity ‘emergency’ in nature and lacked detailed evidence-based research or deep reflection despite exposing possibilities for flexibility and creativity in the SP landscape (Piccolo et al., 2021).

When school closures were announced in Ireland, immediate emergency responses to enable the continued assessment of STs on SP were necessitated with little or no time for planning or reflection. Massive challenges were faced in the facilitation and practice of SP and the provision of consistency in the lived experiences of STs in SoPs (QQI, 2020). These SoPs were functioning under a variety of rapidly changing and overlapping scenarios including full school closures, partial closures and hybrid models (TC, 2021). The primary

challenge for HEIs centred around maintaining SP as a meaningful professional experience, supported by a profession at the centre of a crisis (Young et al., 2022; Hall et al, 2018). When schools were fully 'online' the options for SP were limited but relatively straightforward. They comprised of virtual visits and online assessments of asynchronous lessons with a focus on planning, reflective and collaborative learning and discussion. However, when schools started to re-open in Ireland (September 2020) but with restrictions still in place, the real challenges emerged (TC, 2021). The SP model which had already struggled to provide consistent experiences across varied settings to STs now had to contend with even more diversity within and across settings. A further and more long-term issue also came to light; how to learn from the emergency measures and make determinations regarding what adaptations to keep and what to leave in the past (TC, 2021a). Recognition of the transition from 'emergency' to 'opportunity' included the call to action for teacher educators to move beyond emergency actions towards quality online learning and assessment (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Despite the growing sense of some optimism around the potentials for innovation, concerns remained regarding the impact of such sudden change on the participants in SP, particularly the STs. Lynch et al. (2023) found that the demands of alternative SP models, alongside additional health and safety policies and requirements, had an impact on the mental health, sense of wellbeing and self-efficacy of some STs during this time.

Ó Grádaigh et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative case study investigation into emergency virtual observation (EVO) in Australia and Ireland during the pandemic. Their findings included assertions by SPTs that they found it difficult to fully understand the ST as a teacher without observing them in class, and that a reliance on assessing planning did not reveal real teaching ability. However, benefits included an improvement in the facilitation of reflective conversations away from the stress of the classroom and separated from the emotions of the visit. Mutton (2020) asks the question; what will emerge as the new normal in assessment of practicum post-pandemic? Shankar et al. (2021) highlight the positive transformation of higher education due to the pandemic from a wider lens and Harford (2021) describes the pandemic as a 'black swan event' (161). Black swan events refer to events which are unlikely and unpredicted and have a major effect (Taleb, 2001).

The rapid rise of GenAI is another contemporary example of something described as such. However, the accuracy of this term when applied to the pandemic and its impact on SP is highly debatable considering the fact that pandemics are known to be cyclical in history and the extent of the long-term impact in SP is questionable (Sweeney et al., 2022).

Ó Grádaigh et al. (2021) found that developments in virtual live-streaming technology due to the pandemic, continued to influence classroom observation methods, with SPTs observing practice through digital networks without physically needing to attend the school. The more obvious advantages to EVO include the reduction in costs and travel time (Bolton 2010; Liang 2015). In addition, Ó Grádaigh et al. (2021) concluded that virtual visits or EVO can moderate levels of subjective judgement. Themes emerging from their research include the general flexibility and fairness afforded by EVO, with particular emphasis on the improvement in the quality and facilitation of reflective conversations between SPTs and STs. Ongoing challenges include permission and privacy issues and technological limitations including the limited perspective of the camera (Marsh & Mitchell, 2014; Van Bortel, 2017). The potential for harnessing of technology to support and develop the SP model is a clear learning point from the pandemic (Sasaki et al., 2020).

Young et al. (2022) considered the approaches teacher educators took to dealing with the challenges and disruptions posed by the pandemic in an Irish context in their research. They noted that the modified arrangements which came into place initially were introduced on an emergency basis but that in overcoming these challenges there may have been opportunities to re-shape traditional roles and practices. In this research focusing on the lived experiences of Irish teacher educators in SP up to December 2021, they pinpointed the lack of guidance from the TC or DE in the face of the challenges of school closures, as the prompter of engagement between SP personnel in HEIs and institutional regulatory committees to chart their own pathways for graduating students. Consequently, the lack of innovation, integration and improvement on the part of the TC and DE could plausibly be considered as a factor in forcing partnership to facilitate professional development in ITE.

The first guidance on SP organisation during the pandemic came from the TC in the summer of 2020 in the form of a guidance note with a broad framework (TC, 2020b). This framework emphasised the importance of adaptability and flexibility and that SP should continue to take place, be it in an adapted format, during the pandemic. Young et al. (2022) found that the pandemic impacted on and transformed the work of SP Directors and Co-ordinators in particular, with workloads being very significantly increased, as they acted as a conduit for various stakeholders including SPTs, school principals, class teachers, HEI management, tutors, professional services personnel, and involved stakeholders like the TC, DE, Teacher Unions, and management bodies. Having started in my role as Programme Director during the pandemic, my lived experiences tally with this. Participants described the pandemic as a challenging and draining experience, made more so by the assertion that SP is at the fulcrum of teacher education. Immediate challenges included the unavailability of suitably trained external staff. Other participants in the research conducted by Young et al. (2022) voiced how the pandemic exposed the vulnerability of SP and the need to invest in creating bigger and better resources including SP teams in management, organisation, teaching, development, assessment, monitoring, mentoring and other responsibilities. In terms of next steps, some participants identified potential continuity and changes to teacher education to include improved mentoring roles of SPTs and CTs, the use of portfolios, reflective practice and communities of online supports. An informality in interactions between HEIs and SoPs has continued to characterise communication post-pandemic, facilitating the continuation of a theory-practice divide discussed below (Clarke & O'Doherty, 2021).

1.4.4 Hibernia College Context

Participants were drawn from Hibernia College (HC) faculty, HC alumni, host schools and employers of HC alumni. At the time of data generation, all had some degree of involvement with SP on the Professional Master of Education-Primary (PMEP) at HC. As the largest provider of primary teachers to the system in Ireland, the data generated has the scope to be of significance to the education system nationwide. Having worked with HC for several years and in different senior positions, I had good access to participants and a clear

understanding of the structure of SP as well as the changes made during the pandemic. It should be further noted that the research is specific to the context of SP in Ireland at primary level and is situated within that distinctive political, historical and social context by the Context Chapter.

The unique position of HC as a private college is acknowledged as a potentially limiting factor in the universal application of conclusions regarding SP across HEIs. However, while SP differs to some degree between institutions, the generalisability of findings is facilitated by the principles, theoretical framework and methodological rigour employed during this research and thus the design and objectives align with wider applicability across different educational institutions and contexts. Broader implications of the research include the transferability of the comparative analysis model employed herein which could be used by other HEIs to enable a cross-institutional comparison as a future research direction.

1.4.5 The Primary School Context

This research is based around the SP model at primary school level. However, it is acknowledged that significant overlap exists between primary and post-primary SP and that much of the research is applicable to both contexts. It is also the case that the professional body of the TC, and its documentation, function in the context of both school levels. To address this shared space, the pilot was conducted with post-primary AF. Many of the same concepts emerged between primary and post-primary AF although there were some notable differences, specifically regarding perspectives on the role of the principal in selecting CTs and the role of the CT in supporting STs. Post-primary AF identified the decisions made by principals regarding allocation of specific teachers to STs to be practical and based in subject matches while primary AF described a wider range of contributing factors including teacher professionalism and performance, relationships and seniority.

1.5 A Comparative Exploration: Policy, Practice and Partners

SP has been positioned by TC policy as sitting firmly as the fulcrum of ITE within a shared-vision (TC, 2021a). An expectation of innovative partnership between SoPs and HEIs is presented by the statutory body, but this is set within an informal context of volunteerism and goodwill where the language used to describe that partnership varies considerably (Walsh, 2024). In practice, ITE has been criticised for not adequately and consistently connecting theory and learning from ITE with lived practices in schools, resulting in a disconnect between expectations around SP and lived experiences (Heinz & Fleming, 2019). The labels allocated to processes can reveal how we interpret those processes, how we want others to interpret the processes, how we want to be perceived as interpreting them or a combination of all three elements. The labels ‘partnership’ and ‘partner’ are therefore more than just terms to describe a set of arrangements; they hold the power to impact on how people value themselves, others and the wider system of SP. Mumby (2001) states that the group that can best fix and articulate meaning to a concept in line with its own interests, holds the balance of power. The idea of power in education can be an uncomfortable one, owing in part to the potential for abuse of power from a very fundamental level (the teacher abusing their power over the child) to the more nuanced concept of power between educational institutions and the professional body.

1.6 School Placement as Assessment, Teacher Agency and Professionalism

An investigation of SP as a mode of assessment or whether it is fit for purpose as such is not within the scope of this research. There already exists a significant research catalogue in this area (Hall et al., 2018; Hopper, 2010; TC, 2011, 2021 a, b). Rather, it investigates the functioning of SP as a partnership model and the concept of SP as a first step in the continuum of professional development. Assessment is only relevant to this research in as far as practices around it may have the potential to obscure, hinder or support the mentoring, preparation for entry into the profession and the development of teacher identity.

SP is an opportunity for STs to put theory into practice in a school-based context and develop their conception of self from a student identity to a teacher identity (Joseph

& Heading, 2011). STs have been selected for ITE courses based on a number of criteria, the existence of which selection processes is indicative of certain requirements and standards needing to be met to gain entry to the course and ultimately to the profession. However, it is during SP that these existing competencies and those nurtured through professional and curriculum studies, are given the scope to develop in a SoP. This research touches on how the agency of STs impacts upon the SP experience, probing the temptation to manipulate their SP experiences to achieve what they consider to be the best outcome possible for themselves.

Teacher Agency (TA) is broadly defined as the managing to achieve of something, resulting from an interplay of capacities and environmental conditions (Priestley et al., 2015). The research interrogates what Campbell (2018) eloquently describes as *'the artisan quality of teachers' practice, gained through experience, association and personal commitment'* (abstract) to culminate in a visualisation of teacher professionalism and teacher agency as something responsive and creative. Success or attainment of TA is due to a culmination of effort, resources, cultural and structural factors (Priestley et al., 2015). TA is often actively encouraged by HEIs, partly in recognition of the fact that teachers experiencing self-responsibility and self-efficacy are generally more committed to their profession (Matteucci et al., 2017). Leijen et al. (2021) further define the achievement of agency as when a student can consider the different available alternatives and make judgements as to which option is most appropriate for the achievement of their purpose. If SP is the first step in the continuum of professional development, then TA and the quality and purpose of that TA could be a means of initially identifying factors which will contribute towards professional development and decisions made on how to progress within the profession.

1.7 Aims of the Research and the Research Participants

This research aims to explore the perspectives of partners in SP and provide an opportunity to discuss the assertions, claims and requirements of policy against the lived

experiences of those participants. Participants include Student Teachers (STs), Academic Faculty (AF), School Placement Tutors (SPTs), Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), Co-operating Teachers (CTs) and school principals. It is noteworthy that I use the term 'co-operating teacher' rather than 'treoraithe' throughout this research. The rationale for this, linked to the use of Irish language to describe key terms in ITE by the TC, is expanded upon in the Context Chapter. They were drawn from across SP, but all have one trait in common: they are educators at varying points in their own continuum of professional development with a role to play in SP at HC. In conducting a comparative exploration of partner perspectives, the researcher aims to develop specific and implementable recommendations for the improvement of a better-defined partnership model of SP which effectively contributes towards the continuum of professional development of NQTs and thus to the profession of teaching. These aims are within the context of the Hall Report (2018) and its findings but also consider Céim (2020a), the pandemic adaptations, the findings of the School Placement Working Group (SPWG) and progress made on the implications outlined by Hall et al. in 2018.

1.8 Rationale and Background to the Research

I acknowledge that professional knowledge in tandem with lived experiences influence the lens through which the research questions were framed and engaged with. Predisposed by the use as a teacher and teacher educator of the Brookfield reflection lenses (1995) towards a similar model, my intention was to engage in a reflective process informed by different lenses; that of self-reflection, peer review and consultation with literature. The social and professional world I inhabited for most of the time I engaged with this research (within HC) and those of the participants (STs within HC, STs who have come through this system and the schools and staff working within the partnership model) are all malleable and tenuous constructions. They are influenced, formed, reformed, interpreted and re-interpreted by participants and by me as researcher, depending on the personal experiences of those social worlds we inhabit. Some aspects of the social worlds are

relatively consistent and shared, for example all STs and NQTs have undergone or are undergoing the PME programme, all function within the space of primary education, and all have taken part in or will take part in a professional induction process. These are common boundaries which enabled the framing of this research as a case study. However, other aspects are nebulous and determined by the individual's interpretations, such as what a participant might interpret as success, how they envisage the fulfilment of their continuum of professional development (CPD) and what their interpretation of their role within the system of ITE is.

1.8.1 Personal Educational Philosophy

Kilroy (2016) highlights that education does not take place in a vacuum free from specific values but is underpinned by philosophical assumptions, including those of the researcher, which have the potential to shape how research is approached and how resulting knowledge is created and understood. My philosophical assumptions have been at least partially formed by what I loosely define as three stages of my career as an educator to date: 1) a teacher, 2) a teacher educator and 3) a leader in education. These stages shaped personal values regarding collaborative practice and collegiality and the desire for SP performance to impact more directly on early teaching experiences.

Creswell (2008) recommends the use of a professional biography to enable a reflexive approach which acknowledges potential bias and assumptions. The personal perspective also has potential to colour the interpretation and analysis of the data and the selection of literature. I was drawn towards keeping a reflective diary to aid me in understanding my own professional stance and research process and support reflexivity. Reflexivity further strengthens the trustworthiness of methodologies and findings (Dodgson, 2019) and consequently many researchers endorse the use of reflective diaries (Finlay & Gough, 2003, Reid et al, 2018). Fallon (2015) highlights how this practice captures the reasoning process leading to decisions and actions. Fallon also notes how keeping a diary acknowledges the place of the researcher in the research and supports the

understanding of their subjectivity in the interpretation of said research. Thus, a research diary can function as a method of critical reflexivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). My first diary entry was on 26th March 2022, roughly seven months into the D. Ed programme and began,

‘Taking a pause from reading and the literature review to finally write something - words of my own - to make this undertaking feel tangible - to have some sense of progress and agency. To situate myself somehow in all of this emerging chaos.’

The diary helped to organise my thoughts and ensure that I paused and considered the process as well as the output. Diary entries were sporadic at times; reflecting the nature of the D. Ed as something engaged with in a part time capacity and alongside a busy professional life. However, it proved very useful as a dumping ground for the thought processes behind decisions and a motivator to write. At times when I felt an inertia towards the topic creeping in, I committed to writing a diary entry if nothing else. This helped to pull me back towards my studies. Another form of reflective practice was the use of memoing. This enabled a reflective practice focused on the data generation and research process.

1.8.2 My Professional Biography

In presenting a professional biography, I consider my role as informed by epistemology; how I come to know something, the nature of human knowledge and the perception I as a researcher acquire to deepen understanding and define my position on the subject matter (Roche, 2022). Roche clarifies that ontology can define what can be known while epistemology describes how it can be known (Roche, 2022). Kilroy (2016) notes that knowledge of the social world under investigation can only be constructed through the perceptions of the individual, which can be influenced in various ways, as dictated by their circumstances, context or time.

I entered the teaching profession via the Higher Diploma (H. Dip) in Primary Education in Froebel College, having previously worked with the European Commission and as an environmental consultant and having lived, worked and studied abroad in The

Netherlands and Belgium. I found the culture shock of teacher education challenging and while I enjoyed the content of the course, I was uncomfortable in what felt like the very narrow space of teacher education. When I looked around my cohort of students, I saw the same profile replicated time and time again; female, white and middleclass but even here a certain subsection of middleclass; daughters of teachers, nurses, civil servants and other 'good, pensionable jobs.' On reflection, I acknowledge that I established my own prejudices around prejudice; I saw ITE as narrow, lacking diversity and confined: dominated by powerhouses of the Catholic Church and the Conradh na Gaeilge. From this very early point, the rumblings of that frequently attested to statement, "I always wanted to teach," were taking form and creating a discomfort between myself and the profession. I did not always want to teach. I always wanted to learn. I found it disconcerting (and still do find it so) that so many potential teachers self-profess to have started life wanting to teach rather than wanting to learn. Mezirow (1981) describes the moment when we become 'critically conscious of how and why our habits of perception, thought and action have distorted the way we have defined the problem and ourselves in relationship to it (p65) as a disconcerting dilemma. My professional biography is marked by a number of such disconcerting dilemmas.

My professional profile is that of an experienced primary school teacher of 12 years. This was a positive but sometimes unsatisfying professional experience with fewer opportunities to engage in professional discussion beyond the daily demands of the job than I would have liked. While I had performed very well on my final SP, I only experienced it as relevant in securing a teaching position and not in terms of indicating how my role could develop within the school. As a NQT my role was established as subordinate to the greater experience of long serving teachers. I was not asked to share any aspect of my SP experiences with colleagues. There was a clear sense that once you 'got through' SP, you put it firmly behind you and got on with the real business of being a teacher (as opposed to the real business of teaching). This led to a significant disconnect between my teacher education experiences and the value associated with them by peers. These experiences have shaped my view of SP, the potential value of SP and how it supports the professional development of NQTs. This dissatisfaction in the quality and quantity of collaborative

engagement opportunities had a significant impact on my approach to this research. In engaging with the participant groups, I considered not only what they said, but the conversations and engagements they did not refer to, such as the lack of reference made to collaborative conversation between partner groups on how best to support STs.

Within the school context, collegial discussions focused on specific pupil issues, school wide issues and the 'quick fix' rather than pedagogical practice. There was at this time little value attached to teachers as researchers or CPD. Therefore, taken through the lens of peers, the development of any educator philosophy was linked to practice and the practical. In honest critical self-reflection, while I balanced the demands of family life with teaching, this limited philosophy was at least partially shared. At this point in my career, I can acknowledge and be comfortable with a certain level of subjectivity and uncertainty around my reflective practice (Braun and Clarke, 2021) and recognise that my research cannot be fully disassociated from my formative experiences; both negative and positive.

Over the years, a desire to interrogate self-practice and to return to concepts and theories introduced during ITE returned. As my reality or daily lived experience switched to that of a teacher educator, my values refined and took focus - moving away from personal lived experiences as an individual teacher experiencing some dissatisfaction within the school system, to recognising the empty spaces within the current system whereby a ST assessed as 'high achieving' on SP may not have a clear progression trajectory or differentiated support system. This led me to accept a teacher educator role with HC on the PMEP programme. Subsequent opportunities to develop this role arose, moving from Head of School Placement during the pandemic to a role as Director for the PMEP programme when I undertook this D. Ed and in year 2 taking on the role of College Registrar. This move from being directly involved in the academic side of the PMEP towards a more senior administrative role, impacted directly on my research. I became more interested in how policy has impact on practice.

McInerney (2019) describes motivation as a psychological construct used to detail the mechanisms by which groups or individuals choose behaviours and persist in those behaviours. As College Registrar, I was no longer a teacher educator. I did not interact with

students, plan for modules or directly impact on learning content. I was however involved in education and the student journey from a completely different perspective. My motivation moved to sit with the student and their learning, a subtle but significant difference. DeAngelis further describes a disorienting dilemma as a time when new information (or for me a new professional direction resulting in different information) causes the person to question their values, beliefs, or assumptions (DeAngelis, 2022). Towards the very end of this research, I moved roles and institutions, taking on the role of Director of School Placement at Maynooth University. As I wrote the Discussion Chapter, this change in professional environment gave me a further opportunity to review the findings from an altered but directly relevant context.

1.9 The Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction: This first chapter introduces the broad topic of SP and the 3 Ps Framework: Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development. The three research questions are set out and the specific research context of primary education in the Republic of Ireland and the HC PMEP are identified. It also provides a rationale for the research and identifies the key participants. The chapter includes a discussion of the personal educational philosophy and position of myself as researcher within the research context.

Chapter Two: Context: The second chapter acts as the context chapter. As such, it sets out the context within which the research sits: moving from establishing the broader ITE setting and the historical and social context of the Irish landscape which shaped it, towards an overview of the development of the current SP model in Irish primary schools and the advancement of the concepts of partnership and professionalism. It traces the movement towards the consolidation of providers to centres of teaching (Sahlberg, 2012, 2019) and the place of HC outside of this process as the only fully private provider of ITE. This chapter presents some of the different contextual factors which have impacted on SP, such as the

development of a regulatory body in the TC and the changes in educational policy. The recent historical context of the COVID pandemic and post-pandemic adaptations are also presented here.

Chapter Three: Literature Review: This chapter explores the relevant literature for the research area and draws on concepts which have informed the research questions. The literature on partnership in SP is explored under a number of headings, each focusing on a different interpretation of that broad term of partnership. It also includes a review of the research pertinent to SP as the first step in the continuum of professional development.

Chapter Four: Methodology Chapter: This chapter sets out the theoretical perspective of the research. It describes the pragmatic-interpretivist paradigms and details the Iterative Thematic Inquiry framework which helped to frame the reflective approach to this research. Mixed-Methods is introduced, and the purposive sampling of participants is expanded upon. The data generation methods of online questionnaires, focus groups, reflective diary entries and semi-structured interviews are described in detail and the rationale for the use of each is expanded upon. The chosen form of data analysis, with a specific emphasis on narrative analysis is discussed. Finally, ethical considerations and the validity and limitations of the research process are given due consideration.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six: The Findings: The findings are presented as the story of partnership in placement from the perspectives of the participants as the characters and narrators. Part One explores the findings in relation to characters in the context of their roles within the story and their interpretation of those roles. Part Two presents the story of partnership in placement as a series of vignettes, telling the story from the perspectives of the participants.

Chapter Seven: Discussion: This chapter brings together the findings, the literature and the theoretical framework. The emerging themes from the findings are expanded upon and links are made between these themes. The discussion chapter starts to lead the reader towards the framework outlined in the Conclusion Chapter,

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: Following on from the discussion, I propose a staged framework including a Community of Practice, the establishment of a Partnership Network, the development of a Mentor and Professional Development Programme and a Review and Implementation Plan. To support this, a lexicon of common language for Partnership in SP should be established. A scheme of accountability to address power imbalances and how to 'be' a good partner and be verified as such is also detailed. A coherent improvement agenda focusing on the ideal of a shared-vision is put forward in this chapter.

1.10 Conclusion

SP is a deeply meaningful experience for many STs and one with the power to prepare competent and confident professionals by integrating theory and practice (Hall et al., 2018). However, it is also sometimes experienced as a flawed system which is slow to embrace change and encumbered by many moving parts with diverse priorities. Presented by the TC as a 'shared-vision,' this research explores the accuracy of that claim through the perspectives of participants and the progress, or lack thereof, towards a true partnership model which places SP as the first step in the continuum of professional development. The research probes opportunities (missed and fulfilled) for innovation, integration and improvement.

The following chapter provides an overview of the context against which partnership in SP is enacted and experienced. It details the social, political, historical and policy context. The chapter helps to situate the research within this broader background and this helps the reader to engage with the challenges to SP specific to the Irish context.

Chapter Two: The Context Chapter

2.0 Introduction

To a large degree the context within which SP functions shapes what it is, how it is perceived and how it is interacted with by partners. This chapter sets out the wider context of the research; from the founding of the education and national school system within the historical and social landscape of the Republic of Ireland (hereafter referred to as Ireland), towards the development of ITE into its current form. In doing so, it provides the background to the informal approach to SP which now pervades and helps to explain why there has not been a more clearly structured framework for SP to date. It also emphasises the longevity of some of the problems encountered today in the education system around roles and responsibilities and the guardrails imposed on those. Central to establishing context, is an exploration of the establishment of the TC, its policies and its role in shaping the ITE context. Demarcating exactly what is meant by 'context' is made challenging by the plethora of alternative definitions available and the fact that the very meaning of context can vary according to context. This puts an onus on the policies and system to be reflexive, responsive and adaptable. The complex system outlined in this chapter emphasises the profound challenges in facilitating such adaptability. A relatively comprehensive definition offered by Bate (2014), is a good starting point. Bate (2014) describes context as referring to all those variables (z) that influence or could influence the 'independent' (x) and 'dependent' (y) variables directly under study. This definition is supplemented by Ramsden's (1988) assertion that educational contexts are further defined by institutional practice, assessment methods, skills and attitudes of faculty, and the tasks provided to learners.

2.1 The Rationale for a Context Chapter

A context chapter is essential to this research owing to the positioning of SP as a partnership model but one which may lack the necessary impact to adequately function as such. Countries evolve different pathways into teaching which reflect policy to ensure diversity in the workforce but also evolve from historical contexts and compromises in policy and provision (Conway et al., 2009). Accordingly, to understand the current system of ITE in Ireland, at primary school level, it must be contextualised within developments in Irish educational policy, a unique historical context and the demands of a very modern and rapidly changing society. Both the unique local historical context and global context of an emerging concern for transparency, inclusivity in education and accountability form the backdrop to ITE and specifically SP in Ireland (Conway et al., 2009). Moreover, they have had a profound impact on the current status of SP as dependent upon informal relationships between specific individuals and institutions and have hindered the acceptance of a need for a more systematic and consistent approach to facilitating SP. I have included some 'case studies' in this section to highlight specific issues or to enable the spotlighting of a particular policy.

2.2 The National School System

Quality of teaching and quality of learning are fundamentally linked. This necessitates that ITE function well to support the school system (Singh et al., 2021). In this section I outline the development of that system in Ireland. I acknowledge that this part of the dissertation is more descriptive than the main body of work. However, for the findings of this research to be informative and adaptable within both a national and international setting, it is important that the reader is immersed in the historical context which not only facilitated the development of a highly informal approach to SP but also hindered a cohesive approach to solving the dilemmas of SP. If we consider ITE specifically in terms of purpose, intention and relation (Biesta & Stengel, 2016), the efficacy of SP is either hindered or supported by the national school system where practice occurs. In other words,

ITE, and SP specifically, can only be as effective as it is allowed to be within the deeply historically contextualised school system in Ireland.

2.2.1 The Origins Story

Early drivers in the development of national schools were the Penal Laws (including the 1695 Education Act, the 1697 Banishment Act and the 1704 Popery Acts) which forbade Catholic education, and the gap created by the absence of an established middle class to act as school patrons or the presence of enough religious personnel to educate Catholic children. These pressures created a situation where a gap needed filling-and the Catholic Church stepped in to do so. The rise of the Hedge Schools as informal, secret and illegal schools designed to provide primary education to children of 'non-conforming' faiths, came about during the Cromwellian period (1649-1653). They went into decline with the foundation of the national school system by the British government in the 1830s (Lyons, 2016). Consequently, the origins of the national school system in Ireland are primarily as a political response to the challenges of the British Empire in controlling Ireland and as a means of socialising the Irish populace while solidifying Ireland's link with the Empire (Walsh, 2016). Throughout the nineteenth century, education was dominated by the religious orders, particularly the Catholic Church, who were motivated to use it as a means of influencing younger generations. This dominance continued until the 1970s and led to it playing a key role in the educational governance system (Connolly et al., 2023). It was not until the 1960s-70s that a significant paradigm shift in Irish policy occurred with substantial democratisation of education, including the introduction of free second-level education in 1966 (Fleming et al., 2022). The complex and emotive relationship of the Irish education system and ITE with the Catholic Church, and the direct linkage of education with political tensions, has resulted in ITE functioning within a space where establishing connections and alliances is accepted practice. A strong undercurrent of class, status and religious beliefs continues to feed into how ITE broadly and SP specifically is engaged with today.

In more recent times educational policies and procedures have also been influenced by our neighbours, at European and international level (Drudy, 2009). Membership of

international organisation such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) have shaped the educational system (Walsh, 2024). Consequently, developments in the Irish educational system are heavily impacted by the Bologna Process (launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration) which seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems in Europe through the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the facilitation of student and staff mobility to aid inclusive and accessible education. This formed part of a larger discourse around Europeanisation in education (Harford, 2010). The Lisbon Strategy (2000) and Barcelona Objectives (2013) have sought to increase harmonisation of education policy in Europe and introduced a learning outcomes approach with the introduction of a European credit weighting system for benchmarking (Walsh, 2024). ITE now occupies a space where there is a pull towards standardisation, learning outcomes and mobility and an equal push against what is seen by some as the potential loss of elements of the Irish culture, particularly the Irish language and Catholic religion.

2.2.2 A Brief Introduction to National Primary Schools

The Irish education system comprises of primary, post-primary and tertiary or third level education. Attendance at national or 'primary' school is compulsory for all children in Ireland, as is the requirement to learn the Irish language from enrolment (barring an exemption). This requirement for the study of the Irish language is contextualised within the socio-historical setting of the language being identified with a sense of national pride and resilience to forced change (Ó Tuathaigh, 200; Ó Giollagáin & MacDonnacha, 2008). However, in a rapidly diversifying society, there are difficult questions to be addressed regarding the potential negative impact on some groups of pupils including international pupils or those with a diagnosed accommodation requirement such as dyslexia.

Total enrolment in primary schools in 2023/2024 was 556, 084 pupils, a decrease of 2, 059 on 2022/23 (DE, 2024e). However, there has been an overall increase in enrolment in the twenty-year period 2003/2004 to 2023/24 of nearly 20% (DE, 2024e). Although the majority of primary schools are still owned and managed by the Catholic

Church, there has been a net loss of 113 Catholic schools and 11 Church of Ireland schools between 2013/14 and 2023/24, while there has been a net gain of 65 multi-denominations schools over the same period (DE, 2024e). This net gain is due to the opening of new multi-denominations schools, divestment of schools from denomination-ethos to multi-denomination ethos and parental choice. Nonetheless, Catholic schools still comprise most primary schools, with 88% of schools having a Catholic ethos in 2023/2024. The remainder comprise of Church of Ireland, Jewish, multi-denominational and Muslim schools. Therefore, a sizeable and growing minority of children and their families are choosing to step outside of (or not step into) the more traditional Irish primary school setting. This reflects a growing diversity in the pool of pupils and emphasises the need for HEIs to address through their curricula, inclusive of SP, challenges which many current educators are only starting to experience and formulate responses to. The TC mantra of Innovation, Integration and Improvement is particularly relevant to this context of increasing diversity.

Primary schooling covers a period of 8 years from Junior Infants to Sixth Class when transfer to the post-primary system occurs. Sugrue (2011) describes the primary landscape as generally 'benign' however he notes the growing intensification of educational challenges within the context of a change agenda and the increasing pressure on teachers to perform within a more critical and consumerist system. These pressures reflect a broader trend towards accountability and performance metrics in education, where schools and teachers are increasingly evaluated based on pupil outcomes. This shift has implications for teacher autonomy and professional identity, as educators navigate the demands of standardised testing and curriculum reforms. Meeting the needs and expectations of parents, policymakers, and a diversifying society all have the power to impact either positively or negatively on the ST experience.

2.2.3 A Changing Landscape

The socio-economic composition of Ireland has changed considerably in recent years. This has been spurred on by the growth of the Irish economy, the rise in immigration (Lynch et al., 2012) and the growth of neoliberalism (Flanagan, 2024). The sudden impact of pupils arriving to Ireland from Ukraine and the need to act immediately and

appropriately to support those children is one example of a highly significant recent change to the traditional classroom. While the Inspectorate Report of the Department of Education found that teaching and learning experiences for the majority of Ukrainian children in schools in Ireland were ‘good’ or ‘very good,’ the need to support those children through their own curriculum (online) and the Irish curriculum (in school) and to provide age appropriate resources for children experiencing complex and multilayered challenges was, and continues to be, an enormous but essential undertaking (DE, 2024b). In terms of SP, current curricula at HEIs have started to address the more complex needs of children from different cultures and backgrounds, including highly challenging ones. However, there remain concerns regarding allowing STs to engage with vulnerable children or around sensitive topics during SP.

The trust traditionally imbued in the Catholic Church has also deteriorated significantly and attitudes to religion and religious observances have changed radically, with a weakening of the moral authority of the Church and a questioning of its right to play such a dominant role in schools (Connolly et al., 2023). Consequently, the composition of the classroom and school community has changed extensively and there are growing expectations that this should be reflected in the teaching community which remains predominantly Catholic, white, female and middle class (Faas et al., 2015). Returning to the topic of the Irish language in teacher education, there are fundamental connections between the language, Church and State (Riordan, 2000).

2.3 Initial Teacher Education in Ireland

ITE in Ireland includes both primary and post-primary teacher education although the focus of this research was on the primary education context. There are currently four state-funded HEIs offering four-year concurrent (undergraduate) programmes of primary ITE and a two-year consecutive (postgraduate) PME accredited by the TC:

1. Marino Institute of Education
2. Mary Immaculate College

3. DCU Institute of Education
4. Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

DE minimum Leaving Certificate requirements for entry onto an ITE course for primary teachers include the attainment of a minimum of H4 in Irish, O4 or H7 in English and H4 or H7 in Mathematics. Applicants are additionally required to undergo an oral Irish test at the end of first year. There is also a compulsory requirement to complete two placements in a Gaeltacht as part of the programme, another nod to the dominance of the Irish language in ITE. HC as the only privately owned and non-state funded provider, offers a blended learning two-year PME also accredited by the TC. Applicants for this programme must hold an undergraduate degree at Level 8 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), with a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) weighting of at least 180 credits. For entry onto the PMEP with HC, passing an Oral Irish interview is required as part of the admissions process. For other providers, applicants must have completed the oral component of one of the approved Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) oral examinations and achieved the grade of 65% or higher on TEG Meánleibhéal (B1) Irish examination prior to the closing date for applications or currently hold a valid certificate in TEG Meánleibhéal 2 (B2) or TEG Ardleibhéal (C1) having achieved a grade of 50% or higher (DE, 2024b, DE2024c). These requirements, particularly around proficiency in the Irish language, have impacted on the profile of students entering into ITE. As referenced previously, debate continues as to the ethics of limiting the pool of potential teachers to those who meet quite challenging standards in the Irish language. There is an argument to be made that students with Irish language exemptions are being unfairly marginalised from the profession (Keane & Heinz, 2015). Informally, the business of ITE is often conducted through Irish or with the Irish language interspersed into conversations and communications. This is pitched as ‘good practice’ in embedding the language into the culture of ITE. While the merits of this are evident, the potential to exclude diversity is also apparent.

The Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement (DE, 2023) defines ITE in Ireland as the foundational stage of learning to become a teacher and the first formal step in the continuum of teacher education. It further describes the continuum of teacher education

as both the formal and informal educational and developmental activities with which teachers engage during their professional lives. ITE, and consequently SP, functions as the first of three phases in the continuum; ITE (Céim), induction (Droichead) and professional learning (Cosán). All STs are required to undertake a recognised programme of study provided by a HEI and accredited by the TC in accordance with Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020). Fitzpatrick (2021) provides a simple definition of ITE as representing the beginning of formal study for those who wish to pursue a career as teachers but states that it is fundamentally political in nature. ITE in Ireland sits within the context of a national reform agenda and an international culture of increasing global competition and the international setting of standards and benchmarks (Lynch et al., 2012, Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014; Gorman & Furlong, 2023; QQI, 2022).

The DEEPEN Report (2021) notes the evolution of teaching from a learned trade through apprenticeship to a professional status career with a continuum of initial training, induction and ongoing professional learning. This puts the onus on ITE to prepare graduates with a wide array of skills and competencies embedded in high academic standards and the accrual of a body of professional knowledge. A proposed critique of the current admissions standards is that the emphasis on attainment in the Irish language may unfairly benefit certain individuals while potentially disadvantaging others who may possess more fundamental requirements for becoming professional educators. Conway et al. (2009) hold that there is an increasing recognition that learning to teach cannot happen in ITE alone. However, the dispositions which inform future practice and engagement with CPD are informed by the experiences of ITE and the practices *surrounding* ITE.

2.3.1 The Chronological Development of Primary ITE within the Education System

The 1970s: A move towards a 'profession'

The 1970s witnessed a shift in pedagogical approaches and teaching methodologies in Ireland and what Sugrue describes as a 'big bang' of primary curriculum reform (Sugrue, 2011). The period saw the introduction of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum which emphasised core subjects, skills development, and a holistic and student-centred approach

to learning. In order to re-train teachers in this curriculum, the DE primarily relied upon the use of existing voluntary short in-service summer courses, alongside some whole-school training and training-of-trainers. Unfortunately, this approach was not accompanied by supporting in-service policies or the provision of resources to match the expanding requirements being placed on teachers (Herron, 2020). While teachers welcomed the rhetoric of progress, teaching remained didactic and whole school based (Sugrue, 2011).

During this time, teacher training colleges were rebranded as 'colleges of education' (Walsh, 2024). This included the updating of buildings and facilities and courses were given more academic independence from the DE (Coolahan, 2007). Herron (2020) describes this as a period of transitioning away from monotechnic training institutions to institutions with affiliated status with universities. While this marked the beginning of a requirement for formal training in order to obtain a teacher qualification and thus teach, the determination of the specific knowledge, skills or dispositions required of that qualification were largely left to the academic institutions or academic bodies. This could be seen as foreshadowing tensions between the academic status of the qualification and the actual business of teaching. The status of teaching in Ireland as a 'profession' is embedded in these changes.

It should be noted that the DE has always maintained a direct role in the funding and oversight of HEIs for primary ITE, while HC sits in a unique position as a private provider of ITE. A significant change in the Irish educational landscape at this time was the establishment of The Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 1971 as part of a wider series of reforms in education. Fundamentally, it acts as the governing authority for higher education. While the HEA was founded with quite a straightforward remit to allocate funding to third-level institutions and to provide advice to the Minister of Education, as the national advisory body on higher education, it has seen its role change and develop over time. The HEA now leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system. It has the stated objective to create a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions (HEA, 2018; GoI, 2022). It also has statutory

responsibility, at central government level, for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system.

The 1970s marked the beginning of a period of investment and development in teacher education in Ireland and this was most apparent in the move towards professionalisation and the elevation of the status of teaching as a career, in 1974 with the introduction of the Bachelor of Education-B.Ed (O'Donovan, 2013). This replaced the two-year National Teacher Programme and thus marked the introduction of an all-graduate profession. O'Donovan (2013) notes the foundation of The Reading Association of Ireland (RAI), whose mission statement included the encouragement of reflective practice and dialogue among those involved in education, as a marked move towards reflective professional practice (O'Donovan, 2013). This decade also saw the introduction of teacher centres, now known as Education Centres, with the purpose of providing a focus for development programmes for teachers and stakeholders. Their stated aim was to provide leadership and promote research and innovation in the field of education. These changes reflected a shift away from teachers solely as practitioners whose only remit was the classroom and the daily business of teaching and towards teachers as collaborative, evolving professionals. They can also be interpreted as early steps towards a concept of partnership in education; with the role of the teacher expanding outside of the classroom and towards more collaborative endeavours.

The 1980s - 1990s: Education Off the Agenda

Following on from this period was a time in which teacher education policy fell off the priority list (Coolahan, 2007). According to Herron (2020), the policy-making environment in Ireland was dictated by the consequences of economic recession rather than the ideological advancement of education and the betterment of the state. Herron (2020) presents a picture of the Irish government seeking to counterbalance educational spending cuts with promises of consultation and partnership, adopting corporatist approaches to policy-making. Harford and O'Doherty (2016) assert that although the B.Ed programmes responded to curricular reforms and changes in pedagogies and reflective

practice, they remained structurally unchanged for nearly four decades. They observe that the emergence of new ITE providers did little to impact on the structure and underlying philosophy of ITE in Ireland for many years. Walsh however credits the 1980s with being characterised by a more systematic approach to state intervention in Higher Education, both at institutional and programme level and a focus on increasing accountability, quality assurance and value for money being demanded at government level (Walsh, 2016). Walsh recognises this as creating a dominance of a knowledge based economy paradigm which was the preserve of the elite, with all considerations outside of economic objectives playing subordinate (Walsh, 2016). While scholars differ in how they interpret the impact of actions and policy at this time, there is fundamental agreement that action (or inaction) was economically motivated and thus a more transparent link between education and the economy (preempted by the unsanctioned announcement of free post primary education by Minister O' Malley in 1967) had started to become more evident.

The Ministerial Committee on In Service Teacher Education Report (1984) recommended a review of B.Ed programmes however this recommendation was ignored by the government of the time. The Programme for Action in Education, 1984 - 1987 in point of fact excluded any action on ITEs. Financial considerations and the capping of teacher numbers were the priorities of the day (Coolahan, 2007). This climate of closures and capping led to uncertainty within teacher education and impacted on the developmental work in educational practice and studies (Coolahan, 2007). However, the early 1990s did see some reform specific to the concept of teacher professionalisation and this is evidenced in the OECD Report which outlines the concepts of initial, induction and in - career stages of teacher education as integral to teacher education (OECD, 1991). Internationally, the concept of partnership between institutions and SoPs was promoted and the mentoring system emphasised as a positive model to follow (OECD, 1991). In terms of making partnership practicable and supported, the OECD Review did not, as O'Grady (2017) notes, recommend an increase in supports for schools.

2.3.2 The Case Studies

The purpose of the inclusion of these case studies is to provide an opportunity to look in detail at some specific pieces of documentation.

Case Study 1: The White Paper on Educational Development (1980)

Coolahan (2007) gives the 1980 White Paper on Educational Development (hereafter referred to as ‘the White Paper’) as an example of inertia at government level in ideologically motivated reform during the 1980s. Walsh further describes politicians at this time as lacking the scope and inclination to promote innovative policy initiatives, particularly if public investment would be required (Walsh, 2016). The White Paper is notable for its almost complete lack of mention of ITE. Townsend (2011) describes an enormous level of variety in the trust afforded by politicians to teachers and the profession of teaching at this point in history as evident in the approach to this White Paper. Some key aspects of the White Paper:

- Aim: to cover the aspects of educational development in Ireland in the preceding years and examine possible proposals and projects for the decade
- Very broad content
- Lacks clarity
- Very few specific policy directions
- Made little impact on the wider education system
- No lasting impact on ITE

It is notable more for its lack of impact and what that tells us about the state of educational policy and development at the time than for any achievements (Coolahan, 2007).

Late 1990s - 2000s: Debate and Discord

Several initiatives were introduced during the late 1990s and early 2000s as a response to perceived inertia and shortfalls in the previous period, including the development of the 1999 Curriculum. Notable amongst these was the establishment of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) under the 1998 Education Act. The NCCA is a statutory body of the DE and functions as the main policy body to influence curriculum and assessment in Irish schools. Another significant development was the establishment of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) prior to the launch of the revised 1999 primary curriculum. The PCSP was given the function of mediating the revised curriculum to teachers through structured professional development and underpinned by a partnership approach. The formation of the PCSP represented a more pointed effort to engage teachers in professional development than had been witnessed previously. Education Centres were also utilised to support the dissemination strategy and facilitate the organisation of the seminar schedules. An inspectorate Evaluation Report (Inspectorate, 2005) found that the majority of schools and teachers did adopt the new teaching approaches and content of the 1999 Curriculum (DE, 1999) however that for a significant minority of schools and teachers much further development was required. It placed responsibility firmly at the school doors; stating that they should take it on themselves to engage in systematic curriculum review and planning and assume responsibility for their professional development to address inconsistencies in their provision of the curriculum. The report makes the pointed comment that the most successful schools took the initiative themselves and did not wait for external supports to mediate the curriculum content to them.¹ Of significance is the fact that this pronouncement foreshadows the TC approach to HEIs and ITE-placing the onus on individual providers to interpret, enact and facilitate broad guidelines.

Changes in the Governance of Education

By the end of the 1990s, there were five colleges of education for primary ITE. The political backdrop to the development of ITE and the partnership model of SP was characterised by a wide array of participants resulting in a complex system of interplaying departments, bodies and agencies acting, reacting, engaging and disrupting. Nicholls (2015) describes this positively in terms of a consultative and incorporative tradition, thus demonstrating a true partnership model. However, discord is evident between the systems of governance, government, the professional body and the partners in ITE. If we see governance of education as the total process of how decisions are made and implemented, including formal and informal processes, it includes legal and administrative arrangements for decision-making, administrative arrangements, accountability and implementation. It is focused on both the system and institutions of education. The interplay between governance and government in Ireland is made more complex by the number of moving parts and contributing bodies. The DE has responsibility for ensuring the provision of appropriate and proportionate arrangements to support its stated mission to *'To facilitate individuals, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development* (Governance Framework, 2016). While the TC (established in 2006) is the professional body which promotes teaching as a profession, professional development and regulates professional standards and accredits ITE programmes, the DE is responsible for education policy at primary, post-primary and tertiary level, including ITE. The Minister is further advised on matters of curriculum and assessment by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Case Study 2: The Green Paper on Education for a Changing World (1992)

Linked with the emergent 'so – called' knowledge society and economic growth of this period, came renewed enthusiasm for addressing educational policy. The 1992 Green Paper on Education for a Changing World (hereafter referred to as 'the Green Paper'):

- Highlighted the contribution of teachers to society

- Need to ensure teaching is sustained as attractive to new generations
- Chapter Six dedicated to the teaching profession and continued professionalisation of teaching
- Noted that a well-trained and committed teaching force is essential to maintaining and enhancing the quality of education
- Stated that research supports the notion that teaching is a complex and demanding job requiring a high-quality training and preparation process, supported by in-career development
- Asserted that pre-service training is of crucial influence on teacher performance
- Emphasised the need for the unification of the primary and post-primary school teaching professions
- Noted assessing candidate suitability for the profession as a key concept for ITE.
- Suggested that trainee teachers should be certified, using a set of criteria, by the school principal in consultation with appropriate personnel
- Highlighted the need for teachers to engage in meaningful professional development over the course of their career, starting with their experiences as NQTs
- Stated that a clear career structure is needed, based on the teacher's merit and achievement
- Held that teachers should hold a reasonable expectation of promotion within teaching to a post of responsibility
- Identified possibility that teachers could be seconded to support and advice services
- Noted that remedial help should be given to teachers who are struggling and suggested that the problem of unsatisfactory teaching should be debated and resolved
- Cited the issue of unsatisfactory teaching as requiring addressing up to and including withdrawal of recognition
- Proposal to fully replace the concurrent model of primary teacher training for the consecutive model.

- Highlighted the need for a TC and introduced the terms innovation, integration and improvement as the 3Is

This Green Paper marked the first time a proposal to formalise induction policy and the adoption of a policy on the continuum of teacher education was made by the government. The most significant aspect of the Green Paper for this research is the response it received. The attempt by the government to centralise and harmonise ITE, while placing more responsibility with the SoP was firmly met with opposition in these changes. On the back of what Coolahan (2007) describes as ‘unprecedented’ debate on the Green Paper, The National Education Convention was convened in Dublin Castle and the subsequent report was published in 1994. The Convention broadly supported the 3 Is of the continuum of teacher education however it rejected the suggestion to drop the concurrent modes of ITE. The word ‘partnership’ was used again in terms of enhancing relationships between ITEs and schools. It specifically highlighted the use of teacher mentors for students on teaching practice. The Convention reiterated the Green Paper proposal for a more structured induction year into teaching although it pushed against the idea of the school principal certifying this work as satisfactory. It favoured handing this responsibility at least in part over to The TC once established. The Convention promoted incentivising teacher development. It supported the Green Paper’s proposals for the secondment of skilled teachers for in-service work to schools.

Case Study 3: The White Paper on Charting our Education Future (1995)

The White Paper on Charting our Education Future (1995) built on this consultative process and outlined:

- Significant agenda for change and development
- Reflected a desire at policy level and among partners in education to take on board achievements and trends in educational provision and practice and to chart future directions

- Sought to set out a framework for the development of education against the background of a changing society
- Noted that the quality, morale and status of the teaching profession are key in the development of a strong education system
- Asserted that the profession needs to attract talented people and prove itself professionally rewarding
- ITE cannot be seen as the final preparation for a life of teaching
- Pointed to the importance of not confining ITE to the immediate requirements of the education system but that it should also cater to the need to facilitate the personal education and development of STs
- Described mature students as bringing rich diversity of backgrounds
- Held as a key responsibility of ITEs, to note those STs who are 'unsuited' to teaching
- Recommendations on the induction process, giving school principals a significant role in the assessment of NQTs for registration
- Approved idea of setting up a TC and the drafting of the legislative framework

Harford (2010) states that despite the impact of the educational change agenda, the lived reality of professional development for teacher remained largely unchanged. She notes that this reflects the situation at a wider European level and further describes teachers' experiences of continuous professional development as remaining ad hoc, lacking in detailed theoretical basis and lacking in coherence or sustainability (Harford, 2010).

The recognition of suitability or lack thereof to the profession is an exceedingly complex and nuanced process, which is not reflected in this assertion. If diversity in the ST population is a fundamental aim of ITE, inclusive of STs with diverse needs, then the issue of establishing what constitutes Fitness to Practice and where the nuance between support for inclusion and reasonable accommodations and the attainment of professional learning outcomes lies is in critical need of review. The credibility of members of the teaching profession to uphold and promote high standards of diversity within SoPs is dependent upon the members of that profession meeting not only high standards and learning outcomes but appropriate ones for the challenges of today. This in turn requires ITEs to

review their own application processes and criteria, assessment structures and content and supports for STs.

Case Study 4: The Education Act (1998), Teaching Council Act (2001) and The EPSEN Act (2004)

Three exceptionally important piece of educational legislation was passed at this time; the 1998 Education Act, the 2001 Teaching Council Act and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004). The Education Act (1998) was the first education act passed since the formation of the Irish Republic and provided a statutory framework for the Education system, seeking to clarify roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the system (Dolan, 2016).

The Education Act (1998):

- Set out the right to education of every person in the state
- Specified that this included a person with a disability or special educational need and that all persons should be in receipt of an appropriate level and quality of education
- Key principles of accountability of the education system, respect for diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions and a requirement that education be conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, teachers and the community

The Teaching Council Act (2001):

- Marked a major turning point for ITE
- Announced the extending of the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) from a three-year programme to a four year programme
- Initiated a need for ITEs to review their programmes and as Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) state, bring aspects of professional development into direct teaching

The EPSEN Act (2004):

- Aimed at ensuring that children with special education needs receive appropriate support and education
- Promoted the education of children with special needs in an inclusive environment, alongside peers, as far as possible, mandated the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), highlighted parental involvement in decision-making processes and established the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Provided for the creation of a Special Education Appeals Board

The Act has been critiqued for the slow pace of fully implementing all aspects, with the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) calling for more ambitious reforms to create a truly inclusive system (OCO, 2023). There have also been concerns raised regarding the adequacy of resources and supports and the timeliness and effectiveness of assessment. This act is demonstrative of the existence of the 'will' but not always accompanied by an appropriately demarcated and resourced 'way.'

Case Study 5: The European Context, The International Context and the Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications

The European Union (EU) created the 'Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (hereafter referred to as 'the principles') as a response to the challenges outlined in the Joint Interim Report by the European Council and the European Commission on progress towards Education and Training 2010 (European Council & European Commission, 2010). Three key areas of commonality for teachers were established by the principles as: 1) working with others, 2) with knowledge, technology and information and 3) with and in society (EC, 2010). The principles called for a more structured approach to the continuum of teacher education. They recommended that the teaching profession should be seen as a continuum inclusive of ITE, induction and continuing professional development in a coherent, well resources and sustainable structure. The principles aim to serve as leverage policies to facilitate improved efficiency and quality of education in the EU and to harmonise the teaching profession as a highly

qualified, mobile profession enhanced by lifelong learning (Sanchez & Matarranz, 2023). Another significant European communication from this time entitled 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education' (EC, 2007) noted the need for a coherent process of continuous professional development to support new and emerging demands in a more complex and changing society. This emphasis on a 'continuum' at a European level may to some extent explain the use of the language of 'continuum' by the TC with regards to SP.

The provision and overview of ITE and SP differ internationally, with a multitude of providers, routes, priorities and standards. Despite these differences, many countries, including the UK, Australia, and the United States of America, are encountering similar problems in attracting and retaining skilled individuals into the profession (See et al., 2020). Consequently, these countries are faced with a teacher supply crisis (Harford & Fleming, 2023). As a member of the EU, Ireland is influenced by the European Commission's (EC) priorities to improve teacher quality and education (Sahlberg, 2012). Within the European context, Finland is often presented as having achieved best practice in education, owing significantly to the presence of a well-educated teaching force (Morgan, 2014). ITE in Finland is university-based, with all teachers required to complete a five-year academic master's degree programme. There is a strong emphasis on transversal 21st-century competencies and skills acquisition for student teachers through ITE, preparing teachers to support pupils in becoming ethically responsible members of society (Niu et al., 2021).

Outside of the EU, teacher education programmes in Australia are located in federally funded universities. The teacher supply crisis in Australia has resulted in the development of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, which includes proposals to expedite visa processes to attract teachers from overseas (Dao et al., 2024). Countries such as the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Germany, and France have centralised systems of ITE (Fitzpatrick, 2021; Snoek et al., 2011). The system of ITE in the United States, where teacher supply is also an issue, is decentralised and operates at the state level, linked to the aspiration for economic improvements through education (Cochran-Smith, 2008).

Looking towards our nearest neighbours geographically, ITE in the United Kingdom differs significantly from Ireland. England, for example, employs a centralised approach,

evidenced by the controls exerted on teacher training programmes by the Teacher Training Agency and the declining influence of universities (Fitzpatrick, 2021). On the other hand, Scotland has resisted the impact of the national government through the General Teaching Council for Scotland, maintaining a different approach to teacher education. Focusing on school placement in ITE, Maandag et al. (2007) highlight the variety of types of institutional SP favoured internationally. These include the work placement model (Germany), the co-ordinator model (France), the partner model and the network model (England), and the training school model in the USA and Hong Kong. Each model presents unique benefits and challenges, reflecting the diverse approaches to integrating theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experienced globally.

2010s to Present Day: A Reform Agenda

The Sahlberg Report (2012)

The Sahlberg Report (2012) represents the findings of an International Review Panel to advise on the structure of ITE provision. It originated from a concern in the DE that the very large number of ITEs involved in teacher education in Ireland was negatively impacting on the quality of the courses provided and thus the quality of teacher education. The validity of this concern remains a contentious issue to this day. This concern reflects the findings of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), whereby higher performing countries had fewer providers which maintained higher standards. The Sahlberg panel advised that smaller institutions would not be able to engage with high quality research. Thus, the panel recommended the dissolution of two smaller institutions and the merging of others into six centres of excellence. Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) caution that this universalising of ITE has the potential to result in a loss of diversity within teacher education. They note that this is an area which still requires further research. The Sahlberg Report recommended that Trinity (TCD), Marino Institute of Education (MIE) and University College Dublin (UCD) form one centre for teacher education and that the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) should be integrated into this centre. It also

highlighted the dependence on part-time staff in the colleges, specifically noting the supervision of students on SP. The authors considered that this had potential to negatively impact the quality of education provided. Despite this, there has been a reluctance on the part of HEIs to prioritise addressing the nature of the SPT role.

ITE in Ireland now follows two different models: the concurrent model (240 ECTS) and the consecutive model (120 ECTS) for both primary and post-primary. Traditionally, most prospective STs followed the concurrent route. However, HC has had a major impact on the profile of student teachers. It is now the largest provider of Initial Teacher Education in Ireland and only runs the consecutive model. It is noteworthy that HC was deemed outside of the Sahlberg review process as a private provider. Despite this, it was deemed appropriate to include HC in some recommendations. This lack of consistency casts some doubt on accuracy or authenticity of the findings of this report.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy announced in 2011 (heretofore referred to as the strategy) acted as catalysts for a reform agenda during this period. The strategy outlines the objective to create a more co-ordinated and coherent system from existing disparate elements of the higher education system. This was envisaged as including systems of interconnectivity between complementary higher education institutions, each with a clearly defined mission. The strategy was developed, similarly to the Sahlberg Report, as a response to poor PISA results and consequently teacher education was characterised as a problem in need of reform in order to improve outputs (Walsh, 2024.)

Sahlberg 2 (2019)

The Structure of Teacher Education in Ireland: Review of Progress in Implementing Reform (also known as Sahlberg 2, 2019), constitutes a review of the extent to which the recommendations of the 2012 report had been implemented. It broadly found that good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the 2012 report and recommended that Mary Immaculate College be recognised as a free-standing provider of

ITE and that issues regarding inconsistency of staffing arrangements in the sector be addressed. This report accepted that the proposal to reconfigure Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Dublin (UCD), National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and Marino Institute of Education as one centre would be better replaced with two separate clusters, one made up of TCD and MIC and one made up of UCD and NCAD. The report further recommended that research and collaborations between providers be extended and developed. The absence of HC from the body of the report is evident.

The Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement (2023)

The launch of the Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement (2023) sought to:

- Reflect on a decade of change and innovation
- Create a vision for the future by setting out a phased implementation plan for 2030, including high-level goals for the next seven years
- Reflect and take account of the Sahlberg 2 (2018), Céim (2020a) and other recent developments and provide clarity around a vision for ITE.
- Goal five - to improve communication and collaboration across all sectors of education including within and between ITEs and other key stakeholders in ITE is of specific relevance to this research

This goal included the establishment of an Advisory Group (with ST representation) on ITE to support progress on the actions coming from this policy statement and the gathering of information on current arrangements for partnership and feedback between ITE providers and schools to inform future phases. The impact of this policy statement to date has been minimal. While the statement outlines ambitious goals, it lacks clarity on how resources will be allocated to support initiatives, leading to gaps in implementation. There is also a lack of comprehensive guidelines on how to assess the efficacy of the implementation of the goals or adapt them based on reflective practices. Given the rapid changes to the educational landscape, particularly in educational technology and pedagogy and the use of

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), there is a need for more explicit reference to addressing this area.

As part of the consultation phase of the policy statement, feedback on current SP practices included a recommendation that the TC Guidelines on SP (2021) still had scope for developing greater consistency in the quality of placement experience and that the TC should introduce a mandatory assessment activity to SP. The lack of systematic supports for CTs was also noted and a national framework to support school-based TEs suggested. O’Grady (2017) describes enactment of SP policy into practice as only beginning to be implemented around the time of her writing. She explains bedding down of policy into practice as involving initiation, implementation and institutionalisation of factors associated with change. She states that if political and educational needs are linked, chances of success are improved. Consequently, when perspectives of partners do not align with the vision and mandates of policy makers, progress is stilted. Obstacles to implementing SP policy and guidelines are due to factors including insufficient resources on the ground, lack of stakeholder buy-in and competing priorities within sites of practice.

2.4 The Teaching Council

This section addresses the establishment of the TC, and the policies and guidelines produced by this professional body, with a specific emphasis on SP and the continuum of professional development. At their best, professional bodies can act as vehicles for social mobility, agents of institutional mobility and ultimately a support for agentic professionalism (Friedman & Afitska, 2023). However, their efficacy is impacted by a variety of factors including the acceptance by the profession that there is a need for such a body and the experience of their efficacy. Research shows that professional bodies can become dysfunctional when they deviate from their main concerns and objectives or fail to work effectively, or be seen to do so, according to the mandates and objectives entrusted to them (Panda et al., 2022).

2.4.1 The Establishment of the Teaching Council

The Teaching Council (TC), the statutory body of the profession, was formally established in 2006 under The Teaching Council Act (2001) and on the back of the Education Act (1998) and Education Welfare Act (2000). It operates under the aegis of the DE. With its establishment came a sequence of changes in ITE (Gorman & Furlong, 2023). A general acceptance amongst teachers in Ireland pervaded that such a body might be required for the maintenance of standards (O'Donovan, 2013). However, the call for the creation of such a professional body was primarily driven by the teacher education system as part of the continuing professionalisation of teaching rather than by practicing teachers themselves (Ó Gallcháir & McGarr, 2022). The desire for a professional body came from a belief that the TC could strengthen the status of teaching and enable alignment with high performing countries.

One particular area of note whereby the TC has a statutory remit is regarding teacher supply in Ireland. The TC has a legislative obligation in this area and a statutory remit to advise the Minister of Education. According to the UNESCO International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 Report (2024), there is currently a global teacher shortage affecting access to education and leading to problems such as overloaded classrooms, lowering teaching quality and limited opportunities from education. The Report states that this has resulted in a need for 44 million additional teachers globally in order to achieve universal primary and post-primary education (UNESCO, 2024). Areas to address highlighted in the Report include teacher salaries, gender and disabilities, socio-demographic challenges and a need for increased teacher mobility and inclusivity. Within Ireland, proposals from the TC to address teacher supply have included the creation of the Teaching Supply Communications Working Group and the Teaching Supply Action Plan (DE, 2018). In the face of the supply crisis, the TC has proposed a timebound provision for teachers who qualify outside of Ireland to be eligible to apply for registration and complete their induction requirement in Ireland (TC, 2024). As of July 2024, it was anticipated that the timebound provision could be open to applications in the first quarter of 2025.

Another area of note for the TC is establishing and investigating Fitness to Teach (FtT). The former is primarily through the Code of Professional Conduct (2nd ed., 2016), discussed below. The TC has responsibility for investigating complaints made against

registered teachers. The TCs Disciplinary Committee enquires into a registered teacher's fitness to teach if the Investigating Committee refers a complaint with evidence to support further action, as per Section 43(1) of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015. A calendar of public inquiry hearings is published alongside findings and decisions on the TC website (<https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/fitness-to-teach/fitness-to-teach-inquiries/#information-for-public-and-media>). It is significant to this research that these procedures relate to registered teachers only. HEIs are expected to develop their own FtT and/or Fitness to Practice policies and procedures for STs. This endows HEIs with a gatekeeping responsibility, whereby they must establish systems by which to determine FtT, initiate investigations into FtT and adjudicate on these cases (Finch & Corrie, 2023). This localised approach to FtT has the potential to result in variances in FtT standards and practices in different HEIs. The HC policy and procedure, both made publicly available through the Hibernia College Quality Framework (HCQF), are based directly on the TC FtT, making use of the same language and definitions (<https://qualityframework.hiberniacollege.com/document/view-current.php?id=79>). However, other HEIs, who sit within wider university structures, have faced more complex challenges in developing FtT policies and procedures which fit within and alongside existing Fitness to Study policies used across the university and not solely for STs.

The initial experience of the TC by teachers in SoPs was less than ideal due to the requirement to pay a membership fee and a perception that this was foisted on teachers with limited consultation. According to Walsh (2024), the legislative power underpinning the TC and its ability to recognise or not programmes of ITE, has resulted in a new power structure. The TC can be critiqued under five key areas; regulation and standards, professional development, supports for teachers, level of bureaucracy and disciplinary actions (DE, 2024). Broadly, the efficacy of the TC in relation to each of these is largely unproven. The power of the TC is significantly curtailed by the expectation that it engages with various groups such as teachers, schools and the wider public. The quality of this engagement varies, particularly regarding evidence of outcomes from consultation. Excessive bureaucracy has resulted in complaints from teachers, particularly those attempting to transfer qualifications having worked for a period abroad (DE, 2024).

2.4.2 Structure and Composition of the Teaching Council

The TC consists of 37 members, comprising primarily of teachers - 16 elected and 6 teacher union nominees, with an equal division of primary and post-primary nominees. The remainder of membership includes 5 members nominated by the Minister for Education - inclusive of Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and IBEC membership and members from the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and DE Inspectorate. Two nominees come from specified third level bodies, four from school management, two from parents' associations and two nominated by colleges of education. Walsh describes this representation of teachers as minimal given the powers of the TC across the continuum of teacher education (Walsh, 2024). Gorman and Furlong (2023) describe the TC as a forum where HEI providers of ITE work alongside other stakeholders in policy formation and negotiation. Smith (2013) interprets the composition of the TC as representing a lost influence of HEI - based TEs, due to lack of explicit representation during talks on the format of the TC. Gorman and Furlong (2023) conclude that this has resulted in HEI TEs being at a disadvantage in negotiations on teacher education policy going forward. Following this line of reasoning, the need for a professional organisation such as the TC may have been advocated for by TEs in HEIs, but the policies and guidelines produced by the resulting body may reflect an inadequate representation of the current needs and challenges of those same HEIs and their students.

2.4.3 The Teaching Council Mandate

The Report of the Steering Committee on the Establishment of The Teaching Council (1998) set out the context and rationale for said body. Broadly speaking, the remit of the Council was outlined as being to improve and regulate initial and continuing teacher education. The Steering Committee defined the TC as *'an independent, statutory agency which exercises the powers and performs the functions through which teachers can achieve a large degree of professional autonomy and self-regulation and thereby enhance the*

status and morale of the teaching profession and the quality of education being provided for students in our schools.' (p3, 1998). It described the establishment of this body as a normal and necessary step in the maturation of a profession and a response to a progress of growing understanding of the complexities of teaching and the establishment of an all-graduate workforce. Therefore, the TC is presented as a logical next step rather than a radical move heralding a new direction.

The TC has a dual mandate to promote and regulate the profession of teaching (TC, 2011). It has statutory responsibility in accordance with section 38 of the Teaching Council Acts (2001), to review and accredit teacher education courses. It also commissions research into ITE, notable amongst these Hall et al. (2018), Hyland (2012) and Sahlberg (2012). Mulcahy and McSharry (2012), in their research on the changing face of Irish education, define the professionalisation of teaching and teachers, via a professional body, as key to any proposed changes in the education system. Nevertheless, they identify change as involving significant 'buy in' from a wide variety of roles and list the wide array of participants in Irish education and professionalisation as including existing practitioners, the government (DE), HEIs and the unions. It would be appropriate to include STs and those involved in the support and mentoring of STs on SP in this list.

Since January 2014 when Section 30 of the TC Act 2001 came into force, teachers working within recognised schools are required to register with the TC with the payment of an annual fee. Only registered teachers can be employed in Irish schools. Registration includes the provision of proof of appropriate qualification, Garda Vetting and character references (TC, 2018) and concludes with the issuing of a TC number. This initially caused anger and resentment amongst established teachers who failed to see any immediate benefits to membership (Mulcahy & McSharry, 2012). STs emerging into the system will have paid this fee from the start of their careers and it seems likely that the initial resentment may decrease if the TC is experienced as impactful and significant in their careers going forward. Registration is dependent on holding a professional qualification. On registration, teachers accept the values and code of professional conduct for teachers (2nd ed., updated 2016).

2.4.4 The Teaching Council and Professionalising Teaching

The introduction of changes, such as establishing a professional body and extending the PME programme to two years, must be experienced as effectively enhancing existing practices for the TC to gain in popularity and authority. To assure best practices, processes need to be in place to support and evaluate the impact of those changes (Mulcahy & McSharry, 2012). The role of the TC as endorsing the high quality and professionalism of Irish teachers was emphasised by the Steering Committee as granting teaching ‘professional status’ similar to legal, medical and veterinary professionals (Steering Committee, 1998). This assertion is open to debate, with those professional bodies having significantly more direct impact on their professions and their membership. The TC is subject to the terms of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) and is therefore held to Periodic Critical Review (PCR) every five years. In the 2024 Periodic Critical Review of the TC (DE, 2024), an extensive list of 47 recommendations for improvement were presented. These included recommendations to improve the statutory mandatory, legislative, strategic and regulatory functions, structure and capacity and performance of the Council. Of particular relevance to this research are the recommendations to examine the lack of perceived clarity and consensus in the system as to the TC’s role in the promotion of the profession. Another recommendation was that the TC ensure meaningful consultation arrangements are put in place to facilitate involvement of key partners in the review of Céim Standards and the standards of ITE.

The Steering Committee (1998) specifies that teaching has moved away from the acquiring of skills as with an apprenticeship or training course and towards professional activities conducted by professional people who undertake continuing professional development through ITE, induction and in-career development. The professionalisation of the teacher is defined as

‘the exercise of discretionary judgement and the application of a high level of knowledge and skill in complex situations and in conditions of unavoidable uncertainty ...at the core of current concepts of professionalism.’ (Steering Committee p6,1998).

The person of the teacher as a professional is further defined as incorporating, improving and rendering the perception of the teacher as a skilled practitioner with specific professional knowledge in the science and art of teaching. They apply professional knowledge, intuition and creativity to their teaching and problem-solving tasks. They are moral influencers, curriculum makers, decision makers, researchers, evaluators and reflective practitioners (Steering Committee, 1998). This fulsome definition of the teacher as a professional describes someone who is accomplished in specific area as would be expected of a professional, but it is this reference to 'intuition,' which seems to hark back to that idea of the teacher as a 'certain type of person' who is predisposed rather than a skilled and highly educated professional. There is a danger in any definition which includes a 'certain type of person' in that it excludes those who do not fit the prescribed vision and therefore hinders or discourages change, innovation or diversity. Teacher professionalism and teacher professional identity continue to be highly contested ideals at the level of policy and practice (Sachs, 2001). Whether the TC can contribute to a more harmonious interpretation and enactment of professionalism is yet to be established.

2.4.5 Efficacy and Power of the Teaching Council

The existence of the TC, its remit and its influence all bear witness to the developing professionalising of teaching and the significance attached to the recognition of teaching as a profession in Ireland. Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) further define the TC as a driving force in Irish education, bringing about significant changes to the system. O'Doherty and Harford (2016) describe the establishment of the TC as a significant development in Irish education which also heralded a move towards more regulation and intervention and less autonomy for ITE providers. Furthermore, Walsh points to the legislative power underpinning the TC, and its power to recognise programmes offered by HEIs, as having created a new power structure in ITE (Walsh, 2024). In light of these powers, the establishment of the TC can be viewed as a move away from institutional autonomy in areas such as the nature of teacher education programmes and the content of said programmes (O'Doherty & Harford, 2016). A limitation on the TC is that it does not have control over the

resources to support policy changes, which are controlled by the Teacher Education Section of the DE (Clarke & O'Doherty,, 2021). A counter argument to the call for protection of autonomy is the need for greater consistency across ITEs, particularly regarding assessment practices, the training and hiring of SPTs and the response to the emerging challenges of Generative Artificial Intelligence. The experience by many educators of the TC as highly bureaucratic and lacking in specific expertise, hinders the willingness of educators across the system to engage effectively with it in supporting and implementing change. In researching the TC, I have found a lack of specific and detailed independent review or critique of the professional body, indicative of a lack of valuing of the body, a lack of need for critique or an unwillingness to be seen or experienced as an agitator against the professional body. From my research and the perspectives of participants, the lack of value attached to the TC is most evident. This begs the question, can such a body effectively support, plan for and guide innovation, integration and improvement?

In terms of the potential for the TC to promote the professionalism of teaching and the self-perception by teachers of themselves as active researchers and system-shapers, Sexton (2007) states that teachers continue to view their own professionalism in very pragmatic and classroom-based terms only. This inhibits the ability of teachers to look at wider educational, theoretical or philosophical issues as things of relevance to them and their developing practice or professionalism. Sexton finds that the TC could play a major role in advancing professional practice which is focused on these bigger issues. Treacy (2022) advocates for the increasing of the scope of the TC and states that the TC should analyse graduates' legal knowledge of TC documentations and educational law, to ensure they have the appropriate skills to perform adequately as a professional. In light of the already heavy burden placed on STs across the wide variety of modules and assessments on both the B.Ed and PME, and the requirements placed on NQTs through Droichead, this could be viewed as an excessive and overly simplistic requirement. Of more immediate significance is the issue of Fitness to Practice (FTP) and the establishment of criteria to address this going forward. Finch and Corrie (2023) highlight the sparsity of literature on FTP procedures in comparison to other curriculum or assessment development areas. While universities struggle with the potentially litigious world of establishing and proving

FTP, there is a clear case to be made for the TC establishing clear and consistent standards and detailing the implementation process, specific to the ST. Furthermore, the role of the TC in establishing how to address the teacher supply crisis is becoming ever more critical. The contentious issue of striking a balance between ITE curricular needs and the supply of teachers requires sustained input by the TC. The finding of a recent INTO, Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) and Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) poll shows an overall current staffing shortage of 951 teachers across the 40% of all primary and special schools who responded to the survey (INTO et al., 2024). Despite this, the TC input on teacher supply has been limited, as outlined previously in this chapter.

2.4.6 The Teaching Council Codes, Guidelines and Policies

I have included an overview of the TC codes, guidelines and policies within the context chapter instead of the Literature Review chapter as they form part of the history of the regulatory body, its assertion of power and authority and the context within which SP functions.

Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2007, Updated 2nd Edition 2016)

The Code of Professional Conduct (hereafter referred to as ‘the code’) applies to all registered teachers and lays out the values and standards expected of the profession. This code is the first of its kind for the teaching profession in Ireland. It was updated in 2016 (from 2012) to include reference to FtT investigations, amendments to the FtT provisions of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015, and a section focused on complaints relating to registered teachers. These revisions point to an underlying issue of increased litigious practices and more complex working environments. The code lays out three main purposes:

1. It serves as a guiding compass as teachers seek to steer an ethical and respectful course through their career in teaching and to uphold the honour and dignity of the teaching profession.

2. It may be used by the education community and the wider public to inform their understanding and expectations of the teaching profession in Ireland.
3. It has an important legal standing and is used by the Council as a reference point in exercising its investigative and disciplinary functions under Part 5 of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001 – 2015, dealing with fitness to teach.

(Code of Professional Conduct, TC, 2016)

The Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011)

In 2011 the TC concluded a review of the content of teacher education, resulting in the policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education which now guides the TC's work. The embedding of a continuum of education in the ITE landscape has impacted on both education policy and practice (Walsh, 2024). The policy:

- Emphasises the importance of a life-long learning approach to the teaching profession, subdivided into initial, induction and in-service education
- Defines the continuum of teacher education as spanning early, continuing and later career professional development. The TC (somewhat idealistically) describes this as *'merging seamlessly into the next and interconnecting in a dynamic way with each of the others'* (Teaching Council, 2011a, p.8).
- Emphasises the concepts of innovation, integration and improvement
- Identifies life-long learning for teachers as a core foundation of the profession

Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (2011)

A key aspect of the reforms discussed above has been the development of the accreditation system for all teacher education programmes. An advisory group was set up by the TC to establish criteria and guidelines for ITEs on reconceptualising their programmes. This reconceptualisation resulted in a detailed formulation of the programme design and content. It emphasised literacy and numeracy, ICT, special education and assessment. It also impacted on the length (moving from one year diploma to a two-year

PME) and nature of SP (O’ Doherty, 2014). Concurrent programmes are now required to be 240 ECTS credit programmes, with SP comprising 25% of the programme and all consecutive programmes must be 120 credits with a minimum of 40% of the programme as SP. According to O’Doherty and Harford (2016) this has necessitated detailed review of programme content, design and structure. The Criteria and Guidelines (2011) also replaced the use of the term Teaching Practice with School Placement, stating that this is more reflective of the broad range of teaching and non-teaching experiences students have.

Guidance for Registered Teachers About the Use of Social Media and Electronic Communication (2023)

This document sets out to provide guidance on the use of electronic communication and social media to teachers. It emphasises the potential dangers and gives some advice on how to avoid them. As is standard for TC documents, the guidance emphasises that schools must develop their own policies in this area. The document is very short, consists mostly of bullet pointed advice around minimising risk and lacks substance in terms of implementation. The opportunity to address the area of Generative Artificial Intelligence is not availed of. There is also little evidence of research guiding or informing the content or of consultation in developing the document.

Guidelines on School Placement (2013, revised 2021a)

The 2021 Guidelines on School Placement (hereafter referred to as ‘the guidelines’) self-define as a culmination of a partnership process between the TC and national stakeholders. The guidelines:

- Aim to enhance consistency in the SP experience of STs and facilitate collaborations between HEIs and schools, within a partnership model (TC, 2021)
- Acknowledge existing good practice and note developing this incrementally to the benefit of all partners

Fitzpatrick (2021) describes the guidelines as a significant step forward for SP programmes in Ireland, due to their aim to provide greater consistency in the placement experience across providers and to their acting as a blueprint to support HEIs in the delivery of a structured and coherent placement experience with clarity in roles and responsibilities. It should however be noted that there is no attempt to detail the provision of professional development for CTs or selection processes for the role of CTs or SPTs within the guidelines (O'Doherty et al., 2017). The guidelines highlight three benefits of a reconceptualisation of SP 1) to improve the SP experience for STs, 2) enrich learning of pupils and 3) deepen professional satisfaction and thus the status of the profession (TC, 2021, p5).

The guidelines note that SP is dependent on the goodwill of teachers and voluntary participation but emphasise the benefits of CTs providing more structured supports. O'Doherty and Harford (2016) define these guidelines as aspirational with little engagement with practical aspects of SP such as how to develop the partnership model, operationalise it or resource it. They also point to the absence of any reference at all to how CTs should be selected, professionally developed and guided in their work with STs. This level of uncertainty and obscurity around operationalising a true partnership model continues to bare impact today. Gorman & Furlong (2023) find that the guidelines do not include a full consideration of the fundamentals of partnership with funding, resourcing, professional learning and/or recognition of engagement. Thus, the opportunity for meaningful engagement with how partnership can be actualised is not availed of. The guidelines do not explicitly seek to address the tension between the ideal vision of SP and the experiences of and in SoPs. Gorman & Furlong (2023) describe them as pitched towards a range of partners, with a central theme of partnership building and a persuasive tone prevalent throughout. However, they also point to the use of third person pronouns by the TC when discussing the shared objectives, thus removing the professional body at the outset from the partnership.

2.4.7 Missed Opportunities: Updating the Guidelines

The 2021 guidelines follow on from recommendations of the SPWG (2019) and the introduction of Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020a). They profess the overarching aim of providing improved consistency and collaboration between HEIs and schools. However, does the updating by the TC of the guidelines reflects a failed opportunity to provide more specific guidance on SP and definition of roles and processes?

The 2013 guidelines define the CT as '*... a teacher in the placement school who supports and guides the student teacher and who acts as a point of contact between the HEI and the school*' (p5, 2013). This lacks detail in terms of how that support is envisaged, what skills, competencies or training a CT needs and structures around how guidance might be offered. It fails to speak to the role of the CT specifically in relation to the HEI, reporting and acting on concerns regarding poor practice or what if any role they play in assessment processes. Rather than addressing these issues, the revised guidelines further muddy the waters by introducing the Irish term for guide, 'treoraithe.' The guidelines make the refutable claim that this term more accurately reflects the nature of the role. The use of Irish language to describe key roles is common practice with the TC and runs the risk of excluding from the profession and thus acts as a possible barrier to inclusivity. McDaid & Nowlan (2022) assert that despite the increase in ethnic diversity in Ireland, the Irish teacher populations remains mono-ethnic. For this reason, I refrain from using the term 'treoraithe' over the course of this research.

Beyond the introduction of this term, the definition remains relatively unchanged. Regarding the definition of the role of the SPT, a similar approach is taken; the title is changed from HEI Placement Tutor to SPT thus making the connection to the HEI less explicit. However, the definition of the role continues to focus on supporting, mentoring and evaluating and no further nuance is provided. While Figure 3 (20) of the revised guidelines breaks down the roles and responsibilities of each further, without a more comprehensive definition, there is room for confusion. Looking at the roles and responsibilities of the CT in the revised guidelines, they are littered with words which lack clarity and tangible evidence such as 'encourage', 'allow' and 'afford.'

The table below shows how little has changed between the roles and responsibilities for the CT described in 2013 and 2021. The few changes made (highlighted) relate exclusively to terminology and not content. This is despite the SPWG Report (2019) noting the need for all stakeholders to realise the shared-vision and for this to happen the recommendation to include a detailed communication process with CTs to facilitate them in understanding their role. Furthermore, the Hall Report (2018) strongly recommended the need to train CTs in their role in the face of an ad hoc SP system.

2013 Guidelines	2021 Guidelines
Introduce the student teacher to: the learners , the classroom, the teacher's plan of work for that class, class rules and procedures, and the roles of other staff directly involved with the learners in the class.	Introduce the student teacher to: the pupils , the classroom, the teacher's plan of work for that class, class rules and procedures, and the roles of other staff directly involved with the pupils in the class.
Afford the student teacher opportunities to observe their teaching (and that of their colleagues). Inform the student teacher regarding learners' needs and attainments.	Afford the student teacher opportunities to observe their teaching (and that of their colleagues). Inform the student teacher regarding pupils needs and attainments.
Assign the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student teacher while retaining the primary responsibility for the progress of the learners	Assign the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student teacher while retaining the primary responsibility for the progress of the pupils .
Discuss the student teacher's planning and resources with him/her , as appropriate	Discuss the student teacher's planning and resources with them as appropriate.
Observe the student teacher's practice and provide oral or written feedback to the	Observe the student teacher's practice and provide oral or written feedback to the

student teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner.	student teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner.
Encourage, support and facilitate the student teacher in: critical reflection on his/her practice, the use of a variety of teaching methodologies and in engaging with and responding appropriately to feedback from learners	Encourage, support and facilitate the student teacher in: critical reflection on their practice, the use of a variety of teaching methodologies and in engaging with and responding appropriately to feedback from pupils.
Encourage the student teacher to seek advice and support where necessary. — Allow student teachers to teach independently, as their competence develops (in line with HEI requirements for the particular placement), and as deemed appropriate by the co - operating teacher and the principal.	Encourage the student teacher to seek advice and support where necessary. Allow student teachers to teach independently, as their competence develops (in line with HEI requirements for the particular placement), and as deemed appropriate by Treoraí and the principal.
Work collaboratively with the student teacher, the HEI placement tutor and the school principal. Advise the principal of any serious concerns regarding a student teacher's practice or professional conduct.	Work collaboratively with the student teacher, the school placement tutor and the school principal. Advise the principal of any serious concerns regarding a student teacher's practice or professional conduct.
Have discretionary time while student teachers teach independently to facilitate engagement with the student teachers at other times	Have discretionary time while student teachers teach independently to facilitate engagement with the student teachers at other times.

Table : 2-1 Comparison of 2013 and 2021 Teaching Council Guidelines on SP

Changing Names to Denote Changing Functions

Changing names to denote changes in function is a consistent feature of TC documentation. Walsh & Dolan (2019) note the challenges of moving from an era of policy development to translation into practice and how the roles and responsibilities of those in ITE are currently in transition. However, in a broader context, the very title SP is a move away from the previously used term 'Teaching Practice.' This change in title is briefly described in the guidelines (2013) as replacing Teaching Practice in order to '*more accurately reflects the nature of the experience as one encompassing a range of teaching and non - teaching activities.*' (6) The intention is emphasised to include the activities undertaken within the HEI (such as micro teaching, preparatory workshops, reflections) which are directly related to the SP while sitting outside the physical boundaries of the school. Furthermore, SP describes the experience in relation to the school context as a whole rather than specifically to the classroom teaching. This speaks to the vision of an increased role for partnership participants in SP but is not accompanied by guidelines on how a whole school context can in practice be facilitated. For such a whole school approach to SP to flourish, a level of organised collaboration or collaborative partnership would be required. Adams (2023) describes collaborative partnership as specifically aiming to avoid dichotomies in theory and practice and the practice of seeing teacher knowledge as sequential or responsibility located in one space only - either HEI or SoP.

Relationship with Sites of Practice

The revised guidelines (2021) describe a move towards a more structured approach to identifying and supporting SoPs. This is followed by encouragement that schools act as communities of good professional practice and engage with HEIs of their own accord. In effect, the guidelines immediately fail to follow through on delivering a structured approach. The 'goodwill' nature of the relationship between HEIs and SoPs is noted and the recommendation for further consultation with stakeholders made. However, the opportunity to outline a proposal for a more structured approach is missed. The call for

further consultation is potentially frustrating for partners owing to the fact that the revised guidelines are already the result of a comprehensive consultation process.

The guidelines require all HEIs and schools to work together on SP as partners with an expectation, not a requirement, that schools and HEIs develop more explicit and formal partnerships. However, as Adams (2023) recounts, power imbalances in SP often mitigate against its effective working. The lack of specific or detailed guidance as to how to formalise partnership is noteworthy as a potentially missed opportunity for further clarity in the revised guidelines. Harford and O'Doherty critique this model as being overly loose and lacking in the necessary detail about roles and responsibilities (2016). The ideal is presented by the TC as if it already exists as predominant practice, without consideration to the complexities of enactment which can force the ST into an apprentice, Teacher Assistant (TA) or Special Needs Assistant (SNA) role. Bain et al. (2017) emphasise how national priorities in education shift without thought to sustainability or continuity while those based in the issues on the ground, focus on more fundamental motivators of improving teaching and learning. Consequently, a picture of SP as a loosely woven textile of ill-defined working parts, lacking clarity in definition of roles, responsibilities, structure and content emerges.

Efficacy and Implementation

The guidelines are presented as the embodiment of interconnectivity between partners seeking workable innovations. There is very little literature available critiquing the efficacy of the guidelines and a lack of criticality around the implementation of TC policies and guidelines in general. The guidelines speak to improving consistency in SP and claim to mark a step towards an improved articulation of the continuum of teacher education. However, while 'encouraging' new and innovative practice, they stop short of specifically defining or regulating how innovative partnership is to be facilitated. For the ideals of the guidelines to be met, certain conditions need to be expressed and negotiated (Bain et al., 2017). These conditions include a recognition that partners have different work norms, allocating time for collaboration and engaging in sustained work to promote partnership (Bain et al., 2017).

2.4.8 The Teaching Council and the Status of the Student Teacher

The status of the ST within the host school is complex - as teachers and learners negotiate their professional spaces - and this can impact on the motivation for innovation (Conway et al, 2012). Coupled with the context of a teacher supply crisis and expectations being placed on HEIs to adapt their SP practices in order to relieve this pressure, this begs the question whether there is an increased role for a body to protect the interests of STs. STs report feeling pressurised to engage in subbing during SP and HEIs find themselves in a difficult space where some SoPs are absolutely opposed to STs subbing during SP and others are exerting pressure on the ST to fill the gap. SP can be critiqued as perpetuating power imbalances and not providing adequate opportunities for STs to engage in meaningful, collaborative and authentic learning (Van Velven et al., 2012). Hardie et al. (2022), researching the central role of patients in nursing preceptorship relationships, emphasise the lack of student, staff nurse and patient involvement in the design of preceptorship programmes. This is also evident in and applicable to the concept of partnership in SP as presented by the TC, which model lacks adequate consultation and collaboration with partners such as the STs, CTs, SPTs or pupils. The research by Hardie et al. points to a co-design process to develop skills amongst preceptors, which is comparable within SP to a co-design of SP by partners. However, such co-design is impossible without clearer definition of roles and responsibilities of participants within a partnership model.

Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020a)

Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education (hereafter referred to as Céim) set out the requirements for all ITE programmes of qualification for teaching in Ireland to meet in order to be accredited by the TC. These standards are highlighted as having been shaped by a consultative process, inclusive of a range of stakeholders. According to Gorman & Furlong (2023), the TC is thus not solely accountable to the standards set but rather

accountability sits with the wider stakeholder group. Treacy (2022) emphasises the low profile given to educational law in Céim despite significant developments in laws about teachers in the preceding years. Treacy holds that educational law may actually have decreased in profile and argues for a need for the TC to make explicit reference to educational law in order to prepare students adequately for more challenging professional environments. Key aspects of Céim include:

- Emphasises the three I's of Innovation, Integration and Improvement as integral to the continuum of professional development
- Notes ITE as the formal starting point of this progression
- Sets out 'Core Elements of ITE' which all programmes must address
- Emphasises the requirement to address Gaeilge, including the Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht
- Specific need to address early childhood education
- Contains a range of standards against which programmes of ITE are reviewed, underpinned by a number of key principles

Unfortunately, Céim does not address the emerging challenges due to advances in Generative Artificial Intelligence. Some of the elements are developed to a higher standard than others - with elements such as 1) professional relationships and working with parents and 2) creativity and reflective practices feeling particularly 'light touch.'

Core Elements of ITE
Inclusive Education
Global Citizenship Education
Professional Relationships and working with parents
Professional identity and agency
Creativity and Reflective practice
Literacy and Numeracy
Digital Skills: to include Digital Literacy

Table : 2-2 Core Elements of ITE, Céim (TC, 2020a)

SP in Céim is introduced under the heading, 'A Shared-vision for School Placement' (Céim, p20, 2020a); a title which ambitiously implies an existing partnership and coherence within ITE. SP is described as central to ITE. The importance of establishing a supportive environment and network between SPTs, school principals, class teachers and the school community is stated but no clarity or detail is given as to how this should be developed. STs are described as making valuable contributions to school life but there is a lack of detail in terms of how this is envisaged. Reflective practice and socialising into the profession are noted as key to SP - again little detail is given as to what is really envisaged here in an ideal scenario. Partnership between schools and HEIs is lauded as enabling supportive professional collaboration. However, Céim offers no specific new structures, guidance or framework for this to happen. Céim states that STs should identify further professional learning for Droichead during SP and keep a Taisce (portfolio) with this aim in mind. This Taisce has been interpreted very differently across ITE providers. A source of confusion and practical challenges exists in how to keep a record (whether online or in paper version) of this Taisce throughout ITE and then transfer this with the ST when they graduate. Gorman and Furlong (2023) draw attention to the use of certitudes to express statements dealing with HEI-school partnerships, where that certitude is not in reality a given. They highlight the passage which states that, *'student teachers experience a supportive model of placement which facilitates professional conversational engagement between all partners'* (Céim, 2020a) and point to the use of verbs such "experience" and "facilitates" which imply existing practices despite calls for resources and supporting HEI-school partnerships in the Guidelines on School Placement (TC, 2021a). Additionally, they note the lack of clarity or explanation given to what the *'structured at the national level'* (Céim, p17, 2020a) to facilitate quality and collaborative engagement in school placement actually refer to. Overall, there is very little in the way of innovation or development in the presentation of SP. There is little detail and an abundance of buzz words (innovation, collaborative, partnership) with minimal depth or evidence of a more structured, clearly defined and supported process.

Assessment on SP is given little verbiage beyond the stated requirements of a minimum of 200 hours direct teaching across placements and the requirement to complete at least one extended 10-week placement. The requirement that all STs be supported by a minimum of 2 SPTs is also asserted and as of May 2022 at least 50% of SPTs are to be registered with the TC. STs are required to pass SP independently of any other element of the programme. STs who fail a module of SP are to be offered mentoring supports and no more than one repeat attempt. All of this does, to some extent, point to the centrality placed on SP in the preparation of teachers and the desire for a linking between ITE and professional development. What is missing is not the destination but the detailed map of how to get there.

Two developments in requirements for assessment purpose within Céim are the need for the ST to keep a Taisce (portfolio of learning) across their placements, as noted above, and the centrality of research on placement. The Taisce is presented as an opportunity for the ST to demonstrate a comprehension of inclusive education in their class context and demonstrate an understanding of the importance of working with parents as stakeholders. Research is presented as offering STs the opportunity to investigate and learn from practice, thus enhancing their teaching. STs are required to engage in research on their own practice that demonstrates the connection between the sites of practice and HEI. The ‘Treoraí’ and ST are expected to discuss the research plans. At this juncture it is worth noting that CTs are unpaid for their support of the ST and are not given any additional training or recognition for undertaking the role. This can result in a reluctance to take on such a role and in some cases this reluctance may be well founded, where the CT has little or no experience of conducting or engaging with research.

Graduate Teacher Standards are outlined in Céim under the three broad headings of 1) professional values, 2) professional skills and practice and 3) professional knowledge and understanding. Céim notes that these standards can also be employed by teacher educators in supporting programme design. The learning outcomes are described in terms of the complex role of teachers and engagement with lifelong learning. The broad headings are divided further into elements and further still under ‘student teacher will be able to’

outcomes statements. This amounts to a vast array of learning outcomes, the volume of which renders their efficacy doubtful.

2.5 Towards Partnership in School Placement

The Council of the European Union (EU, 2014, p22) notes the need for stronger partnerships in educational policy and practice in order to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing society.

‘the role of teacher - and the expectations placed upon them - are evolving too, as they face the challenges of new skills requirements, rapid technological developments and increasing social and cultural diversity, and the need to cater for more individualised teaching and special learning needs.’ (Council Conclusions, 2014/C 183/05)

The term partnership is open to some interpretation but broadly speaking, partnership in SP refers to interconnectivity within the ITE programme, partnership with STs and other participants in SP and possibly most significantly partnership between ITEs and SoPs. Partnership describes the interconnectivity between the different groups and individuals involved in one or more of these aspects. Partnership is defined within Céim (TC, 2020a, p4) as ‘the processes, structures and arrangements that enable the partners to work and learn collaboratively in teacher education’. These processes, structures and arrangements also include School/HEI partnerships which focus on improving learning and teaching.’ (Céim, 2020a). The tone of the 2019 report of the SPWG, is highly indicative of the very informal nature of the Partnership Model in Ireland and the reliance on goodwill of SoPs rather than formalised procedures. It is at pains to note that it does not seek to place any further burden CTs but simply to offer proper supports for the role.

The TC commissioned Hall Report (Hall et al., 2018), highlights the growing reluctance of SoPs to engage with HEIs on SP. Hall et al (2018) describe a historical context of a pre-existing informal pattern of relationships between HEIs and schools stretching back in many cases over decades between specific schools and providers. They also note that for PME programmes this pattern is often different, with the relationship between the student

and the school being at the fulcrum as STs source their own placements. In both cases there is a heavy reliance on informal relationships. Hall et al. (2018) draw attention in their study to some growing evidence of formalised and even innovative structures within schools for the selection of STs. These more formal processes include information meetings at the HEI, setting out expectations for STs on SP, site visits by HEIs to schools, and CPD courses that are free to selected teachers/schools. However, overall SP partnership was found by Hall et al. (2018) to be a loosely interpreted and informal concept. Their research also reflects the tone of the SPWG report, and a reluctance on the part of HEIs to be seen as 'demanding' or imposing too much on schools against a backdrop of an assessment process which requires access to schools for regular site visits. This results in a tension between maintaining compliance with TC requirements, ensuring the standards of SoPs and keeping said sites 'on board'. The lack of incentive or coercion for schools to maintain their role as SoPs and the reliance on informal relationships are key factors in the potential efficacy of any partnership model.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has charted the very specific historical and social context of ITE and SP in Ireland within which the research questions lie. As such, the chapter is an acknowledgement of the multifaceted context of the research questions. SP and the potential for partnership within SP are intrinsically related to contextual factors including policy, historical context, the interests and power of different partners and the rapidly changing society within which all interactions and adaptations take place.

The next chapter progresses to a discussion of the relevant and pertinent literature, structured around the framework of partnership, perspectives and professional development and notes how that literature has impacted the conceptual foundation and interpretative lens of this research.

Chapter Three: The Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

The literature review is organised using the 3 Ps framework: Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development. Partnership speaks to the context of SP, perspectives to engagement with it and professionalism to the developmental functions. This research placed a strong emphasis on the concept of partnership in SP, making it essential to examine its representation in the literature. Although the TC, HEIs and DE describe SP as a partnership model, how partnership is defined, enacted and valued within SP is dependent to a large degree upon the perspectives of partners. Perspectives vary according to role and positionality within SP. SP is traditionally viewed as a triad of players acting, thinking, and reacting within their settings (McIntyre & Morris, 1980). The triad comprises of STs, CTs and SPTs. CTs operate almost exclusively within SoPs and within their direct network of peers. SPTs, who for many embody the HEI assessment process, are often seen as the College's representative on the ground (McCarthy & Quinn, 2010). However, they also occupy a somewhat marginalised role within each setting (Zeichner, 2010). STs straddle HEIs and SoPs, negotiating their place in and responsibilities to both and tangentially attempting to forge positive relationships within each (Johnston, 2010). This research expanded the potential partners to include school principals as the leaders within SoPs, the AF, who have responsibility for preparing STs for SP, and finally NQTs, who have recently experienced SP and embark on their continuum of professional development. Although the traditional triadic model presented in the literature is a useful starting point, my research points to the need to extend this to include a wider spectrum of participation. This expansion is informed by Johnston (2010) and Zeichner (2010), whose work highlights the marginalisation and boundary-crossing roles within SP.

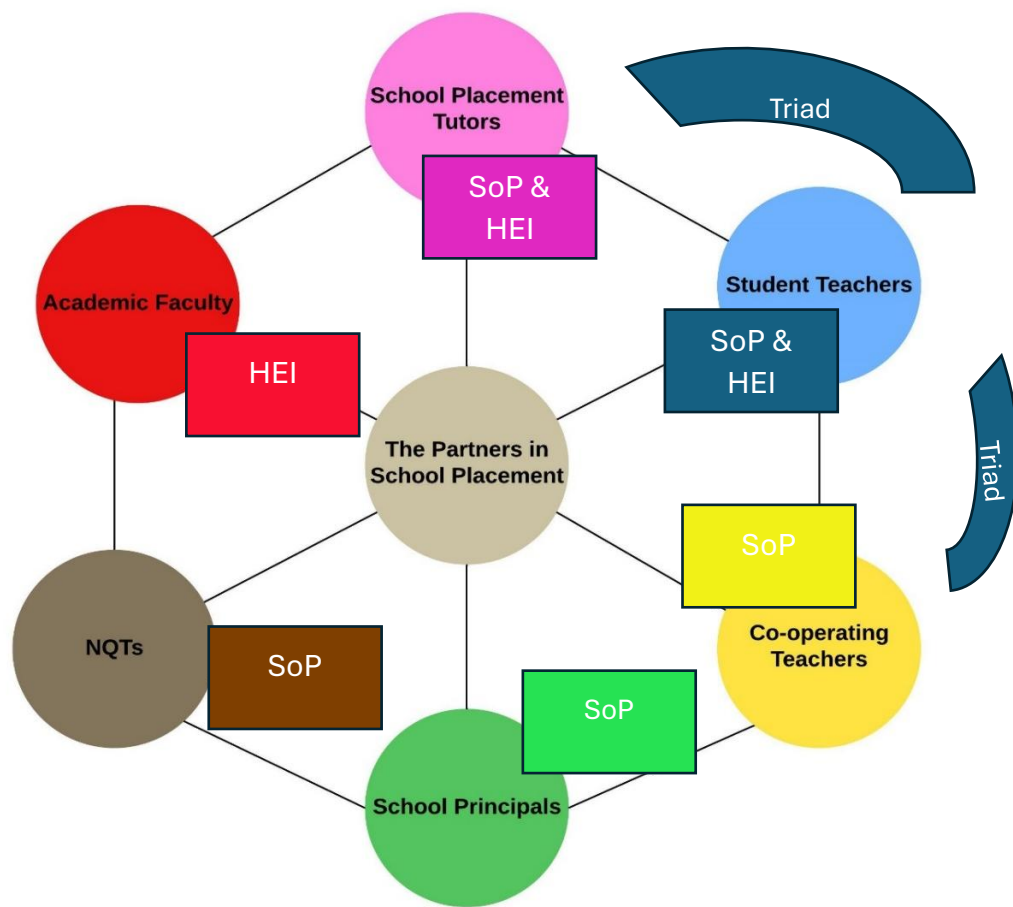


Figure : 3-1 The School Placement Partners

3.1 The Scope of the Literature Review

The literature was selected using a systematic, transparent and replicable process (Siddaway et al., 2019), appropriate to the complex nature of educational research. It is only through a comprehensive, substantive, and thorough literature review that comprehensive, substantive, and thorough research can be conducted (Boote et al., 2005). The development and application of specific inclusion and exclusion criteria supported a systematic approach to the process. I was also aware, from my own professional experiences and reading, of a recent increase in doctoral research on roles and

responsibilities in SP, particularly that of the CT and therefore began the literature review process with an understanding that the relevance and applicability of more recent research would be a priority. Given the interplay of a wide variety of different types of literature, policies and guidelines required to adequately address the research questions, it was important to develop a transparent literature scoping process. The scope for the literature review was defined firstly by the research questions themselves and secondly by the research context. The intended audience for this research was also considered in setting the scope. The intended audience includes Initial Teacher Educators, practicing teachers (particularly those considering or engaged in the CT role), school leaders, policymakers, STs and NQTs. The partners, representing teacher voice at various points in their professional lifecycle, are in effect the intended audience. However additionally, perhaps ambitiously, the intended audience is the TC and those holding positions of authority within ITE and education more widely. This is a diverse audience but one which functions within the same spaces and places: notably the ITE and host school contexts of SP. Finally, as a teacher, teacher educator and College Registrar working in ITE, with experience functioning in the area of SP pre, during and post pandemic, I approached this research with some familiarity with potentially relevant literature and the intended scope and audience.

3.1.1 Grey Literature and Policy Documents included in Scope

Grey literature can be defined as any electronic or printed literature not controlled by commercial publishers (Siddaway et al., 2019). In the context of this research, familiarity with grey literature was essential for establishing the political, policy and social context of the research environment which includes research reports from government agencies, reports and working papers from working groups, conference proceedings and official publications. The inclusion of grey literature was also merited as it can help to reduce positive publication bias. Positive bias within the grey literature itself is also possible in policies on education or research commissioned by the TC. Those involved in writing such documents are generally to some extent invested in preserving the *status quo* (Adams et al., 2016). As a former employee of HC there was also potential bias towards protecting the

system I worked in. While some bias is hard to avoid completely, I used an intentional selection process to mitigate against this. Consequently, prior to establishing familiarity with the academic literature, I firstly catalogued the pertinent grey literature as identified through my professional experiences and then began to compile a list of educational policies, guidelines and reports from key sources, primarily, the DE, the TC and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (*Appendix 1 - List of Policies, Act and Guidelines*). Although comparable to practices in other countries, SP in Ireland is deeply contextually embedded. Therefore, the grey literature pertained to the domestic context in order to facilitate an exploration of those factors which are specific to the Irish system, as explored through the Context Chapter.

3.1.2 Timebound with Search Criteria

This literature review focused primarily on literature from 2010-2024, with more emphasis placed on recent research when the context of the research has changed rapidly and consequently had an impact on the validity of that research. Niedlich et al. (2020) explain that cumulative knowledge development in research implies an assumption that recent articles build on and add to pre-existing ones. Grey literature was not subject to this timescale since it is part of the context within which the research sits. The conclusion of the Literature Review process was June 2024. A wide variety of common terminology is used to describe different aspects of the research questions. A list (not exhaustive) of common terminology and synonyms was devised to facilitate literature searches (*Appendix 2 - List of Common Terminology*).

3.1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Emerging familiarity with the literature, enabled the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The purpose of inclusion and exclusion criteria was to ensure that the research questions were specifically addressed and that a consistent process for including

or excluding literature was followed to ensure a transparent and clearly defined strategy (Siddaway et al., 2019). The PRISMA checklist was consulted in the development of these Inclusion/Exclusion criteria (PRISMA, 2020).

Criteria	Explanation
Relevance to Topic	Literature needs to be explicitly linked to at least one of the research questions. Tripartite framework of Professionalism, Perspectives and Partnerships used to establish relevance.
Recency	Literature searches confined to 2010 - 2024 Literature prior to this date only included when a minimum of 2 - 3 other Inclusion Criteria are met
Quality	The research employs several strategies to assess quality including scan reading and assessing, prioritising peer reviewed literature, recommendations from professionals/colleagues, scan reading reviews of literature
Search Criteria/Terms	4 electronic databases prioritised for searches using search terms: Pro Quest, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis and EBSCO. These were supplemented with searches using search terms in the general Hibernia College and Trinity College online libraries and TARA – dissertations
Transparency	The purpose and methodologies employed must be clear
Validity	The findings of the literature must be based on valid criteria and methodologies
Geographical Spread	International literature as applicable to the Irish primary education system
Setting	Literature specific to educational settings prioritised. Literature relevant to other settings (ie nursing) included when a minimum of 2 other Inclusion Criteria are met

Table : 3-1 Inclusion Criteria

Criteria	Explanation
Context	The primary school context for School Placement and Induction is prioritised. Pre - School settings are excluded. Post - Primary setting only included if the literature meets a minimum of 2 other criteria and has direct and applicable relevance to primary system

Private Schools	Fully private schools which do not follow the established Primary Curriculum are excluded
Date	Literature prior to 2010 unless it meets a minimum of 2 other inclusion criteria and is deemed of significant relevance to include
Type of Publication	Editorials and reviews are excluded unless they meet a minimum of 2 inclusion criteria and have direct and applicable relevance to the primary system
Screening	Literature excluded in the screening process after reviewing the abstract for relevance to research questions, further excluded if on reading the full text if data it does not meet the Quality of Literature for Inclusion Terms set out in the table below
Quality	Literature lacking in clarity, transparency or clear and appropriate methodologies excluded, Peer reviewed literature prioritised above non - peer reviewed

Table : 3-2 Exclusion Criteria

Literature was screened in order to evaluate whether it fell within the specific subject of study after review of the abstracts (Niedlich et al., 2020). Similar search criteria were used for all of the databases. These databases were selected for their scope and advanced search options. I employed limits and filters within the advanced search options of the databases. Boolean search operators “AND” and “OR” were employed, being of particular use where a variety of different terms had been identified at the scoping stage. The truncation symbol “*” was used to look for all words starting with a particular combination of letters exp. Teach* and Mentor*. The searches were for ‘abstracts’ however when this revealed too many results the scope was reduced to ‘title.’ Once literature was included using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, I reviewed the list of references for further relevant research.

Category	Explanation
Methodological Quality	Quality of research design, justification of decisions taken (sample, instruments, analysis) Measures taken to maximise validity and reliability.

	Appropriate, validated research measures used for the specific area of study, Participant sample size, selection methods and response/attrition rate (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Inadequate)
Methodological Relevance	Appropriate for research objectives Research question(s) clearly stated. Methodology is highly relevant to research questions Research questions answered in detail. (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Inadequate)
Topic Relevance	Paper/literature is closely aligned to one of the review questions and provides very strong evidence upon which to base future policy/action. (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Inadequate)

Table : 3-3 Quality of Literature Assessment: Adapted from 'Weight of Evidence' Scale (Gough, 2007)

3.2 The 3 Ps: Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development

The 3 Ps of Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development relate to 3 core integrated elements of this research; the context within which SP functions, perspectives of those involved in SP and the developmental function of SP within the continuum model.

3.3.1 Partnership

The broad concept of partnership in SP was introduced in the previous chapter. Partnership can describe relationships between individuals (teacher educators, STs, SPTs, CTs) or between institutions (HEIs, TC, sites of practice) with the focus of various models depending on the nature of teaching espoused by the stakeholder and the educational philosophies underpinning the partnership (Brisard et al., 2005). This informed my approach to analysing partnership not as a fixed structure but as a dynamic and context-sensitive process. There exists significant overlap between the models - with themes of fairness, transparency, power, efficacy and collaboration common across the board (Hall et

al., 2018). These themes emphasised by Hall et al. (2018) informed the analytical lens of this research.

The literature on partnership frequently describes it in terms of models (Smith, 2016; Farrell, 2021a,b, Halvorsen, 2014) and roles within those models (Farrell, 2021a,b; O’Grady, 2017). This notwithstanding, a critique of the initial rationale for positioning SP as partnership is conspicuous in its absence from the literature. This informed my research by promoting a more critical interrogation of the assumptions underpinning partnership discourse, guiding the development of the research questions that explore not only how partnership is enacted but also why it is framed in particular ways and whose interests and positionality such framing serves.

Mentorship of some capacity is generally assumed to be a key aspect of most partnership models. As noted by Mackie (2017), mentorship within ITE is complex and interpreted differently according to the definition of roles within a given institution, specific needs and aims and external and internal contexts. This insight informed my decision to look at mentorship not as a uniform practice but as a site of negotiation and interpretation. In broad terms, most definitions include a more experienced colleague in a support, facilitation and sometimes assessment role (Mackie, 2017). Mentorship in Ireland is primarily associated with two roles; the SPT providing academic mentorship and the CT providing site-based and practicum related mentorship. The role of the latter is often associated with observation, direct experience and contextual learning (Fernández-Morante et al., 2024). The TC offers a very broad definition of mentoring as encompassing all the ways by which the ST is supported, advised, encouraged, affirmed and challenged, as appropriate (TC, 2021a). Ó Gallchóir et al. (2019) find that STs experience mentors on SP primarily as models for their own practice, taking a simplistic approach to dichotomising good and bad practice. They also highlight how the mentor role is associated with a gatekeeper aspect, aligning the mentor with the protection of the school and practices therein more than with the ST. This literature informed by approach to considering mentorship in SP as not always inherently supportive but capable of both enabling and constraining ST experiences, depending on how it is enacted and perceived.

Partnership in SP is not unique to Ireland, with various models gaining popularity in the UK, Finland, Australia and USA. However, some of the challenges to the efficacy of partnership are specific to the ingrained informality around SP in Ireland. Additionally, the strength of the teacher's unions, as powerful players in policy development and implementation, and opposers of anything which could be perceived as additional burden on the teaching profession, has impact on the opportunities for partnership to thrive (Connolly et al., 2023). The variety of models of partnership, the abundance of language and terminology used for those models and the confusion over what constitutes 'true' partnership all contribute to muddying the conceptualisation and effective implementation of partnerships (O'Grady, 2017). Halvorsen (2014) identifies four requirements to support the development of 'true' partnerships, which can be used as a standard against which models are measured. Although useful in the application of partnership to SP, their accuracy in the context of Ireland is hampered by a lack of reference to the importance of transparent practices and the need for accountability across institutions and roles. Therefore, these requirements have informed my exploration of partnership and I return to these, adding four additional requirements based on the data analysis, in the Discussion Chapter.

Requirements	Definition
Intentionality	A strong intention of pursuing a shared goal is needed to overcome possible tensions and concerns which can arise when stakeholders have differing expectations
Predictability	Collaborations involve unpredictability but when blame is allocated to one side of the partnership relationships break down
Flexibility	An ability to go beyond a comfort zone and willingly face and embrace unfamiliar contexts
Vitality	This concerns how one positions oneself in a partnership and self-understanding in terms of efficacy and agency

Table : 3-4 Requirements for 'True' Partnership (Halvorsen, 2014)

The ideal of partnership within the profession of teaching is currently growing in popularity internationally. As evidence of this, a profession based on partnership is one of the four Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (European Union, 2008). Despite this, the partnership metaphor in Ireland has been very loosely used to describe collaboration and consensus with some arguing for a lack of a real and consistent definition or a sustainable framework of partnership (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016). Nonetheless, the concept of partnership in SP in Ireland has been on the ITE reform agenda for a long time (Furlong et al., 2000), with Simmie (2014) describing relational partnerships as the established rhetoric of SP. While partnership in SP is ubiquitous in policy documents globally (Farrell, 2021b), in Ireland SP remains primarily characterised by a voluntary approach rather than formal structures, as noted previously. This is despite the existence of the TC as a professional body and the ardent recommendation by the Sahlberg Report (2012) of a fundamental shift towards stronger systematic partnerships between HEIs and SoPs to support the delivery of higher quality SP. As referenced in the Context Chapter, the 2019 Sahlberg Report further noted variances in the extent of partnerships between schools and HEIs. The Report drew attention to geographical inconsistencies, with more structured links existing outside of the Dublin area. This growing rhetoric of a need for institutional partnership in SP reflects a policy of collaborative partnership (O'Grady, 2017) not universally reflected on the ground in SoPs (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016). Although Brisard et al. (2005) describe the link between the various forms of partnership and the outcomes of ITE as a matter which has long occupied researchers, policy makers and practitioners across the world, the embedding of partnership in SP is reported as hindered by vague definitions (Birkenhoff, 2002) and informal practices (Sloan, 2023). Therefore, the nature of partnerships in SP, the extent to which they are voluntary or enforced, the contested nature of partnerships in general and the requirement for partner 'buy - in' are beginning to emerge as areas requiring further analysis and critique.

The persistent lack of investment in the infrastructural and procedural mechanisms necessary to enhance, formalise and sustain partnerships and professional development in

SP act as obstacles to sustainable policies and practices (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016; Cowan & Farrell, 2023). Furthermore, the complex historical and political context, alongside tensions and discourses detailed in the previous chapter, play a profound role in hindering progress towards a formalised partnership model (Walsh, 2024). In the search for innovative responses to the need for enhanced clarity around partnership in SP, many different conceptualisations including institutional-centred, collaborative and central-policy focused have emerged (O'Grady, 2017). However, consensus on the best model across the literature has not been reached. Arguably, it has also not been sought-an assumption prevailing that consensus on a single model of partnership is neither necessary nor possible. All the proposed models share at a fundamental level a requirement for a valuing of the interactions between partners functioning in potentially very different settings (Gorman & Furlong, 2023). Each partnership model has a different focus; the ST, the pupils, professional development, mentoring practices or research (Brisard et al., 2005). An assumption of some mutual benefit is central to even the broadest definition (Gorman & Furlong, 2023). Despite this, the literature does not explore in any great detail what the cause for that mutual benefit is, how it is recognised or how it can be sustained. Varying conceptualisations of partnership also imply different level of delegated, implied or acquired accountability for each partner (Caul & McWilliams, 2002). However, there would be value in further exploring how each partner recognises their own accountability within the partnership. The absence of consensus reflects more than theoretical divergence; it signals a deeper epistemological and ideological contestation over the purpose, ownership, and direction of SP. These ambiguities complicate efforts to institutionalise partnership in a way that is both equitable and sustainable.

The Different Models of Partnership

Having reviewed the literature on partnership in SP, I have chosen to present it under the headings of 1) Student Focused Partnership, 2) Institutional Partnership, 3) Policy-Based Partnership, 4) Partnership as Interconnectivity and 5) A Third Space in order to highlight the evolving complexity and diversity of approaches to and understandings of partnership in SP. By categorising the models under these headings, a clearer concept of how different partners interact and hold the potential to influence the SP experience is facilitated. This structure also helps to trace the levels of partnership from informal, goodwill based to more structured and systematic. An exploratory criticism of the literature reveals a tension between innovation and implementation: while student-focused models promote agency, authenticity, and responsiveness to ST needs, they risk inconsistency and over-reliance on individual CTs. Conversely, institutional models aim for sustainability and equity but may struggle with power imbalances and insufficient mentor training. The literature, while rich in conceptual models, sometimes lacks empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these partnerships in practice, and there remains a gap in addressing how power, training, and accountability are negotiated across contexts. This critical lens underscores the need for a more coherent, well-supported, and mutually beneficial partnership framework in SP.

Student Focused Partnership

One model of partnership in SP found in Ireland is the ST focused partnership. This genre focuses on enabling the ST to experience the school setting as a site of inquiry where practice and understanding can be refined (Timperley, 2010; Timperley et al., 2017). This student focused approach to partnership underscores the role of the ST, their learning and bridging the theory-practice gap as central to good partnership (Walsh & Backe, 2013). In this model, Beck & Kosnik (2002) describe the ST as the ‘consumer’ of SP and conclude that as such they particularly value the emotional support provided from CTs. However, in an informal and locally adaptable model of partnership where the extent to which the CT provides this support can vary wildly, this has potential to create vast differences in the ST experience of SP (Mitchell et al., 2023; Gorman & Furlong, 2023; Hanly & Heinz, 2022). These ST focused partnership models generally keep the SoP confined to the role of host

while other models seek to go beyond this towards more innovative interpretations (Maandag et al., 2007).

There are several examples of other partnership models which place the emphasis on the ST experience, to varying degrees. One such model is whereby the curriculum is developed in alignment with the students' experiences and questions from the practice field. This has the potential to alleviate anxiety by involving the ST more directly in their SP experience formation. In this model, content and reading lists are developed with students, building on their cases and concerns. This flipped classroom model would have the ST share their experiences from SP at lectures, having been mentored by school-based teacher educators during their SP experience. The role of mentorship on SP is given additional gravitas in this model. The practical experiences of SP are then explained by theory and literature. A student-centred model puts the teacher educator in a more vulnerable position (Smith, 2016). However, it is a significant step towards addressing the need for authenticity in assessment. Authenticity in assessment is most often described in terms of real-world tasks and activities and the application of graduate knowledge and skills to professional workplaces (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). The model outlined above would result in a less uniform teacher education programme, with reading lists not finalised until a later stage. It does in some ways reflect the move towards an outcomes-based curriculum at primary level, which also places more emphasis on the teacher's agency.

Smith (2016) also offers the example of a potential alternative model of partnership (based on practice in Norway) whereby schools sign-up for a defined period to act as partnership schools and specific teachers within the schools take up a mentoring role. This concept of mentoring in SP, is more complex than it might initially appear. CTs, SPTs and school communities are expected to act as mentors to STs (TC, 2021a) however there is no training provided on how to engage with this complex role. The word 'mentor' is often used interchangeably to describe specific roles (CT, SPT), competencies (supportive, encouraging, collaborative) and responsibilities (feedback, assessment, advice). This model as described by Smith focuses on providing the ST with sustainable, transparent and consistent experiences. While this marks a move towards more genuine partnership, it sees the HEI as the possessor of power and the ST as the primary beneficiary. Currently in

Ireland, most of the initial power sits with the SoP, who can decide arbitrarily whether to accept students or not. Smith also offers the example of university schools, similar to teaching hospitals. These schools become sites of excellence with HEIs and schools working together directly and on a daily basis on creating supportive learning environments for the ST. The focus of these models is the quality of the education received by the ST and they would require a massive shift in current practice in Ireland towards a level of systematic organisation unheard of heretofore. I infer from this model the value of intentionality and clarity in partnership agreements-elements lacking in the Irish context. This has informed my argument for a more formalised and transparent framework in SP, where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and mutually agreed upon.

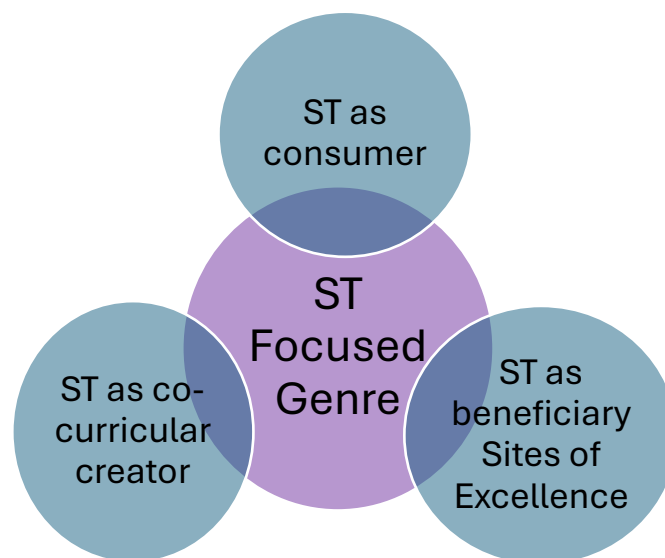


Figure : 3-2 Student Teacher Focused Genre of Partnership Models

Institutional Partnership

The ST focused models outlined above, demonstrate a shift towards a more systematic approach to partnership, albeit focused on the ST. Partnerships at the level of the institutions, or ‘institutional partnership’ requires greater involvement by schools in ITE but can lead to concerns regarding the capacity of CTs acting as mentors to deliver high quality training and potential power struggles among stakeholders (O’Grady, 2017). Mentoring requires a specific skillset, the understanding of which is often assumed without

probing the different interpretations. The primary institutions involved are the HEI and the school as SoP. The advantages of a more systematic approach to institutional partnerships have been emphasised in the literature in more recent years (Coolahan, 2003; Farrell, 2021b). To date, SP in Ireland has been built upon the establishment of goodwill and informal relationships between institutions, schools and individuals, with structures and partnerships between schools and HEIs remaining undefined and informal. Partnerships have been one-sided, with HEIs seen as benefitting more than schools (Ní Áingléis & Looney, 2018). The difficulties experienced by ITE providers due to the voluntary nature of these collaborations have led to imbalanced relationships between SoPs and HEIs and ultimately constrained SP practice (Heinz & Fleming, 2019). O'Doherty and Harford (2016) assert that the reservoir of goodwill which has sustained these informal partnerships thus far is starting to run dry. Mitchell et al., (2023) find that the lack of formal and structured supports and processes is also experienced as a barrier by some partners. Concerns regarding the sustainability of an informal approach to placement have led to the concept of a more structured approach to partnership slowly gaining popularity.

Smith (2016) defines the partnership model in this context as an agreement between HEIs and stakeholders in education, working towards a shared goal to improve education at all levels. While this definition foregrounds a shared goal, the variability in the formality of such agreements—ranging from contractual to informal—raises questions about the consistency and accountability of these partnerships in practice. The formality of this agreement, whether contract based or informal, can vary. Smith further describes institutional partnership as enabling teacher education to have a space where practice and theory meet. It has an additional role of promoting professional development of teachers and teacher educators. Hall et al. (2018) note the lack of formalised structures around partnership to support this institutional model and the significant reliance on historically based relationships and goodwill. Farrell (2021a,b) describes the current ITE partnership structure as not being fit for purpose due to its *ad hoc* nature and lack of joined up thinking. She identifies the following themes amongst leaders in ITE in Ireland; misconceptions about roles in partnership; the key role of the CT and concerns due to the pressures they face, over-loaded agendas and lack of resources.

Smith (2016) holds that for partnership to go beyond relationships between stakeholders; it needs the key players to be partners who come together, keep together and work together. However, Farrell (2021b) emphasises that currently there is significant ambiguity around the concept and roles in SP. Smith (2016) asserts that HEIs should draw from the experiences of practicing teachers and seek out cross-disciplinary approaches - placing the burden of impetus with the HEI and the burden of sustained effort with the SoP. This form of a partnership model seeks to foster collaboration with teachers and host schools, thus encouraging teachers to see co-operating with ITEs as part of their key role and not an 'add on'.

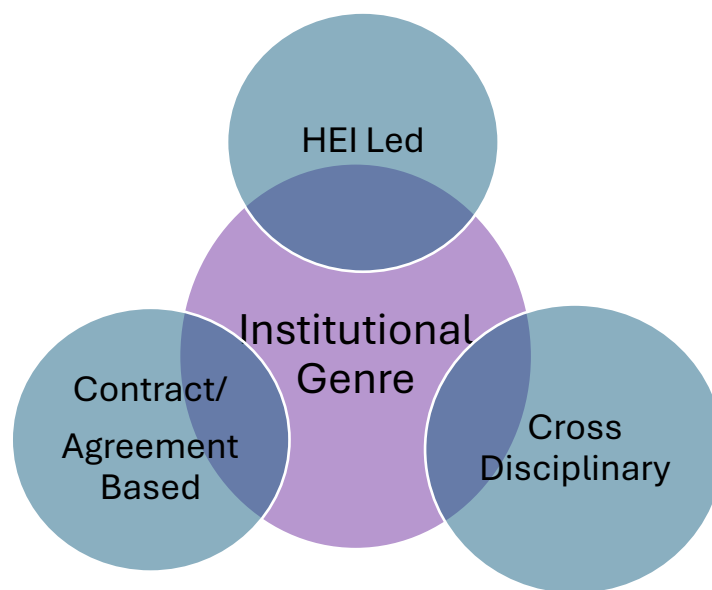


Figure : 3-3 Institutional Level Genre of Partnership Models

Policy-Based Partnership

Tensions can exist within all partnership models, whether at institutional or individual level. A policy-based partnership, linked to national policy agendas and international standards and benchmarking, holds the potential to remove or limit the 'personal and informal' nature of these relationships but can be interpreted as prescriptive and limiting (Gorman & Furlong, 2023). Gorman & Furlong (2023) offer a thought-provoking critique of the approach to policy development regarding ITE and SP in Ireland. It is noteworthy, beyond the content of their research, that apathy and mistrust for policy can

vary across the continuum of teacher education. The lack of consultative, adaptable and sustained frameworks for policy enactment, which emphasise how policy impacts different roles to varying degrees, has not been the subject of significant research to date. The limited focus given to collaborative enactment and engagement and the structures which can support sustained practices, is indicative of a need for a framework such as that outlined in the Conclusion Chapter. The TC model of partnership is grounded in policy documents and requirements, specifically the Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (TC, 2020) and Guidelines on School Placement (TC, 2021a). TC policies (2013, 2021a) define partnership in terms of processes, structures and arrangements acting as enablers to collaborative work and learning in teacher education. However, the approach to the dissemination of policies on partnership also has impact on their efficacy, with the Guidelines (TC, 2021) being distributed directly to HEIs but not to SoPs (Sloan, 2023).

The SPWG Report (2019) defines SP as the only place where the AF, teachers in schools and STs *'all meet and relate with each other'* (p3, 2019). It further defines SP as, at best, exemplifying connections in professional learning across the continuum of teacher education but notes the perception in schools that HEIs do not adequately recognise the role of the school. This highlights the ongoing tensions between policy and practice which may stem from teachers' inherent understanding that their specific educational contexts are unique, presenting distinct challenges that broad policies cannot adequately address or capture (Jeffers & Lillis, 2021). Factors contributing towards apathy in enacting policies, procedures and guidelines originating outside SoPs (whether with HEI, TC or DE) include time constraints, lack of awareness of the significance of supporting STs, competing ideological beliefs and cultural or organisational barriers (King, 2019). Gorman and Furlong (2023) conclude that partnership at policy level in SP between ITE providers and SoPs remains generally ineffective. This is due at least in part to a poor integration of schools with the partnership process, lack of opportunities for schools to contribute to teacher education and the inhabiting of separated worlds with a lack of established and clearly articulated common grounds in the policy documentation (Zeichner, 2010).

While the TC may call for innovative approaches to SP models (Teaching Council, 2011), this will only be possible once it is enforceable. There is no mention in TC

documentation of a move away from HEIs developing, controlling and managing the placements. Harford and O'Doherty (2016) define the lack of any attempt by the TC to address the fundamental principles of partnership as a cause for concern. They assert that the current partnership model which does not include a shared conceptualising of the principles of teacher education or any outline of how an infrastructure for such partnership or shared responsibility could be enacted, is unsustainable going forward. An acknowledgement of the complex nature of relationships and relationship building and the challenges of building networks of trust to facilitate partnership (Metz et al., 2022) are conspicuous in their absence in the policy documents. The revised Guidelines for SP (2021a) state, *'As the relationship between a HEI and a placement school develops, further opportunities for collaboration may present themselves.'* (p21, 2021a). The Guidelines go on to give the example of HEIs offering professional development courses and SoPs facilitating updating of teaching experiences. It is noteworthy that only one page (including images, bulleting and significant white spaces) is dedicated to this relationship. No further examples of how this relationship can give specific value to each participant are offered. The support required of the HEI includes guidance documentation on the expectations of the environment for the STs learning which should offer the CT clarity on those expectations. The TC also notes that there should be regular professional dialogue, especially when a ST is experiencing difficulty. The difficulties are assumed to be on the part of the ST and no reference is made to a situation where the CT is not of an appropriate standard, behaves unprofessionally or fails to establish an appropriate professional relationship. Clark and O'Doherty (2021) note that the level of partnership and sharing of professional responsibility for placement between HEIs and schools envisioned by the TC has not materialised in reality.

Farrell (2021b) asserts that despite the centrality of SoP and HEI partnership to ITE and the frequency with which it is referred to in policy documentation, it remains ambiguous, policy documents lack detail, and the resulting collaborations can be challenging and lead to participants deconstructing their own roles and finding their own pathways for engagement. This results in an even more informalised model of SP in which it can vary not only between HEIs and SoPs but also even within those institutions

depending on the relationships built by the participants themselves based on criteria they self-select. This marks a tension between a top-down policy-based partnership and a bottom-up, SoP based model (Figure 3.4). Farrell also highlights the different priorities of SoPs and HEIs and states that the types of knowledge promoted and valued by HEIs can often be at odds with the school practitioner’s knowledge. This can place the ST in the uncomfortable position of having to choose which they value most at a time in their professional continuum when they are unlikely to have honed the skills and experience required to do so.

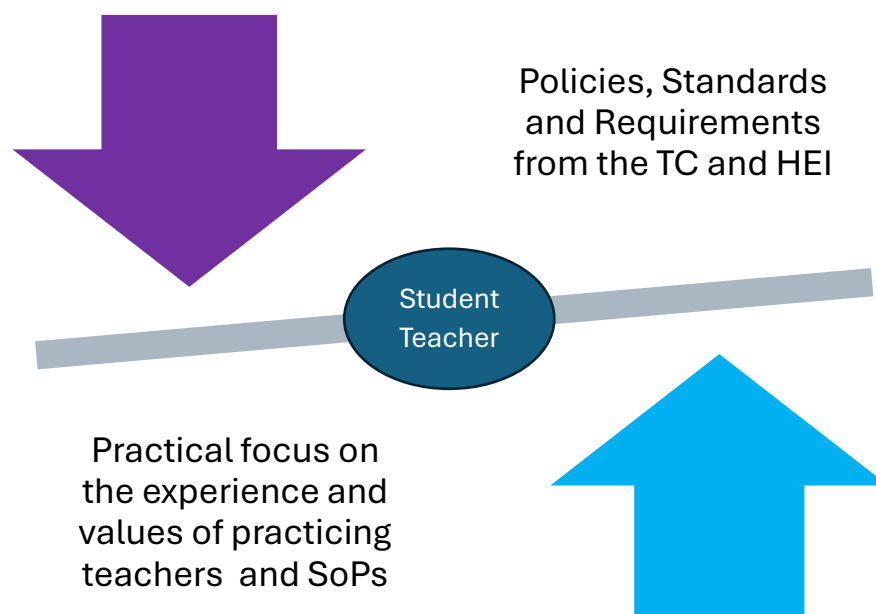


Figure : 3-4 Tensions within the Policy Model

Partnership as Interconnectivity - A ‘Shared-Vision’

Farrell (2021b) considers the range of contextual differences between SoPs to be a further hurdle to partnership. I have taken this as a key consideration in my research, recognising that any model of partnership must be adaptable to diverse school contexts while still maintain core principles of collaboration and mutual benefits. This has informed my argument for a more context-sensitive framework. According to Nilsen (2011), work,

learning and practice are not separate activities but occur within the same flow of experience thus requiring SP as the practicum of learning to be part of a flow of knowledge, creativity, responsibility and ownership between HEIs and SoPs. Despite this, SP is seen as a distinct aspect of ITE, uniquely preparing the ST for life within and outside the classroom while also providing support to STs in their professional growth (Nation, 2019). As the only aspect of ITE where HEIs are required to engage directly and in a sustained manner with schools, it is not adequately supported at a national level by specific established requirements on how partnership should be structured. Engeström (2008) emphasises the significance of collaboration between participants in SP where divergent interests, values and practices exist but are open to negotiation. This emphasis on divergent interests and values is particularly relevant to my research, emphasising the importance of negotiation and shared meaning-making in SP, which has informed my exploration of how partners navigate their roles and expectations.

In attempting to establish where and how these negotiations take place, a shared-vision model has been proposed (Smith, 2016). In this model SP is seen as networks of opportunities for interconnectivity or the establishment and acceptance of a 'shared-vision.' Teacher education can be very broadly described as consisting of four main components (Smith, 2016): 1) disciplinary knowledge, 2) knowledge about teaching or methodology, 3) pedagogical knowledge and 4) Practice or 'School Placement.' However, as Smith notes (2016) the responsibility for each of these components is often dispersed between different departments and the interactions, dialogues or partnerships between these are not always of the highest standard. In other words, the interconnectivity is lacking. The shared-vision presented by the TC does not account for practical issues such as the scheduling of long placements and securing schools for large student cohorts which can take precedence over linking the components of a programme in a meaningful way. For the lofty ideals of partnership to be reached, the practicalities must be resourced (Bloomfield, 2009). For partnerships to be innovative, a shift in the thinking of teacher educators, who they partner with and how they partner is required (Hall et al, 2018). Adams (2023) describes collaborative partnership as relying upon different partners across HEIs and SoPs, agreeing to act to support STs in the establishment and management of

professionalisation synthesis. Adams sees this as facilitated by the provision of integrated placement experiences which enable personal narrative construction, synthesising theory and practice into a coherent philosophy and practice of teaching.

The importance of intentional alignment across the components of ITE in the shared-vision model, particularly the integration of disciplinary knowledge, methodology, pedagogy, and practice have informed my analysis of how fragmented responsibilities across institutions and SoPs can hinder the development of cohesive and meaningful partnerships. Smith's observation that these components are often managed in silos, with limited dialogue or collaboration, resonates with my findings and supports my critique of the lack of systemic coherence in current SP structures (Smith, 2016). This model highlights the disconnect between policy rhetoric and practical implementation, particularly in the Irish context.

The Third Space

An extension of the idea of a 'shared-vision' model is the 'third space' model. Educational partnership can be identified as creating spaces where joint deliberation of knowledge, expertise and identities can take place (Beck, 2018). Partnership can provide the structure within which teacher education navigates professional situations and avoids fixed ideas of expertise (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Daza et al. (2021) describe ITE as becoming increasingly reliant on partnerships to improve professional practice and to strengthen the link between university-based and school-based knowledge about teaching and the nature of the teaching profession. For professional development to extend beyond ITE, these links are vital. They identify a 'third space' as being in constant negotiation due to the crossing of boundaries and hybrid roles. Interconnections between knowledge in this space create a move in the focus on which expertise counts in the education of STs. They describe the third space as a less hierarchical place where universities, schools and discourses meet thus facilitating a participatory approach to SP in which teacher educators, STs and communities collaborate and co-construct knowledge of teaching. In establishing

such a space there are significant challenges to be met including time requirements, planning, resource allocation and addressing how this third space would be structured and integrated into teaching programmes. The 2019 Salhlberg Report notes the potential for collaborative developments across Centres of Excellence to provide opportunities to share and disseminate good practice beyond ITE. The challenge lies in not just establishing but maintaining third spaces as continuous and lasting experiences over time and within specific educational structures, thus facilitating the continuum of professional development beyond ITE (Hulme et al., 2009). In the Discussion and Conclusion Chapters I outline a proposed model for facilitating appropriate spaces for collaborative decision-making.

The 'third space' model offers a compelling vision for reimagining partnerships in ITE by fostering collaborative, non-hierarchical environments where knowledge from universities, schools, and communities can intersect. Its strength lies in its emphasis on co-construction of knowledge, boundary-crossing roles, and the dismantling of rigid expertise hierarchies, which aligns well with contemporary calls for more integrated and authentic professional learning experiences. However, an exploratory critique reveals several challenges. The model's conceptual richness is not always matched by practical clarity—how such spaces are to be structured, sustained, and evaluated remains underdeveloped. The demands on time, planning, and resources are significant, and without institutional commitment and systemic support, these spaces risk becoming aspirational rather than operational. Moreover, the fluidity and hybridity that define the third space can lead to role ambiguity and uneven power dynamics if not carefully managed. While the model holds transformative potential, its implementation requires robust frameworks and clear role definitions, currently lacking in the Irish ITE context.

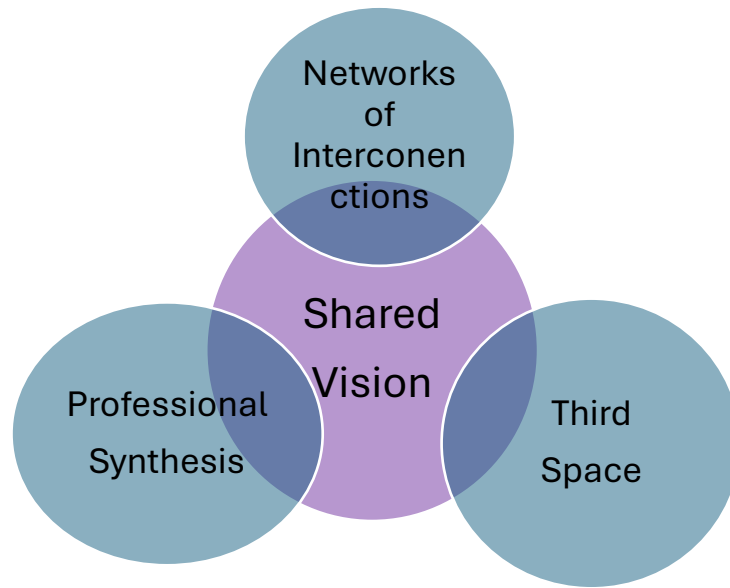


Figure : 3-5 Shared-vision model

3.3.2 Perspectives

People construct perspectives, and those perspectives are informed by the contexts within which they operate (Bozic et al., 2021). Perspectives are heavily dependent upon the positionality of participants; how they see themselves as functioning within a system and where they believe the power lies in relationships within that structure. The ‘power’ can relate to perceived social power (Keltner et al., 2003) and the negotiation of a shared reality and shared meanings, inclusive of ideologies and identities (Haslam et al., 2010; Guinote, 2017). In the case of SP partnerships, the power is primarily identified as sitting at an institutional level with the HEIs and at an assessment level with the SPTs (Fitzpatrick, 2021). I would add that a third and very important level of power sits with schools as the gatekeepers to the sites of practice. There is very little exploration in the literature of the power held by schools in preventing access by HEIs to schools as SoPs, despite the significant challenge this presents to SP models. However, the efficacy of that power is to some extent limited and controlled by the willingness and ableness of other partners to engage and the perception that there is tangible gain, mutuality and cohesive achievement of co-created aims from doing so (Kruger et al., 2009). Those conceptions of power can be

categorised as asymmetric interdependence, outcome control and socio-functional relations in groups (Guinote, 2017).

Perspective-taking is linked to positive and negative interpersonal outcomes however for organisations to function well at a systematic level, participants need to recognise and value issues from one another's perspectives (Calvard et al., 2023). Within any professional partnership model, participants want to be understood but their perceptions of being understood are often only partially related to actually being understood by others (Reis et al., 2017). Smith (2016) poses the question; is partnership between HEIs and schools' true partnership between equals or are there hidden power struggles over issues such as who is perceived as leading the partnership and who makes assessment decisions? Furlong et al. (2000) and Darling-Hammond (2006) point to the importance of including agents both inside and outside of academia in partnership models, particularly including strong relations with practicing teachers. While the TC calls for enhanced relationships between stakeholders (TC, 2011) and cites the development of the SPWG as facilitating this (2021), Clark and O'Doherty (2021) describe the SP Guidelines as diluting these relationships. They further conclude that partnership does not support a true sharing in terms of co-ownership of the process and joint strategic planning and implementation of SP.

Co-ownership, and the perception of practising teachers that they have some ownership of SP, is linked to experiences of professional agency. The agency of teachers is an area which has received significant attention in recent years (Priestly et al., 2012; Imants & Der Wal, 2019). It is related to teachers' beliefs and how these beliefs orientate or motivate teacher actions (Meirink et al., 2009). Agentic practice is perceived as a way to make teachers agents of change in professional development, reform, improvement and the establishment of professional identity (Imants & De Wal, 2019). According to Biesta (2010), agency is not only something that people have but it is something that people do. As the field for 'doing' in ITE, it is therefore likely to be more dominant in SP than other areas of teacher preparation. However, tensions exist as to how much agency should be granted to teachers and the teaching profession. While the TC professes to protect the agency of teachers by involving them in policy development, some see teacher agency as a

form of weakness within school operations and propose replacing it with an evidence-based and data-driven approach (Biesta et al, 2015). Teacher agency as the active contribution of the teacher to the shaping of their work and its conditions, is viewed by some scholars as an antithesis to an overly prescriptive curricula and oppressive testing and inspection systems (Priestley, 2011). There is a line of argument that improved teacher agency can contribute towards better collaborative and interactive environments, resulting in shared communities of practice where teachers and STs negotiate their own learning and practice, work together in professional groups and build collective agency, thus shaping perspectives in a collaborative and professional focused space towards shared educational and professional development goals (Guoyuan, 2020). This literature raises critical questions about the extent to which institutional structures and policy discourses support or constrain genuine agentic practice, prompting an exploration of the tensions between professional autonomy and accountability in the context of ITE.

The perspectives of primary educators in Ireland are unique from those in many other countries due to the pivotal role allotted to the teacher's unions (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016) and high union membership rates (over 45,000 primary teachers - www.into.ie). As a predominantly unionised profession, primary teachers have a distinctive voice and group perspective. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) has therefore played a key role in teacher education and the professionalisation of teachers in Ireland. Unions in Ireland go beyond traditional union concerns for pay and engage in conversations around policy reform and partnership (Puirseil, 2017). Nonetheless, pay and terms of engagement are key concerns of the INTO and it could be argued that they motivate engagement with policy reform and partnership (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016). In a comprehensive overview of the INTO Puirseil (2017) notes the professionalising of teaching as a major concern of the union. Of less interest to the INTO has been introducing and supporting diversity into teacher education. The agenda to protect members against increased workloads has impacted the efficacy of policy to require participants, such as CTs, to take on more formalised roles within a partnership model for SP and has added to the limitations around the enactment of the role (Farrell, 2021a).

The Perspectives of Student Teachers

STs are universally recognised as core participants in SP. Therefore, their perspectives on SP and partnership within SP, and how the literature presents those perspectives, are highly significant to this research. Teaching in Ireland is a profession of choice populated by highly qualified candidates choosing this profession above others (Clark & O'Doherty, 2021). Teachers are therefore highly educated, qualified and specifically selected individuals (Heinz, 2013). Unlike in many countries (Dedering, K. & Pietsch, 2023), Irish teachers experience a trust associated with the profession and a human and social capital from their professional status (Dulfer et al., 2023). Human capital, related to a teacher's education, qualifications, and experience, and social capital, related to peer interactions, are both valued aspects of the teacher professional persona in Ireland (Demir, 2021). This implies a profession with inbuilt exclusivity. On the surface this appears positive; of course, we want our children to be educated by the very best of professionals. However, Conway et al. (2009) point to a lack of STs from minority groups and low socio-economic status (SES) sections in Irish society, also noting under-representation of males in teaching. Recent research has started to probe the place of class and social mobility in schools. Keane (2024) examined the perspectives of STs from working class backgrounds and the values they attached to their own class identity within the classroom. Some research has argued that stereotypes play an important part in educational inequality and contribute towards negative status beliefs (Foley, 2023; Durante & Fiske, 2017). At present, the perspectives of STs are those of quite a narrowly defined and cohesive group of individuals; middle-class, white, educated, female and Catholic.

Despite the significant role STs play in SP, they occupy a precarious position attempting to appease and please the HEI and SoP. This was most evident during and post the COVID pandemic. In 2021 Minister for Education, Norma Foley, introduced a number of emergency measures to attempt to deal with the escalating teacher supply crisis. She requested that HEIs show flexibility in facilitating STs to be available for substitution work. In addition, STs who have completed the first two years of their undergraduate programme of ITE and have commenced year three, may now apply to register with the TC, thus enabling them to complete work as substitute teachers. This has inadvertently stirred

animosity between HEIs and SoPs, grappling to find a happy medium between support for the school and maintaining standards for ST assessment through SP. Unfortunately, the ST and their experience of SP sits at the centre of these push and pull forces.

Smith (2016) identifies STs as the largest group of agents in teacher education (Smith, 2016). She asks the uncomfortable question, to what extent do HEIs genuinely listen to and act on the STs' perspectives? Hall et al. note that in general STs appreciate their SP experiences and recognise their professional value (Hall et al, 2018). However, while the vast majority of HEIs survey STs for feedback on their experiences of modules, how this genuinely feeds into decisions about the programme structure and content is less obvious and relates to the historical context of HEIs and who asserts the power (the academic) and who is subjected to the power (the student). O'Grady et al. (2011) detail the significance of the relational nature of respect for STs. A lack of confidence can result from lack of experience, a sense that they cannot relate well to the pupils as they struggle to define their own teacher identity and a complex process of professional identity formation including understanding and influencing how they will be perceived by other teachers. Although research alludes to student contributions to educational reform as improving student outcomes (Yonezawa & Jones, 2007) and the notion of a pedagogy of voice gaining traction, the genuine nature of the engagement with that voice is debatable (Ranson, 2000). Efforts to include 'the voice' of any group can quickly deteriorate into tokenism (Gillet Swan & Baroutsis, 2023).

Even when HEIs do take the time and care to involve STs as partners in SP, the STs self-understanding as a developing professional can be very complex within the ill-defined space of SP. Self-doubt and assessment anxiety can hamper performance, judgement and self-perception (Kyriacou & Stephens, 2010; Kilroy, 2016). This becomes even more complex in a scenario where the ST is failing or at risk of failing SP, which can have a significant and often negative impact on all the partners around the ST, including impacting on their perceptions of SP and willingness to engage with it again (Roulston et al., 2023).

The variability of SP experiences and the different impacts of diverse workplaces on the benefits or otherwise of workplace socialisation are highlighted by Johnston (2010). Johnston describes the difficulties involved in the traditional perspective many partner schools take of STs as apprentices who learn through interaction with the experienced and knowledgeable other. Without clearer definitions of the relationships between participants and the specific status of the ST, this can be problematic (Johnston, 2010). STs sometimes feel vulnerable and conflicted by the wide variety of perspectives and teaching styles they are exposed to and this can lead to struggles and possible withdrawal (Johnston, 2010). Paker (2011) describes STs as anxious about factors such as evaluation, classroom management, pedagogy and relations with staff, with female STs more anxious about the practice of teaching than male counterparts. The forming of professional relationships on SP is emphasised by Hall et al. (2018) as a possible solution to these anxieties and a step towards better partnership. They state that these relationships with colleagues can have a significant impact on the capacity of the ST for professional growth and their developing teacher identity. They describe a need for further scaffolding of STs on SP to facilitate the development of a sense of belonging, contributing to an improved and clarified perception of their own role within SP.

The Perspectives of the Co- operating Teachers

SP takes places directly within the working environment of the CT and ideally under their mentorship and guidance. Therefore, an exploration of the research seeking to contextualise the perspectives of CTs, and the perspectives of others regarding the role, is particularly pertinent. The role of the CT is an extremely important one and yet it is ill defined, poorly supported in terms of training and haphazardly controlled regarding selection processes and monitoring (Matsko et al., 2020). While some research sees the role as absolutely key to SP (Lund et al., 2008; O'Sullivan, 2003), there are also many examples of literature pointing to concerns regarding the lack of clarity around it (Farrell, 2021a; Bullough & Draper, 2004). While the research emphasises the ambiguity around the role and the multiple interpretations, there is a lack of consensus on exactly how a CT can best fulfil their responsibilities and to whom they are primarily responsible. TC policy

promotes a partnership model of SP and teachers in schools whereby CTs are “*teachers of teachers*” (Ó Ruairc, 2013) and “*hidden teacher educators*” (Livingston, 2014, p. 226). According to O’Grady (2017), for this to become actualised, a reconceptualisation of the roles and responsibilities of teachers is required. She describes this as CTs being willing and able to engage with practices previously confined to teacher educators. Recent changes in SP, including the requirement for an extended placement, have impacted on the role of the CT and go beyond programme re-organisation (Korthagen et al., 2006) and towards a requirement for greater involvement of CTs in teacher education (Zeichner, 2012).

There are numerous definitions and perspectives on the role of a CT. Céim (TC, 2020a) emphasises the significance of the CT within SP however the TC does not in any formal way recommend specific responsibilities linked to skills or professional attainment for CTs (Teaching Council, 2013). Young et al. (2022) see a better definition of the role of the CT as the key to unlocking the partnership model. They acknowledge that any development of the role to formally include mentoring and feedback will require buy in from all stakeholders. The INTO has not expressed support for such a change and is highly unlikely to do so unless a financial remuneration is associated with the role. Although Céim (2020a), introduced the term ‘treoraí’ or ‘guide’ to describe the CT, in an attempt to provide a more holistic conceptualisation, it did not take the opportunity to advance a particular model. The TC asserts that this term accurately reflects the role as a supporter and guide of STs. Farrell (2021a) states that at a basic level, the role of the CT, when not fulfilled well, is comparable to an absentee landlord. While this interpretation potentially stems from a belief in the importance of total immersion in the teaching experience for the ST, it can lead to limited experiences and a narrow view of professionalism (Hopper, 2001 cited in Farrell, 2021a). Another, slightly more developed interpretation of the role of the CT, is as an ‘on the ground’ supervisor of the ST (Sunserie & Sunseri, 2022). In this version, the role is expanded to include providing feedback on the STs practice. Farrell (2021a) notes that while some level of interaction exists in this model it is primarily unidirectional. This could lead to a ‘big brother is watching you’ sentiment developing and hinder genuine collegial experiences between the ST and CT. Figure 3.6 summaries the main interpretations of the CT role.

An alternative model for the CT is that of co-teacher educator. This model assumes that the CT is far more engaged with the process than many other models. It places a requirement on the CT to engage directly with the HEI in making decisions around SP. Farrell notes similarities between this model and that of the coach or mentor (Farrell, 2021a; Ellis, Alonzo & Nguyen, 2020). Going a step further, Willegems et al. (2017) present a concept of the CT as co-inquirer. This model involves the CT engaging in reflective practice and research with the ST thus enabling the ST to be agentic drivers of change in pedagogy and practice (Farrell, 2021a). While this stands out as the 'gold standard' model, the difficulties with implementing such a model on a national scale are evident. While it supports the notion and practice of teacher as researcher, this also limits the pool of interested potential CTs. This literature has influenced my research by prompting an exploration of the feasibility and desirability of more collaborative and inquiry-based models of CT engagement within SP. It also encourages a critical examination of the structural, cultural, and professional barriers that may inhibit the widespread adoption of such models, particularly in balancing the aspirational ideals of co-inquiry with the practical realities of teacher workload, institutional support, and professional identity.

Mentoring and the Role of the CT

Matsko et al., (2020) acknowledge the assumption that many hold in education that being an effective or experienced teacher leads to being an effective mentor, however this is not always born out in practice. This is because the characteristics which make a good CT can differ to those for a good teacher. Wright and Grenier (2018) found that effective CTs often show developed abilities in the following areas; instruction, management, discipline, interaction with students and active teaching. These tally with those of a good teacher in some but not all capacities. Hall et al (2018) state that it should not be assumed that good teachers make good mentors. However, there is a need to clearly define what is envisioned by 'mentor' specific to SP. Field notes that in an education setting, a mentor is one who operates in a space between the classroom teacher and the teacher educator (Field, 2005). Matsko et al. (2020) find that CTs have roles as both facilitative coaches and models of effective instruction. Focusing on the CT as mentor, the findings of The DEEPEN Report (2021) on the Droichead Induction process are of relevance. DEEPEN notes that there are

many roles for the mentor such as motivator, critical friend, advisor, colleague, organiser and expert practitioner (Bubb, 2013, as cited in DEEPEN, 2021). The report also cites Carroll and Simco (2001) in stating that teaching mentors require four basic skills to fulfil these roles: active listening, questioning, summarising and managing review and feedback. Attention is also drawn to the work of Casey and Claunch (2005) who outline the five phases of mentor development as predisposition, disequilibrium, transition, confidence and efficacy. The DEEPEN Report (2021) points to a dearth of training specific to the complexities of the role of mentor and holds that what training exists tends to focus on paperwork, minimal professional development and administration rather than skills and disposition development. The authors of this study suggest that if mentoring is linked to seniority in schools, then it could be argued that those providing the training have the least relevant personal experience of ITE and that the motivation for undertaking the role is self-motivation or a sense of duty rather than a genuine enthusiasm for the teacher education.

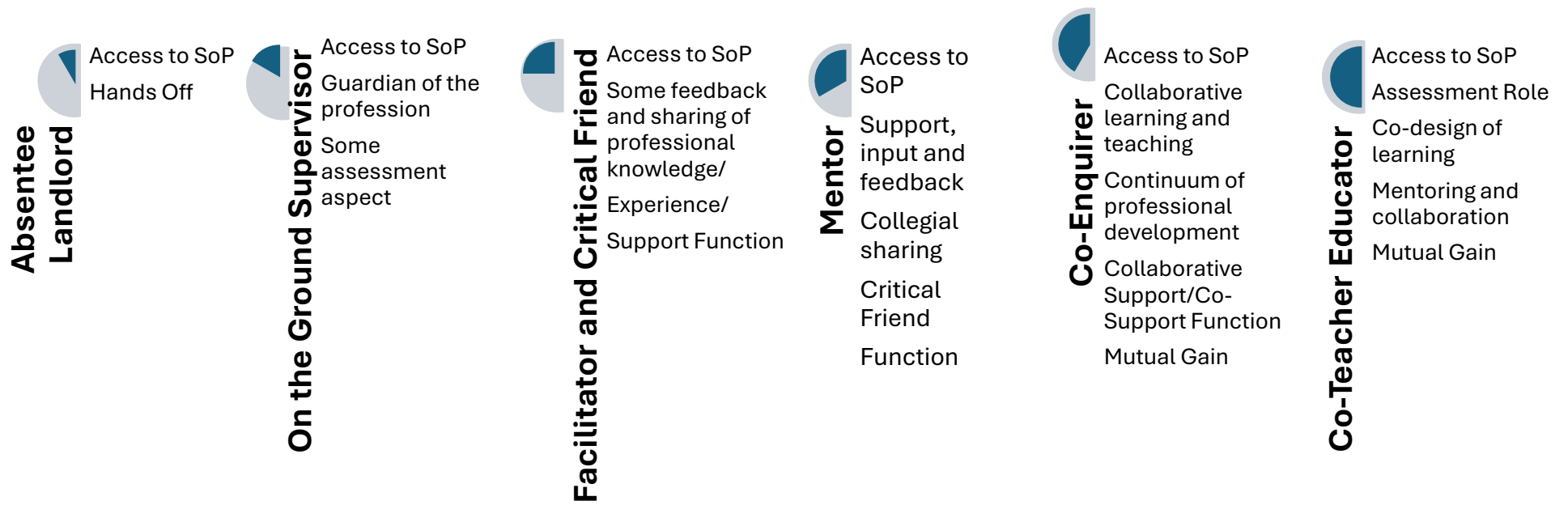


Figure : 3-6 Interpretations of the Role of the Co- operating Teacher

The Perspectives of the School Placement Tutors (SPTs)

The role of the SPT, and their perspectives as they seek to understand how to fulfil that role, is central to effective initial teacher education programmes (McCarthy & Quinn, 2010) and consequently to any true model of partnership contributing to SP as the first step in professional development. Their role is both complex and multifaceted as assessor, mentor and connection point between SoPs and ITEs (Steadman & Brown 2011; Asplin & Marks 2013). However, despite the complexities due to the duality of the role (as assessor and mentor), the data suggests that SPTs are the most under-researched group in the triad of SP (Basmadjian 2011; Levers et al. 2013; Meegan et al. 2013; Mauri et al. 2019). This lack of research may be due to the part-time nature of the role in many colleges (HC included) and consequent lack of motivation to engage in research (Basmadjian, 2011).

Fitzpatrick's research on the role of the SPT has significantly improved the level of criticality in the literature around this role and the impact of the part-time nature of it in most HEIs (Fitzpatrick, 2021). Fitzpatrick describes SPTs as the mainstay of ITE programmes in her exploration of the experiences, roles and relationships of part-time SPTs (Fitzpatrick, 2021). She also points to the volume of evidence suggesting that STs see SP and the interactions with SPTs on SP, as the two most significant aspects of their ITE experience. They are perceived as a highly significant aspect of SP, with a complex but important relational role at institutional and individual level. Their sense of self-identity is complex. Although afforded opportunities for professional development, many rely on their experiences as teachers and leaders to support them in the fulfilment of their role (Sloan, 2023; Zeichner & Bier, 2013). Many SPTs are also practicing teachers, therefore in general their self-identity is linked with and constructed by classroom and practice-based experiences (Walsh, 2019). The benefits of this can be countered by the newness and alien nature of the role compared to the structure and clarity of the classroom. Their sense of self-identity therefore tends to remain closely linked to their teacher identity (Murray et al., 2011). Key aspects of the role including building trusting relationships, nurturing student teacher reflection, mentoring, assessing and ensuring STs observe a range of teaching styles (Glover et al., 2024) may be hindered by a lack of clarity in the sense of self-

identity. The concept of establishing Communities of Practice for SPTs is hailed in the literature as a potential avenue for providing clarity in self-identity (Sloan, 2023; Fitzpatrick, 2021; Walsh, 2019). Therefore, the perspectives of SPTs are those of a group at the heart of SP, with an important assessment and mentoring role, but with some lack of clarity around self-identity resulting in a shift in the power balance.

The Perspectives of Teacher Educators/Academic Faculty

The role of the Teacher Educator (TE) and how that role is perceived and self-perceived, can be seen as reflecting the complex relationship between theory and practice, how each is defined and the spaces and places for both. The fostering of strong and meaningful relationships between theory and practice is a central concern of TEs (Conway et al., 2009; Korthagen et al., 2012). However, TEs also function against the backdrop of research concluding that effects of teacher education on teacher practice are generally very meagre (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). Some research concludes that once STs start teaching, the theory is washed out by the practice (Clarke et al., 2012). Farrell (2021b) describes understanding the role of TEs, who they are and how they understand their own role as a key challenge in relation to any school-HEI partnership. Ritter (2007, p.15) notes the challenge many TEs feel in ‘...*relinquishing control as an expert.*’ Swennen et al., (2010) note the multiple professional identities of TEs including identifying as teachers, lecturers, teacher educators, teachers in higher education, researchers or teachers of teachers. Therefore, the TE identity is in many ways in its infancy, being developed by those employed in the role as they navigate their way through it. The identity is revised within the role (Murray & Male, 2004). Murray (2002) describes this as a first order practitioner (teacher) working in a first order setting (school) moving to becoming a second order practitioner. The TE is then typically at least mid-career, often end-of career and undertaking the role has involved moving from an established school community to a new community of practice with an accompanying change in identity (Clemans et al, 2010).

The Perspectives of Newly Qualified Teachers and Principals

There is a dearth of literature on the roles or perspectives of NQTs and principals in SP partnerships, demonstrating an assumption of the tangential nature of their roles within any partnership models. This is surprising when we consider their place within the SP structure; NQTs having recently completed SP and consequently acting as a potential source of feedback and support and principals as the gatekeepers to SoPs and often the instigators of professional development (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023). This gap in the literature has influenced my research by encouraging a more inclusive exploration of the roles and perspectives of NQTs and principals within SP partnerships, recognising their potential to shape and sustain meaningful professional learning environments. It also raises critical questions about the assumptions embedded in current partnership models and highlights the need to re-evaluate who is considered a legitimate partner in the co-construction of SP experiences. As ITE graduates, STs are not fully recognised teachers until their probationary period is completed. This represents the ‘next step’ in the continuum of professional development after SP during ITE. Since September 2020, NQTs are required to engage with an induction and probation model called Droichead (meaning ‘bridge’ in Irish), as the sole route of teacher induction in Ireland. It is defined as an ‘*integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers*’ (TC, 2016) and forms part of the continuum of teachers’ professional development in Ireland (TC, 2011). The main objective of Droichead is to support the professional learning of NQTs during induction. This is envisaged as laying foundations for continued professional growth and learning. NQTs are frequently perceived in terms of the requirements to support them and not in relation to how they can contribute back to the school environment or wider education system. Some recent research investigates how NQTs can be perceived as a resource in schools from a micropolitical perspective (Kvam et al., 2021).

In Irish schools, principals have overall authority and responsibility for providing leadership to teachers, staff, students and the school community (Hickey et al., 2023).

However, there is very little guidance as to how the fulfilment of this role is envisaged within SP partnerships. The TC Guidelines, p3, (TC, revised 2021a) describe the role as *‘the leader of learning, the principal provides leadership to teachers, other staff and learners. In collaboration with colleagues, the principal is responsible for the creation of a school environment which is supportive of learning for all pupils and teachers in the school community.’* There is a notable tendency to switch between the use of the terms ‘school’ and ‘principal’ within this documentation. The role is further developed in this documentation as a leader, collaborator, partner and facilitator but specific advice or requirements around the fulfilment of these diverse roles is not evident (TC, revised, 2021a). The lack of formalised requirements around the principal role in SP may reflect an awareness of the retention issues in the system and concerns regarding work-life balance and administrative burdens (Cahill, 2024).

3.3.3 Professional Development

There are a variety of meanings associated with the term ‘professional’ (Burns, 2019) but what does it mean within the context of teaching and specifically SP? ‘Profession’ relates to the occupation with which the professional person engages and can be defined as a specific type of occupation with certain characteristics which are recognised as positive and shared by all professionals involved in it (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012). The word ‘professional’ is often used to describe the positive attributes required of a candidate for a role. By using the word as such, it attains ethical status. Kirkpatrick et al. (2021) describe the evaluation of professionalism as a mode of regulation and Muzion et al. (2019) propose three lenses through which the theory of professionalism can be viewed: 1) a power lens, 2) a functionalist lens and 3) an institutional lens. The functionalist lens involves the professional in a self-regulation process which pivots on the value added by the profession to wider society. The institutional lens defines professionalisation as a subset of the broader category of institutionalisation and represents way to give order, structure and meaning to an aspect of social and economic life (Muzio et al., 2019). Hilferty (2008) examines teacher professionalism as an enacted discourse of power. She outlines an understanding of teacher

professionalism as a process related to how teachers attempt to influence the character and quality of their own work. This power through professionalism is exerted through teacher-led active participation in educational policy-making and advocacy work and is shaped by changes in cultural, structural and agentic variables.

The Status of Teaching as a Profession

Refining the focus now to professionalism as a developing concept within teacher education, there exists a history of controversy in the status of teaching as a profession (Tatto, 2021). Stone (2022) defines professionalism as a key component of teaching, with STs and NQTs needing to develop and assert their own professional identities very quickly. However, professions can also be described as constructed in the fractious space which exists when groups attempt to assert dominance over the differences in knowledge and understanding in their field (Tatto, 2021). Tatto (2021) also highlights a lack of agreement in the methods of preparation of teachers as professionals. Research suggests that teacher retention rates are related to beliefs about the nature of teaching as a profession (Pop & Turner, 2009; Hattie, 2012). These beliefs about the profession and their role in the profession influence teachers in decisions regarding their own career progression. The beliefs STs hold about their experiences as opposed to their actual teaching experiences can inform or limit the way they problem solve within the profession (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

The Teachers Matter Report (2005) states that ensuring competent people want to work as teachers is a key priority for improving the efficiency and equity of schools. Professional development and the will to engage in and with professional development, is impacted by the quality and competency of teachers coming into the system. Teachers Matter (2005) identified widespread concerns about long-term trends in the composition of the workforce including fewer high achievers choosing the profession. Evidence suggests that in many countries teaching is a profession in decline as it has become less evident as a path to social mobility and job security (Kraft & Lyon, 2024; Harford & Fleming, 2023). While teaching is still seen as an honourable profession in the context of Ireland, it is very

questionable as to whether it has ever been a pathway to social mobility (Keane, 2024). There is some evidence that it facilitates limited upward mobility for STs from working class backgrounds (Coolahan, 2003). Teachers Matters (2005) identified a number of policy requirements to support the betterment and sustainability of the profession of teaching including improving the image and status of teaching, evaluating and rewarding effective teaching, providing opportunities for career variety and diversification and providing more supports for beginner teachers. The findings of the report align with those of Hall et al., (2018), in identifying the stages of initial teacher education, induction and professional development as requiring better interconnectedness to provide sustainable pathways for professional development.

There is increasing recognition in the literature that learning to teach cannot happen in ITE alone and it is best experienced as an iterative continuum of professional development (Conway et al., 2009). The DEEPEN Report (2021) notes the evolution of teaching from a learned trade through apprenticeship to a 'professional status' career with a continuum of initial training, induction and ongoing professional learning. Furthermore, the Report points to the growing demands and complexity of the teacher's role which emphasises the need for expanded induction as a specific component of professional development. The authors challenge HEIs to examine their own assessment systems as a means of promoting professional development.

The Role of the Teaching Council in Developing the Profession

The teaching profession in many countries has been reduced in status to the reaching of certain technical accomplishments and the mapping of professional development against generic professional standards (Diamond & Bulfin, 2023). As the regulator of the profession, the TC has overall responsibility for developing policies on professional development for teacher education and protecting the status of the profession. The role of the TC and its policies has been expanded upon in the previous context chapter. The focus here is specifically regarding professionalism and professional

development. To date, the TC encourages, but does not require, teachers to maintain personal learning portfolios across their professional lives and engage with continued professional development. The keeping of portfolios has been formally included in the SP requirements for HEI programmes of teacher education, in the form of the *Taisce* (TC, 2020) which may or may not pre-empt a move towards further formalisation of portfolio keeping. During all SP modules, STs are currently required to use a *Taisce* to demonstrate understanding of inclusive education and working with parents.

The TC describes CPD as a major policy priority (TC, 2015). Engagement with CPD varies across teachers' professional lives with teachers with 2 - 5 years' experience teaching two and a half more times likely to take part in CPD than NQTs (TC, 2015). This may be indicative of a weakness in the continuum if teachers emerging from their SP experiences are not choosing to engage with CPD. The TC takes quite a 'hands off' approach to the provision of formalised professional development opportunities but an example of the TC directly facilitating professional development is *Féilte*. This is hosted annually and gives teachers a space to share learning with peers and more widely. Practice-based research is also encouraged but not required by the TC. Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) describe how an initially fragmented approach to CPD programme development has been streamlined to some extent in recent times with the DE, working through designated agencies, designing and delivering the majority of programmes.

Regarding professional development as the undertaking of leadership responsibilities, a concerted effort has been made to support teachers wanting to take on leadership roles in schools with the development of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) in 2015 by the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN), the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals and the DE. Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) summarise the role of the CSL as providing a continuum of support for school leaders, developing programmes to support aspiring leaders, the induction and mentoring of newly appointed principals and the provision of CPD for principals. The CSL pursues several approaches including training mentors, one-to-one mentoring for principals and the development of leadership clusters.

The clearest example of the TC planning for and prioritising professional development is Cosán: The Framework for Teachers' Learning (Teaching Council, 2016). This is the national framework for guiding and supporting teachers' professional development following on from induction. It is built around the ideal that teachers' learning has direct impact on the learning of their students. The systemwide implementation of Cosán by 2027 is identified as a key objective of the TC, facilitated by the Cosán Action Plan. Taken together, School Placement (Ceim), Droichead and Cosán indicate a will for a continuum of sorts within the profession, with SP as the starting point. The complexities lie in linking, implementing and assessing their efficacy as a whole. According to Walsh (2024), the embedding of a continuum of education in Ireland is a process which has been on the cards for decades but has gained traction with the formalising and mobilising of a national vision under the Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (TC, 2011).

Selection Processes and Educator Retention

Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak (2019) identify the lack of scholarly attention paid to understanding the beliefs about the profession of teaching and intended career paths of prospective students. This lack of focus on those considering the profession (Watt, Richardson, & Wilkins 2014) results in uncertainty as to why STs then opt to stay with programmes, engage well with them and ultimately perform well on SP. A lack of understanding of or even interest in prospective student profiles, points to complacency within the system. Balyer & Ozcan (2014) specify that choosing both talented and committed 'brains' (2014, p104) is essential for the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the educational system. Looking at the reasons why STs consider teaching as a profession, they find that many are motivated by altruistic reasons - both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, and some STs choose the profession under the influence of others. The quantitative study revealed that female students primarily cite altruistic - intrinsic reasons and STs from lower socio - economic backgrounds, larger families and male students are more likely to cite extrinsic reasons. Altruistic - intrinsic reasons include the desire to influence the minds of young generations (Lawver & Torres, 2011). Darmody & Smyth (2016) highlight the role of screening and selection tools for ITE and how these can only

hope to be effective in the context of transparent understandings of the qualities and dispositions required for and of the profession. Hamdani et al. (2014) advocate for a job task analysis (JTA) to distinguish between and clarify the real - world content of the job, as well as the requirements necessary for those who perform the job (Wolfe et al. 1991). Heinz (2013) determines that the increasing complexity of school settings puts a requirement on policy makers and teacher educators to pay further attention to criteria such as intellectual competencies, personal qualities, values and skills.

Teacher retention can be defined as the ‘need to prevent good teachers from leaving the job for the wrong reasons’ (Kelchtermans, 2017, p965). Stress, workload, work-life balance and increasing societal challenges reflected in modern classrooms are all cited as reasons for declining retention rates (Arthur & Bradley, 2023). However, in Ireland, where the profession is still highly respected, the lack of early professional progression paths emerges as a key retention factor (Keane et al., 2023; Gariglio, 2021). Despite the status of the profession in Ireland, there is growing evidence of a teacher-supply crisis, discussed previously. It is widely acknowledged that continuing job education and professional development positively influences retention rates and has impact on reducing the risk of good employees leaving the workplace (Shiri et al., 2023). Clearly articulated career development opportunities can contribute to cultures of individual development and satisfaction.

Professional Development of the Co-operating Teacher

The CT role emerges as one of the most contentious and hotly debated aspects of the partnership model of SP (Young et al., 2022; Garcia, 2018). The useful distinction provided by Hall et al. (2018) in describing the CT as generally recognised as having strength in the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of practice and SPTs in the ‘why’ has informed my view that professional development for CTs must go beyond technical competence and focus on sustained engagement. Currently, the CT role is not linked to the improvement of professional development prospects or a specialisation in expertise. Farrell (2021a) makes the assertion that in Ireland we still struggle to articulate and implement a shared-vision

for SP and roles within SP. She further points to the clear gap in current policy in terms of the selection and professional development of CTs. Farrell's critique has informed my focus on systemic reform, particularly in how CTs are identified, supported, and integrated into the broader goals of ITE. O'Doherty and Harford (2016) explain that CTs are either self-selecting or selected by school principals and that while the criteria for selection may be linked to their professional and personal abilities and dispositions there can also be many other variables at play. Amongst these they note timetabling issues or supplementing an ineffective teacher. They also hold that while schools are not obliged to take on STs there can be a reluctance to do so, particularly for the longer placements. The authors accuse the TC of not giving enough consideration to the scalability of the SP model. While the criteria for selection remain arbitrary - based on professional or personal capacity or the need for a weaker teacher to benefit from the STs input (Farrell, 2021a), the haphazard nature of allocating the role will persist. Research is starting to reveal frustrations on the part of the CT and the need for CTs to feel included in negotiating the spaces within which they function (Clarke et al., 2014). This has informed my proposed framework, which advocates for negotiated roles, professional development pathways, and recognition of CTs as central to the success of partnership in SP.

There are practical barriers to the selection of CTs related to the scale of the task. Ó' Neill (2015), reporting to the TC, postulates approximately 8,600 primary school placements are required each academic year and that of the 21,724 mainstream class teachers in primary schools (DES, 2015-16 Key statistics), 25% of this cohort may be ineligible/unable to accept STs at any given point in time. Extrapolating out from this data, O'Neill posits that one in every two eligible teachers would have to accept a ST each year. O'Doherty and Harford (2016) also point to the assumption made by the TC that teachers will be willing to accommodate students. In practice, this is not always born out and this is at least partially due to confusion around the terms of participation and how the CT role can be linked with planning for professional development in a more formalised manner (Clarke et al., 2014). Three key themes emerged from Farrell's (2021a) research; 1) the complexity and potential of the role in building democratic partnerships, 2) the need to adequately resource the role and 3) the existence of barriers to the development of

democratic partnership. In terms of the first of these, Farrell (2021a) clarifies that while the data suggests CTs have some general sense of their role, this is very informal. They lack the professional language and formal connections with HEIs to critically reflect on and construct their roles.

The TC School Placement Guidelines (revised 2021) have little to add regarding the selection and training of CTs. They note that the provision of structured support to STs on SP is a requirement and that this includes support for the CT *'having regard to capacity'* (p14, 2021). No guidance is given as to how to assess the capacity of a CT to give support and what form this capacity takes (professionalism, available time, interpersonal skills, pedagogical skills and competencies). The Guidelines speak to affording CTs opportunities to share their professional expertise in order to enhance the continuum of professional development but do not define what best practice in this regard looks like. A list of basic responsibilities is outlined, including introducing the student teacher to pupils, the classroom, plan of work, rules and procedures but again no template for how best to do this is given. A particularly cumbersome task allotted to the CT is to advise the principal of any serious concerns regarding the practice or professional conduct of the ST. For many teachers, this is their first time to take on a supervisory and line of report role and it is noteworthy that they are expected to do so without any training or guidance.

3.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides an overview of the research regarding the 3 Ps: Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development and their place in SP. My research aligns with much of the key literature however it expands upon the complexities of crossing the boundaries between roles and contexts, indicating a need for a better structured framework for partnership. Broad consensus regarding a desire at institutional and individual level to facilitate and support a 'good' experience of SP, with an emphasis on the ST experience, through a broadly conceptualised vision of partnership emerged from the literature. However, there also materialised a complex picture of

multiple moving parts, competing or ill-defined perspectives and poorly articulated definitions regarding the articulation and facilitation of that process. The informal nature of SP emphasised in the literature (O'Doherty & Harford, 2016) requires further analysis beyond an acceptance of its prevalence. Over the course of the Findings Chapters, this research explored the negative impact of informality on participant engagement, including a reluctance to cross the divide between HEI and SoP. The sense of ambiguity around roles, engagement with policy and the perspectives of 'the other' is to date under-represented in the literature. This research proceeds to define those areas of ambiguity and their impact.

The informal, goodwill-based nature of partnership in SP places a heavy weight on the partners to interpret, re-interpret and re-interpret again what their place is in the process, what best practice looks like and how to support or even identify positive outcomes. The framework I propose in the Conclusion Chapter represents an effort to facilitate ongoing engagement across roles. If SP marks the start of the continuum of professional development, the lack of clarity around how to articulate the partnership model and how to fulfil roles appropriately or even recognise when this is done, lays a heavy load on that first step in the journey. The issue of inclusion and diversity, through selection processes for STs onto ITE programmes and the potential inhibitors to diversity created by the Irish language requirement, have also been highlighted.

The next chapter discusses the methodological elements of my research study, drawing attention to the aims, specific research paradigm, ethical considerations and data analysis. The use of vignettes and the detailed approach to their construction is afforded attention.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I critically discuss the research design employed in the fulfilment of the research aims and in addressing the research questions. I establish the tripartite framework, relevance of partnership theory and the specific structures, key concepts, variables, relationships, and theories of relevance. The rationale for a pragmatic-interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is provided. Ethical considerations specific to working with those in the profession of teaching and the sphere of education are also addressed. The ethical considerations relating to my insider profile, including addressing potential power dynamics, bias and objectivity and transparency are detailed. I outline the data generation process and timeline inclusive of the use of questionnaires, FGs, reflective diaries and SSIs. Finally, I describe the phases of the narrative data analysis and coding processes and the use of vignettes as part of a narrative analysis approach.

4.1 Research Aims

The primary objective of this research was to develop specific and hopefully implementable recommendations for a better-defined partnership model of SP which incorporates the perspectives of partners and addresses the challenges they face in both

the fulfilment of their roles and their progression along the continuum of professional development. My research aimed to establish how partnership is perceived and experienced by participants in SP and integrate their perspectives into developing a proposal for a framework for SP partnership to enable it to function as an early step in the continuum of professional development. The research therefore critically assessed the assertions, claims and requirements set forth by the TC regarding the current partnership model and juxtaposed them with the lived experiences and perspectives of partners involved in SP. Participants in this research were all educators who were at various stages of their own continuum of professional development and held roles within SP.

Through a comparative exploration of perspectives, I developed a practicable partnership framework that holds the potential to contribute meaningfully to the continuum of professional development within the teaching profession. The aims were informed by the context of 1) the Hall Report (2018) and its findings with the additional considerations of 2) Céim (2020), 3) adoptions to SP necessitated by the pandemic, 4) the efforts of the School Placement Working Group (SPWG) and 5) the progress made on the implications identified by Hall et al., (2018).

4.2 The Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter One, the research questions stemmed from my own professional experiences in ITE, working in the area of SP. The final version of the research questions I addressed was as follows:

1) Partnership and Innovation: Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?

2) Perspectives and Integration: What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?

3) Professional Development and Improvement: Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

4.3 The Research Paradigm

The research paradigm provided the foundational framework to guide the design, construct and conduct of the research process and ultimately shaped the nature and scope of the knowledge gained. It was directly related to my 'starting point;' fundamental beliefs, assumptions and philosophical underpinnings that gave shape to the research. I acknowledge that as a researcher, the social and professional worlds I inhabit exerted an unavoidable influence on how I engaged with participants and interpreted the data generated. The similarities and systems which bond participants into specific participant groups are based upon malleable and tenuous constructions. They are influenced, formed, reformed, interpreted and re-interpreted by participants and by the researcher, and dependent upon the personal experiences of those social worlds we inhabit. Therefore, the research paradigm was focused on the idea that knowledge is constructed within social concepts. ITE and SP specifically are deeply influenced by the social and cultural environment from which they have developed and to which they still belong.

4.3.1 Pragmatic, Interpretivist and Constructivist Paradigms

This research was primarily guided by pragmatic and interpretivist/constructivist paradigms stemming from the ontological position that different realities can co-exist for participants in research. Furthermore, a continuous process of inquiry and adaption is necessary to engage with reality as dynamic and evolving. While paradigms guide methodological decisions made in collecting, analysing, and reporting on data, I was drawn to the pragmatic paradigm as it holds the potential to free the researcher to establish and be guided by an appropriate framework. In my case, I chose Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI) as that framework, which is expanded upon below. A pragmatic paradigm is often described

as linking well with a mixed methods approach as it puts the research problem or questions at the heart of the research (Creswell, 2004). Pragmatic paradigms also prioritise finding practical solutions. This was important for me as I came to this research with lived experiences of the problems of SP and I wanted the research to hold the potential to have a direct impact on those problems.

This research drew specifically on the work of Dewey (1910). For Dewey, inquiry starts with prior knowledge and existing beliefs which are subject to interpretation and definition, the act of which creates problems, uncertainties and questions (Dewey, 1910). Dewey chose to emphasise human experience rather than abstract concerns and he highlighted that beliefs must be interpreted to generate action and that actions must be interpreted to generate beliefs (Dewey, 1938). In his seminal work, *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey described democracy in terms of conjoint, communicated experiences (p87) and shared learning as key to education and democracy and emphasised that learning is a social process, where individuals grow through active participation and engagement with others. This research builds on the concept of exploring the socially constructed perspectives of partners in SP in order to understand how they engage with each other, the value they attach to their roles and those of others and how this impacts on their participation in a partnership model of SP. Dewey's view of democratic learning environments defined education as a microcosm version of society where pupils learn to respect diverse perspectives and engage in dialogue to collaboratively find solutions. This resonated with my research approach as I was interested in 1) collaborative practices in SP, 2) the accuracy of a shared-vision model when applied to SP and 3) the impact of the perspectives of participants in SP on how they worked together collaboratively to support placement. Furthermore, Dewey's concept of a community of inquiry resonates with an exploration of whether and to what extent participants in SP engage with each other for a mutually agreed goal.

Dewey held that inquiry is ever-ongoing, self-correcting and social. He saw knowledge as not static but evolving through continuous interaction with the environment. Throughout the different professional roles I held during this research period, it was impossible to avoid interacting with the initial questions and assumptions they were built

upon. Rather than trying to avoid or mitigate against this interaction, I chose to include it as a fundamental part of the research process. Therefore, I ensured that I utilised methods for recording the self-corrections and explorations of uncertainties- primarily through memoing and a reflective diary. The use of memoing and a reflective diary is expanded upon below.

I also drew on the interpretivist paradigm which facilitates the valuing of participant perspectives and the knowledge emerging from those perspectives as personal and unique (Creswell 2014). In this research, the participants played an integral role not only for the data they provided but more significantly for their perspectives and interpretations of the social phenomena of SP within ITE. Weber describes interpretivism in terms of addressing the meaningful character of social actions (as distinguished from physical action) through 'verstehen' or understanding, perceiving or knowing the nature and significance of something (Weber, 2003). Meaning and process, are engaged with (Braun and Clarke, 2021) through critical exploration of interpretations of reality - a reality which is at least partly constructed in the mind of the participant, and which is socially constructed through the interactions that individual, or group has with society. In comparing the perspectives of participants, value is attached to researching different understandings and interpretations rather than focusing on simple descriptions (Dennis, 2014). Instead of starting with a theory, within an interpretivist paradigm the researcher inductively generates patterns of meaning (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The role of the researcher within this paradigm is not reductionist and this enables them to focus on the language and perspectives of the participants.

A challenge in terms of interpretation of data is that there is a self-reflection process and thus two levels of interpretation: firstly, the observing of the phenomena from the perspective of the participants and secondly the understanding of meaning construction by the participants (Bhattacharjee, 2012). With regard to this research, the first level of interpretation related to the expressed experience of partnership within SP by the participants and the second level of interpretation related to the construction by the participants of a role for themselves and others within their concept of partnership in SP.

In other words, the research addressed how partnership is perceived and then how this perception influences the playing out of roles and responsibilities within SP.

4.3.2 Social Constructivism and Iterative Thematic Inquiry

My research process can be summarised as a seeking understanding through engagement with the world under investigation. As someone who is deeply embedded within the world of SP, this was not only logical but unavoidable. This led me towards a social constructivist framework, particularly the work of Gergen (1973, 1985, 2023). In social constructivism there is an emphasis on the development of subjective meanings of experiences. A key aspect of social constructivism is the acknowledgement that how we understand and perceive the world (in this case the world of ITE and SP) does not necessarily reflect the nature of the world itself but how the world is represented or produced through language and recounted by participants (Burr & Dick, 2017). This emphasis on the 'language and recounting' was appealing to me as I wanted to highlight the nuances of the participant's interpretations of their experiences rather than focusing primarily on the data they explicitly provided in response to questions. What a participant or group of participants did not say or how they chose to represent their own role and that of other participants, were of significance to the research. Identifying what was 'not said' was achieved by a detailed comparison of the transcripts under the themes emerging through ITI at an individual and group level and identifying 'gaps' in the accounts. Therefore, I actively sought out the complexity of views, often negotiated socially and historically. The Context Chapter also sought to bring the social and historical space of this research to the fore, acknowledging how SP sits within a contentious and negotiated space.

Gergen states that social constructivism views discourse about the world as an artefact of communal interchange (Gergen, 1985). It invites a challenging of the objective basis of conventional knowledge (Gergen, 1985). Social constructivism also respects the plurality and diversity of the social world under investigation. It moves away from objective reality to reality as construction. Gergen (1973) draws attention to the historically situated

nature of inquiry and the resulting theory and knowledge and expressed human activity as culturally bound. Within social constructivism there is an emphasis on communally shared understanding and values. The process of knowledge generation as relational in nature and generated from communities sits very well with this research. HEIs, ITE and SoPs are all communities within a wider educator community. Participants often belong to multiple communities and occupy different roles within those communities. This leads to complex layers of self-identify and potentially conflicting priorities. The productive power of discourse is also significant in social constructivism. Discourse not only describes the world, events therein or individuals, but also influences what we do and how we act (Knights & Morgan, 1991).

4.3.3 The Insider/Outsider Status

I have previously referenced my status as a professional working in a position of authority within the area under investigation. However, I will address explicitly here how I planned for this in the design, data analysis, participant interaction and writing up phases. Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) acted as a framework for understanding and addressing insider bias. Bourdieu utilised the concepts of habitus, field and capital to support analysis of one's own social position and experiences as researcher.

Concept	Definition	Address
Habitus	Dispositions and Tendencies	Acknowledged Awareness Reflexivity
Field	The Social Space or Environment	Clear Documentation Peer Review Triangulation

Capital	Resources (social, cultural, economic) that individuals possess	Acknowledge Role and Positionality from Start Clear Documentation Participant Checking

Table : 4-1 Bourdieu's Concepts of Habitus, Field and Capital

Addressing insider bias is crucial for maintaining integrity and credibility of the research, particularly for someone working directly in the area under investigation. I primarily addressed it using the tools below:

Tools	Detail
Reflexivity	Keeping a Diary, ITI Process, Memoing
Triangulation	Multiple Methods/ Multiple Data Sources
Participant Checking	Opportunity for Participants to Review Transcripts and Discuss
Peer Review	Peer Review Session with Academic Faculty
Clear Documentation	Piloted with Post - Primary Academic Faculty and Reviewed Documentation Use of Plain English

Table : 4-2 Tools for Addressing Potential Bias

The explicit inclusion of reflective and reflexive practices through memoing and the keeping of a reflective diary helped me to continuously address my own place in the research and potential bias. I also utilised the pilot phase to inform myself about how those potential biases could impact upon my interactions with participants. In addition to asking for a rating of the quality of the SSIs, I conducted a post-interview informal conversation with the participants. I discussed with the participants where they felt there might have been potential for bias and asked for suggestions as to how to address this. Although the

participants expressed feeling comfortable throughout the interviews, the suggestion was made that I more explicitly state my role within the College as separate to my role as researcher at the start of the interview. I took this advice on board and included this in my interview and focus group guides (*Appendix 3 – Semi Structured Interview Guide* and *Appendix 4 – Focus Group Guide*).

Iterative Thematic Inquiry, detailed below, also required that I address and ‘call out’ my preconceptions from the start and continue to re-visit and review them throughout the research. In using launch pads, constructed from my prior knowledge but also recognising and identifying explicitly where this knowledge came from, I built adaptability and a reviewing and critiquing of prior knowledge into the research process. I was consistently aware of the significance of the relationship between researcher and participants, with each exerting influence over the other (Fallon, 2015). As a researcher, I acknowledge that I have been a member of many of the participant groups (ST, NQT, CT, SPT and AF) and therefore an interactive relationship with co-influence was appropriate once acknowledged and ultimately also unavoidable.

4.4 Iterative Thematic Inquiry

Braun and Clarke (2021) define themes as the establishment of something important in and about the data in relation to research questions. They also represent a patterned response or establishment of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For the purposes of this research, the establishment of important things linked by patterns was more aptly described as ‘the launch pads’ in order to capture the intention to utilise them as points of departure for the research. While versions of the launch pads were subsequently reflected in the data analysis, they did not pre-empt or seek to unduly influence the results of that process, rather they provided a trajectory to enable further exploration and assisted in the development of the interview/focus group guides and questionnaires (*Appendix 3-Semi Structured Interview Guide, Appendix 4-Focus Group Guide*).

I utilised a four-stage iterative inquiry, (Morgan & Nica, 2020) to engage with the ideas emerging from the research, from early launch pads through to the framework for partnership proposed in the Conclusion Chapter. This Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI) was guided by the development of themes - in this case initial launch pads progressing into themes. The role of the researcher as active in the establishment of these initial problems is emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2021). Therefore, the launch pads came in the first place from myself as researcher using my prior knowledge, beliefs and experience of the area being studied (while acknowledging biases) and were refined by the literature review process. In ITI there is an explicit process of engaging with and reformulating the initial launch pads. This was done primarily through memoing. The participants themselves also had impact, through their engagements during data generation, nuancing the launch pads to enable them to authentically address key issues in SP. Finally, the data analysis and coding process was employed to ultimately build the vignettes.

4.4.1 The Fours Stages of Iterative Thematic Inquiry

Stage One:

In the first stage of ITI, I critically assessed my own beliefs and understandings around SP and partnership in SP to develop the initial launch pads. The starting point was therefore my personal and professional beliefs rather than a prior theory. I initially addressed, through a critical reflective process, my preconceptions around SP and partnership and attempted to identify where those preconceptions came from. I did this through a memoing process. I created a template for memoing (*Appendix 5-Memoing Template, Appendix 6-Sample Completed Memo*) which included my research questions, a place to brainstorm and a table to capture the changes to the initial launch pads. I also created a memoing schedule and linked this to my office calendar (once per week in Stage One and once per month subsequently). The table below provides an overview of this process for Stage One. It is noteworthy that these preconceptions impacted upon the interpretation of the data.

Identify Initial Preconception	What is the Possible Source of the Preconception?	What Do I want to Establish About these Preconceptions?	Possible Initial Launch Pads
Partnership is based on relationships and is informal	My Professional Experiences as Director of SP- experiencing the discomfort of an 'outsider' initially coming into the role	Are these experiences broadly applicable? Why has SP developed in this way? Does the informality hinder SP, support SP or a combination?	Concept of Partnership Roles and Responsibilities Reform Agenda and History
Partnership is not clearly understood or communicated as a concept in SP	Research Literature- prior to engaging with the literature review and from my own reading around the area for my professional role- particularly the Hall Report (2018)	Is it accurate to state that partnership is not clearly understood or communicated? By whom and to whom? Where does responsibility lie for this communication?	Roles and Responsibilities Power Imbalances Concept of Partnership

CTs and SPTs do not have a clear understanding of the extent of their role or the boundaries around it	My Professional Experiences and Anecdotally	Is it accurate to say that they do not have a clear understanding? If so, why? Where is the lack of understanding specific to? How can this be changed? What is the impact of the lack of understanding?	Roles and Responsibilities
Communication and input from the TC on SP is not of an adequate standard. HEIs have to meet lists of requirements with little guidance, resources or support	Broad Cultural and Professional Assumptions Conversations with colleagues around the role of the TC Lack of engagement with the TC in my own role	What is the nature of communication and input from the TC? Where could it be improved? Why is it experienced as lacking?	Power Imbalances Roles and Responsibilities
What we do is predetermined by how it has always	Professional Experience - particularly post COVID - lack	What is the historical and cultural context and why does it continue to have this impact?	Reform Agenda and History

been done - change is slow and not always welcome	of interest in building on the progress made	How can this be addressed?	
There is very little diversity in ITE and a lack of understanding of how to change this. Gaeilge requirement and admissions requirements impact of pace of change	Engaging with STs and other members of the education community Statistics of Diversity in ITE	How can diversity be improved? What supports need to be put in place? Where does responsibility lie?	Diversity
SP is valued by STs while they are engaged with the HEI but becomes less relevant when they enter the SoP	My own experiences as an ST and NQT Conversations with colleagues ST Reflections as part of SP documentation	Why is there a disconnect between SP and Droichead? What is the impact of this disconnect? How can it be addressed?	Continuum of Professional Development

Tasice is engaged with on a surface level by HEIs and has not had significant impact on STs or graduates	My Professional Experiences and End of Programme Feedback from STs	How can the gap between planning for SP and planning as an NQT be addressed and supported?	Professional Development
There are multiple voices involved in SP and there is a lack of understanding of or valuing of the roles of others	My Professional Experiences	How can the roles in SP be clarified? Who has responsibility for doing so? What are the challenges involved in clarifying roles?	Power Roles and Responsibilities Concept of Partnership

Table : 4-3 Stage One: From Preconceptions to Launch Pads

Stage Two:

Stage Two involved building new beliefs through encounters with the data. In ITI, analysis occurs every time that the researcher hears or observes something that has impact on prior beliefs. The literature review process also played a key role as I immersed myself in the reading and utilised the memoing process and reflective diary to revisit and reconsider the initial launch pads. This supported an ongoing reconstruction of prior beliefs. I asked myself, as part of the memoing process - does this reinforce my belief, challenge my belief or expand my belief? In summary, Stage One and Stage Two focused on my initial experiences, queries and predispositions based primarily on my professional experiences and how these were refined and reviewed through a reflective process and engagement with the literature.

Stage Three and Stage Four:

Stage Three and Stage Four came about during and post -data analysis and therefore were linked to the data emerging from the participants themselves. Stage Three comprised of the First Cycle Coding and Stage Four comprised of the Second and Third Cycle Coding (see Table below). A detailed account of this coding process is given later in the chapter.

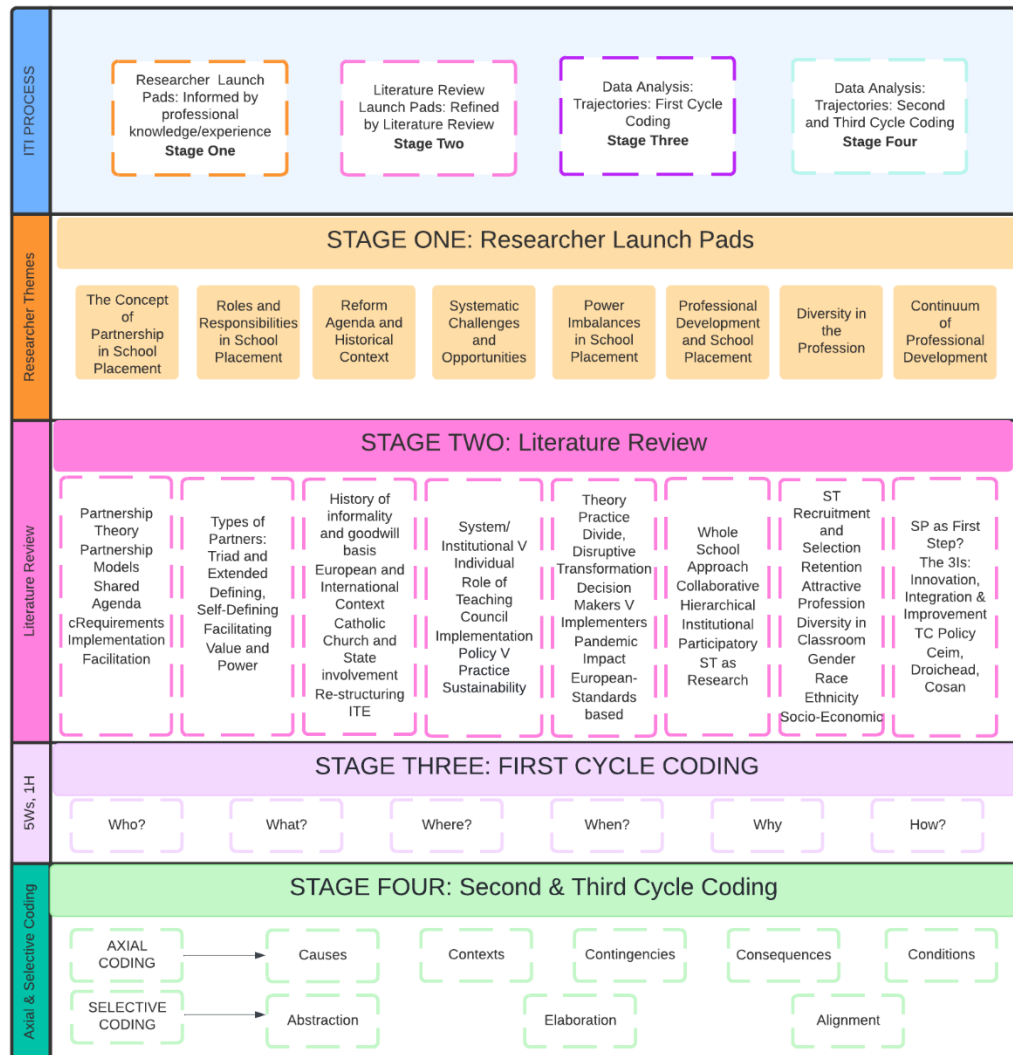


Figure : 4-1 The Iterative Thematic Inquiry Process

4.5 Ethical Considerations

At the heart of ethics is protecting participants and shielding them from any negative impacts of participation. Voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw are fundamentals, all of which were outlined clearly in participant information shared with participants (*Appendix 7-Participant Information Sheet*). Fallon (2015) states that participants must be protected from feeling vulnerable or intimidated while engaging with the research or in the publication of that research. Having partaken in FGs and SSIs as a participant and facilitator, I had relevant experiences to draw from. While this research focused on the experiences of participants and not on their assessment results and is therefore not of a particularly sensitive nature, any research probing

something which relates to professional performance and professional identity has innate sensitivities. It was essential that participants were afforded clarity on the process and reassurance that disclosure would not impact on their professional profile. Research was carried out in line with the revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2004). Steps taken to support an ethical process and ethical engagement included:

Ethical Approval: I was aware of the fact that delays are often unavoidable and difficult to mitigate against in data generation, particularly with a wide variety of participant groups. For that reason, I prioritised early ethical approval from Trinity College and Hibernia College (December 2022) which was granted without any requests for amendments. Due to the iterative process engaged with, the nature of my research questions changed over time, and I applied for an update to ethical approval which was granted (March 2023).

Pilot: I conducted a comprehensive pilot with AF from the Post Primary PME in HC. I asked participants to rate their level of satisfaction with the data generation process and requested feedback for areas of improvement.

Participant Documentation: Comprehensive but transparent participant documentation, with the opportunity to ask questions for clarification and the provision of a clear overview of the research purpose, structure and role of the participant, is integral to ensuring an ethical process whereby participants are aware of their rights. All participants were provided with consent forms and participant information forms (adapted to suit each group) by email in advance of participation (*Appendix 7-Participant Information Appendix 8-Letter of Introduction Appendix 9-Consent Form.*) I used MS Forms to gather consent information as it is easy to engage with, familiar to most participants and secure. I sought feedback from the pilot group on these forms and made adaptations based on this feedback. I also shared the forms with my research supervisors for initial review.

Participant Clarity and Right to Withdraw: I started each session with a reminder of the information shared in advance and reiterated the right to withdraw. I set participants at ease by allocating a few minutes for conversation before starting to record each session and an opportunity to ask any questions they might have. Participants were offered the opportunity to approve their own transcripts and have access to the data although this was not availed of. The AF did request that the initial findings be shared with them, and I did this over the course of an hour long webinar.

4.5.1 Confidentiality

The research required the collection of consent forms, names and email contact details therefore I was aware of the identity of all the participants. In many cases I also knew them as colleagues or students. Consequently, maintaining confidentiality was a key priority. I kept data records secure, and password protected. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were applied to all. During the data generation phase I maintained one master list of the names and pseudonyms to facilitate any follow up communication. As part of the transcription, all names were changed using a 'Find All' function. The pseudonyms were based on popular baby names in Ireland, 2022 (<https://charlies-names.com/en/top-names-ireland-2022/>). Female participants were allocated female names and male participants male names to allow for the gender context to be maintained in the data.

4.6 The Conceptual Framework for the Research

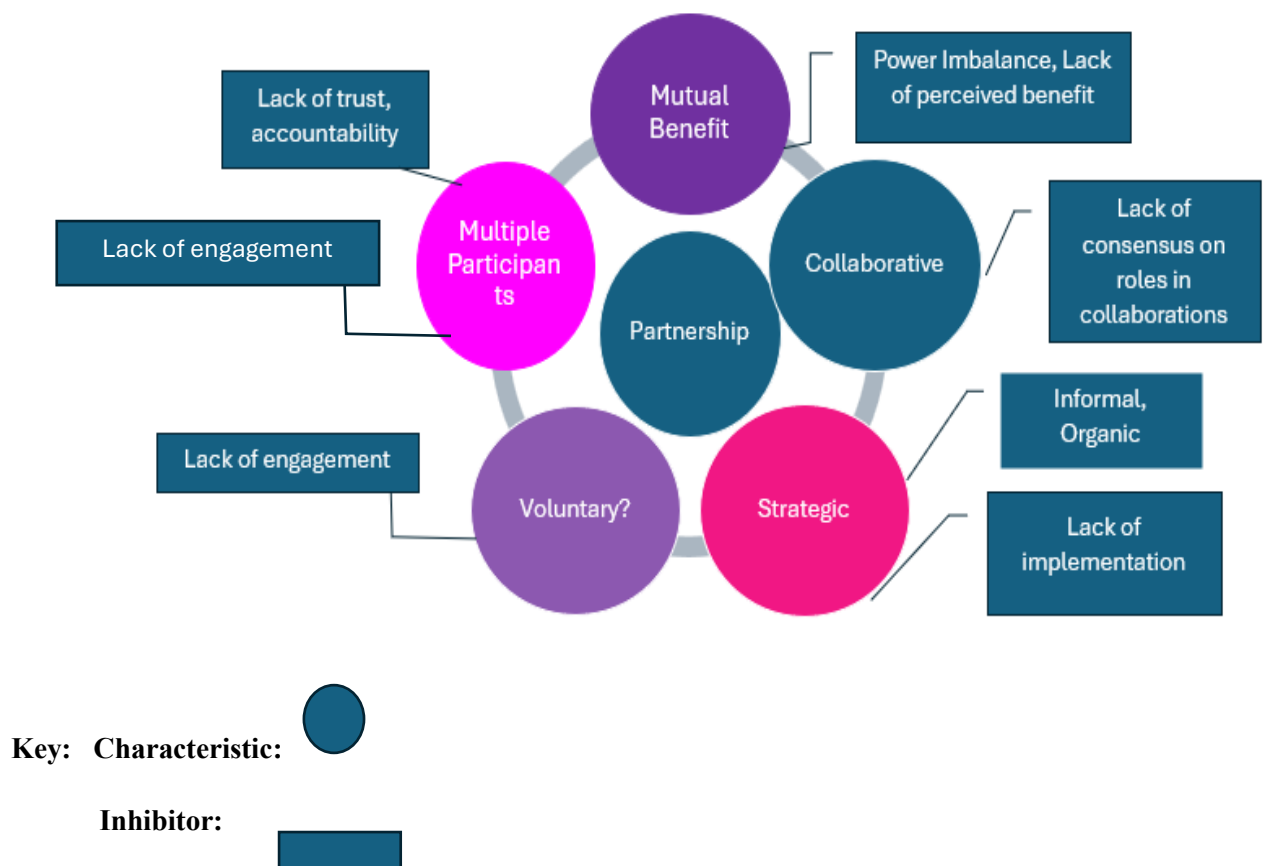
The conceptual framework was informed by epistemological and ontological views as well as experiences and assumptions. The framework was based upon three interrelated constructs: 1) partnership, 2) professionalism and 3) perspectives. By adopting a tripartite framework, the research could be approached from several different vantages, and this provided scope to explore the interplay between different partners in SP. These constructs were chosen in the knowledge that in making the decision to engage in and with a particular

type of research and to include/exclude certain ideas, participants, research and theories, the researcher comes to their chosen subject with assumptions, biases, and priorities which it is crucial to acknowledge and account for. Their work is thus grounded in their belief systems (Creswell, 2013). The belief systems are impacted by a wide array of factors including professional and personal experiences, the socio-economic context of the researcher, assumptions regarding their purpose and role within the research and philosophical underpinnings. I found this tripartite framework very useful as it brought me back to task when I started to wander into other aspects of ITE. A constant mantra of 'Is this related to at least one of the 3 Ps?' enabled me to apply some rigour to inclusion and exclusion of research areas.

4.6.1 Partnership Theory

Partnership theory was the key theoretical perspective which informed the conceptual framework and my engagement with it was built on my reading and critique of the material in the Literature Review chapter. A detailed review of the literature on partnership has already been conducted in the Literature Review Chapter therefore this section is focused on partnership theory rather than the concept of partnership itself. As noted previously, the TC describes SP as a partnership model and this research consequently probed partnership theory within the context of SP and education. Hatton and Schroeder (2007) describe formalised partnership as the organisational structure of choice across a wide range of sectors due to its perceived mutual benefits. Cook-Sather et al. (2014) further define it as collaborative, reciprocal and with opportunities for partners to contribute equally although possibly in different ways. These benefits can be both to the individual partner and to the collective organisation. According to Teisman and Klijn (2002,) in partnership theory, management and experts are strategic partners and both parties should be involved in all strategic stages and decisions. McQuaid (2000) expands upon the ambiguity felt by partners due to the wide range of definitions, concepts and practices covered by partnership theory. Diversity of partners within a partnership can add to the diversification of the pool of knowledge resources and innovations (Wang et al., 2023).

However, while the concept of partnership theory and its multiple potential benefits is widely accepted, the practical application is often flawed due to factors such as lack of trust, accountability, equality, respect and the fact that it is often forced rather than voluntarily and knowingly entered into (Hatton and Schroeder, 2007). Östhol and Svensson (2002), emphasise two key characteristics of partnership theory as being voluntary commitment and the involvement of various different actors. The plethora of types of partnership (strategic, institutional, individual, project-based) and the ambiguity around what constitutes a partnership, can be seen in the lack of clarity in the definition and application of partnership within SP by participants in this research. The characteristics of partnership are often accompanied by inhibitors which have impact on the potential for efficacy. It could be conversely argued that these factors hold the potential to afford certain nuances to a partnership model and, if addressed adequately, could add to the richness of the partnership experience.



4.6.2 Exploring Professionalism and Perspectives

The concept of professionalism has been discussed as part of the Literature Review Chapter. Its relevance in this research is twofold; in the first place in terms of how the participants recognise, define and value professionalism and in the second place in terms of how developing professionalism is impacted by SP. This dual focus allows for a comprehensive understanding of professionalism from both an individual and systemic perspective. By examining participants' perspectives, I was able to delve into the subjective nuances of what it means to be professional. Furthermore, exploring the impact of SP on developing professionalism offers insights into the practical applications and challenges faced within the professional development context. This approach ensures that both theoretical and practical dimensions of professionalism are engaged with.

This research is deeply connected to and dependent upon the perspectives of participants and, as discussed above, is influenced by my evolving perspectives. It is therefore important to establish clarity around what is understood by 'perspectives,' building upon the discussion from the Literature Review Chapter. Perspectives are broadly understood to refer to the particular attitudes individuals or groups take towards or regarding something or someone. A key element of the research is how the participants perceive others. This amounts to social perspective taking. This is the process through which the perceiver discerns the thoughts, feelings and motivations of another or a group of others. According to Gehlbach and Mu (2023), it comprises of four distinguishable phases: 1) perception of the target, 2) motivation to engage in social perspective taking, 3) strategy selection and 4) evaluation of the attempt. Within the context of this research, the perspectives of the participants were analysed in terms of how they chose to discuss themselves and other partners in SP, the extent to which they engaged with perspective taking on others and whether those perspectives were malleable or fixed. Social learning theory suggests that we acquire perspectives through observation and modelling after

significant others. It views people as active agents who can influence and be influenced by their environment. It also emphasises the role of social interactions and figures of influence such as peers in shaping our beliefs and values. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1999) emphasises the role of observational learning, imitations and modelling in acquiring new behaviours and perspectives. Bandura holds that individuals learn by observing the behaviours of others and the outcomes of those behaviours. Bandura emphasises that the individual's perspective is shaped both by their environment and by their personal characteristics (Bandura, 1999). In terms of this research, the different participants observe the behaviours of their peers within their group and those of 'others' in different groups. They establish meaning for themselves by positioning their perspectives as aligned with or in opposition to those of their peers.

4.7 The Research Design and Research Approaches

A mixed-methods research design has potential to improve accuracy of data and compensate for strengths and weaknesses of both the qualitative and quantitative elements (Denscombe, 2010). However, in my use of a mixed-methods approach, I prioritised qualitative analysis to capture the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) emphasise that in mixed methods research, a qualitative-driven approach can be used when the goal is to explore complex phenomena in depth. They argue that this approach allows researchers to generate rich, contextual insights that can shape the development of quantitative instruments or guide the interpretation of numerical findings within real-world context. The quantitative data, consisting of the closed-question responses to the questionnaires, served two clear functions; firstly it provided a structured framework as a context for the qualitative insights. This is evident in the structure I have repeatedly used of situating a discussion, for example how participants define partnership in SP, against the relevant quantitative data, in this case percentages of participants who described SP as partnership. Secondly, the responses to the questionnaires, inclusive of quantitative data, contributed towards decisions I made regarding the content of SSI and FG guides, indicating where there may be less consensus

within or across groups on specific themes and consequently a rationale for a more targeted exploration of divergent perspectives within the SSIs and FGs.

This research was therefore designed as a mixed-methods exploratory, interpretative design which enabled the perspectives of participants to be considered, and comparisons drawn. A mixed-methods approach facilitated some statistical generalisation (via the quantitative data) while enabling a deeper understanding of the issues and hearing the voice of the participants (qualitative). According to McChesney and Aldridge (2019), the use of mixed-methods can lead to debate over the alignment of researchers to a specific paradigm or the amalgamation of different paradigms. The use of mixed-methods implies a pragmatist philosophy (Punch, 2014), using the methods which best serve the specific aspect of the research. As Creswell (2004) states, it gives the researcher the ability to widen their inquiry while maintaining depth and breadth.

4.7.1 Single Case Study with Embedded Groups: The Rationale for Case Study

The research approach was a single case study with embedded groups. Thomas (2019) asserts that case studies can facilitate a context-dependent understanding and interpretation of a participant's own experiences. Although case studies are notoriously difficult to define due to the multiple possible interpretations and variations on the approach, they can be described as an exploration of *'real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in - depth data collection involving multiple sources of information'* (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Swanbourne (2010) further defines case study as an intensive and in-depth approach to the study of a phenomena. While the intention of case study is to provide 'in-depth' data, constraints and limiting factors experienced during the data generation process can mitigate against that in-depth potential. Utilising case study provides a context within which to build a story from the complex social phenomena. Further to defining case study, it is essential to have a clear working definition of what a 'case' is. Yin describes *'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and*

within its real-world context' (2014, p. 16). Simons (2009) defines a case as the problem that researchers intend to investigate. Therefore the 'case' in this research was the shared-vision of SP as a partnership model leading to professional development. Next to consider was the location of that case; within this research the case was located broadly within primary level SP and more specifically SP in HC on the PMEP programme. According to Yin (2014), case study research is an all-encompassing method covering the design and data collection. It must be based in rigour, validity and reliability. 'Real life' refers to the research setting within the space of actual, real-world events (SP). 'Boundaries' refers to factors which help to define the scope and limits of the research. The figure below illustrates how this research fits within the case study structure.

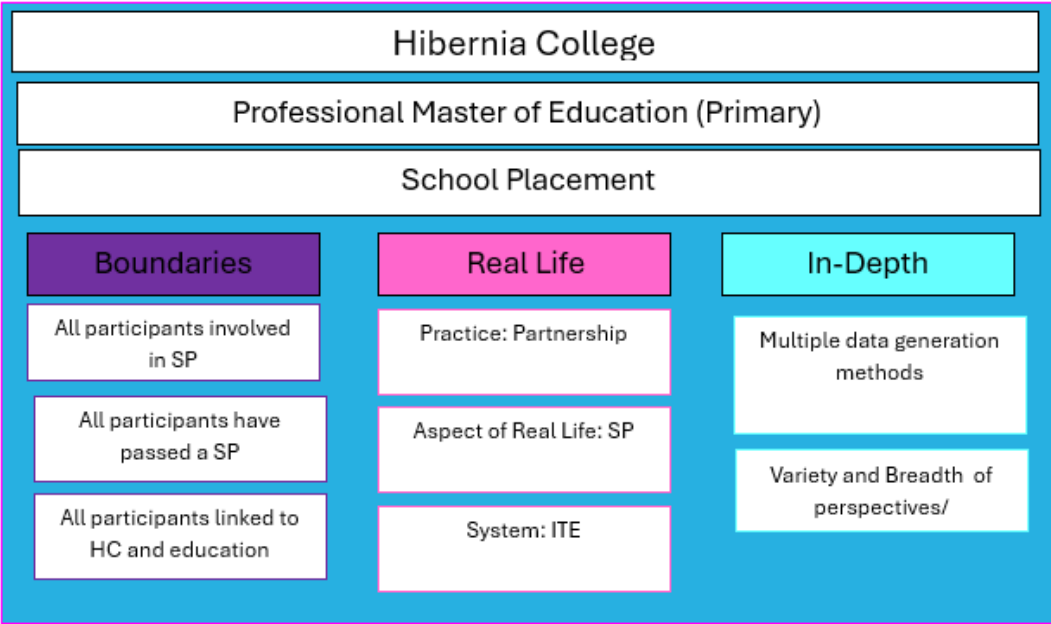


Figure : 4-3 The Case Study Structure

4.8 The Participants

A key aspect of this research was to analyse the perspectives of participants on the link between SP, the continuum of professional development and partnership. Therefore, participants included STs, those involved in SP delivery, development and assessment (SPTs and the AF), NQTs and members of their school community; CTs and school principals. All the participants were linked to HC in some way, either as a student, employee or facilitator

of students. The participants can also be divided into two categories: traditional triad participants and partnership participants. Traditional triad participants are the SPTs, STs and CTs. They are universally recognised as sitting at the heart of the SP experience and are seen to some degree as having a role in all partnership visions of SP (McIntyre & Morris, 1980). The partnership triad was used in this research to identify those participants whose role and impact within SP is less clearly defined and less universally implemented; school principals, the AF and NQTs. The term 'partnership participants' was used because within a true shared-vision of SP based on partnership, these participants would have a significant and acknowledged role to play. As part of the exploratory comparison of perspectives, I identified whether differences in attitudes and opinions towards SP, professionalism and partnership exist between these two groups. To be noted, is the use of colour coding for each of these groups going forward:

STUDENT TEACHERS

SCHOOL PLACEMENT TUTORS

CO-OPERATING TEACHERS

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

ACADEMIC FACULTY

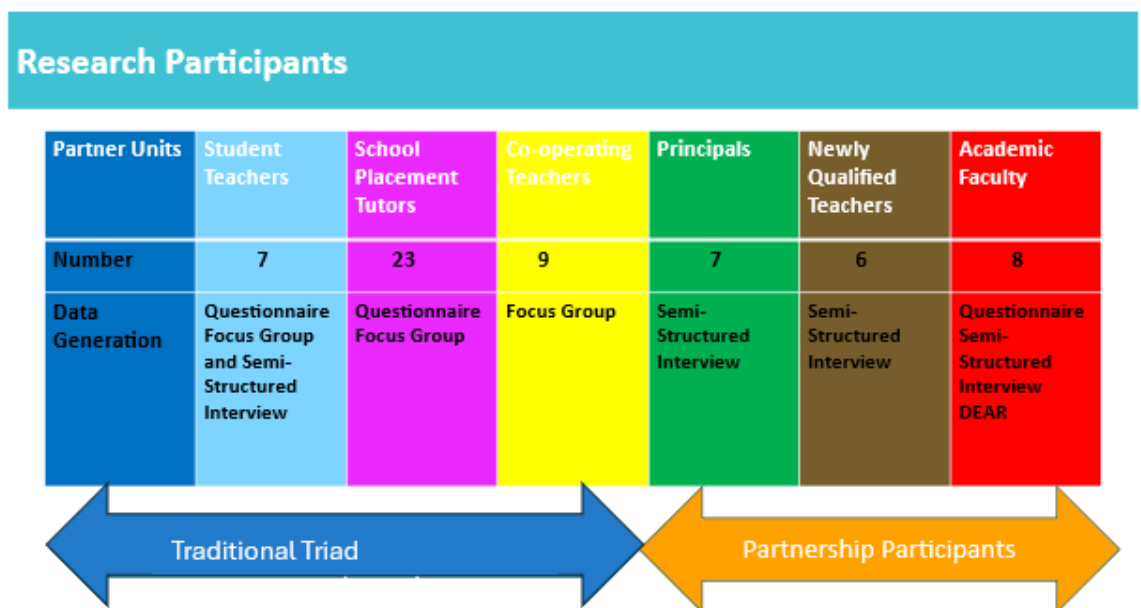
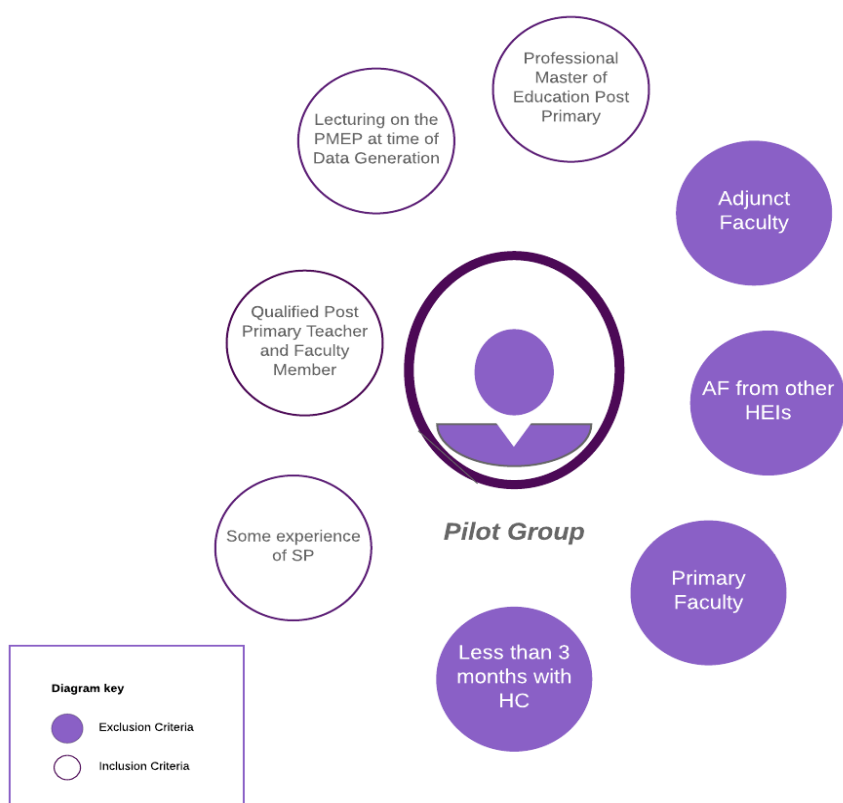
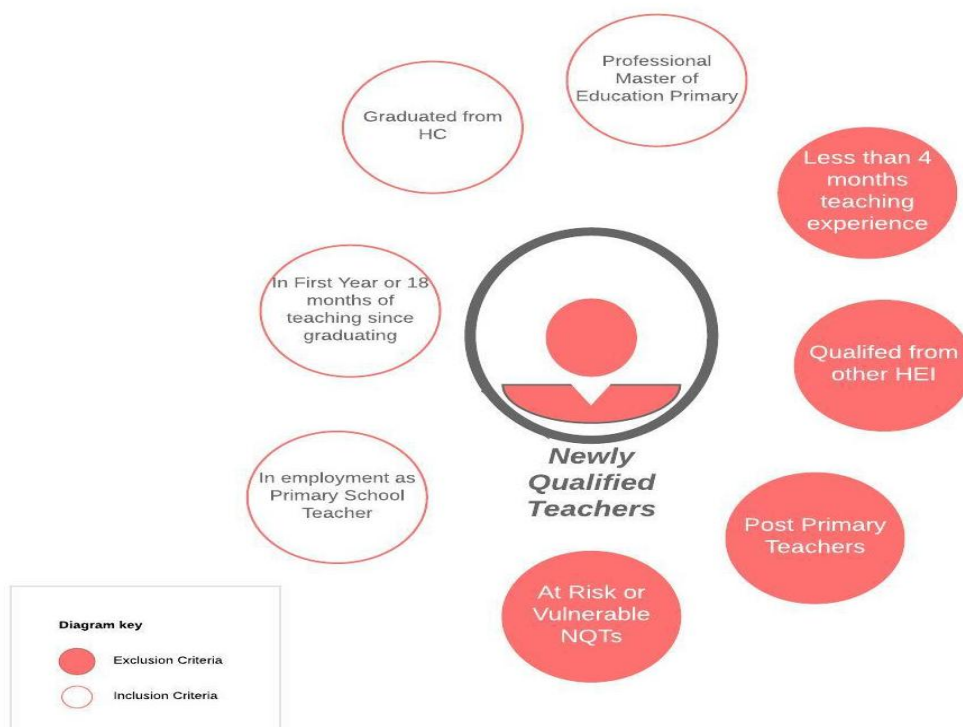
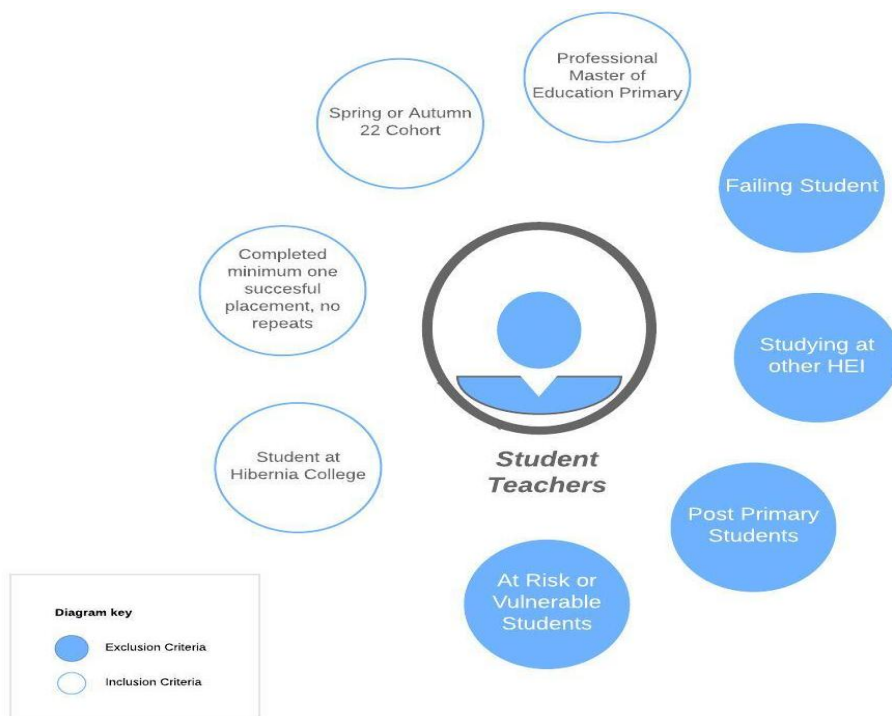


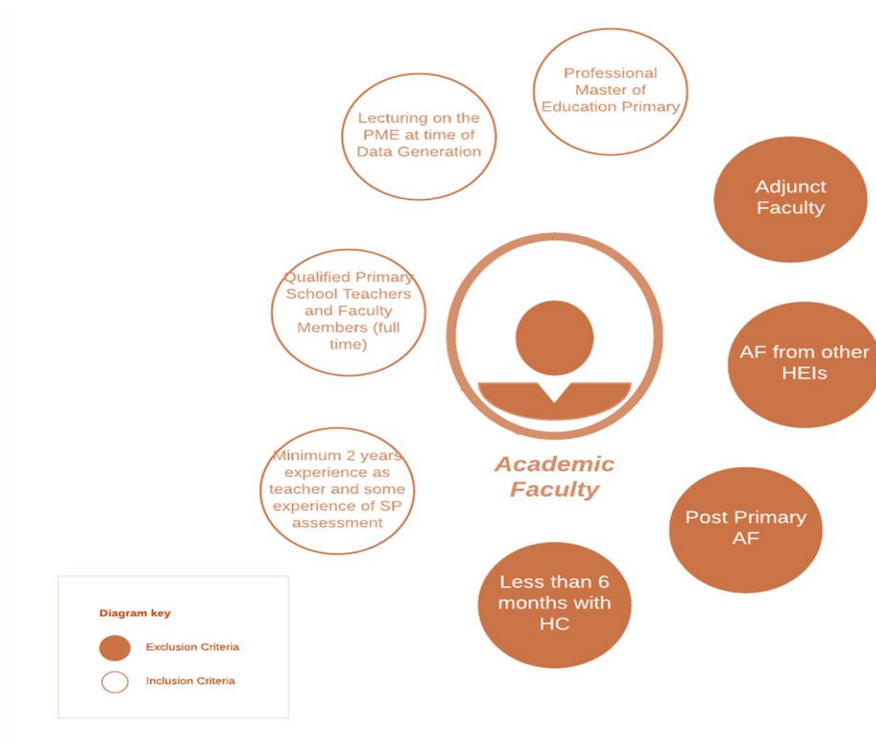
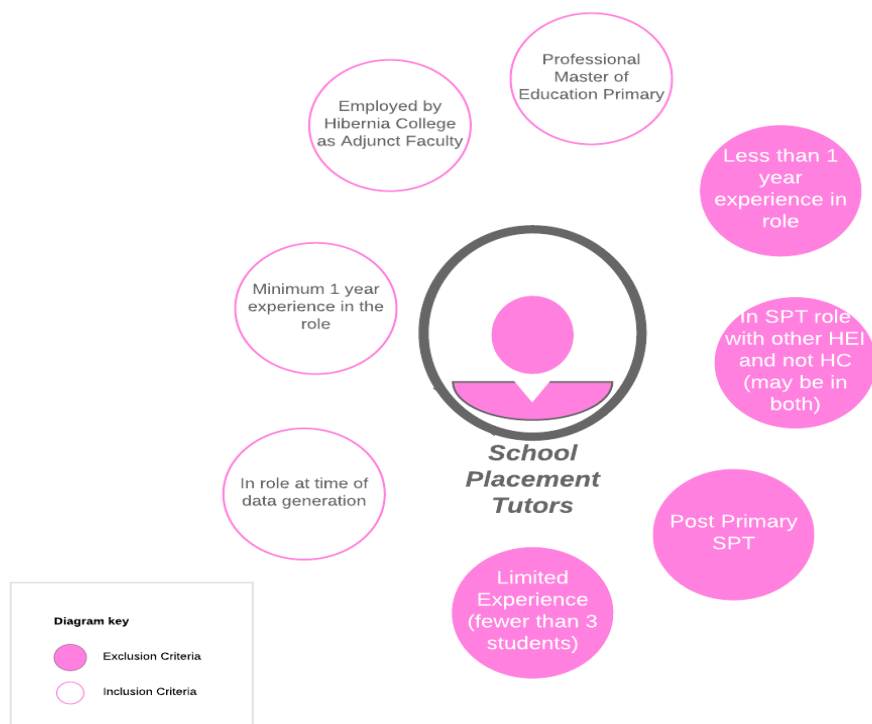
Figure : 4-4 The Research Participants: Number and Data Generation

4.8.1 Inclusion and Exclusion

The inclusion and exclusion criteria provided boundaries for the participants in the case study. Inclusion criteria are the key features of the participants and exclusion criteria are conversely features of potential participants who might otherwise meet the inclusion criteria but have additional characteristics that could put outcomes at risk (Pattino & Ferreira, 2018). In this research the inclusion criteria included setting (HC), positionality in relation to SP and timeframe. Exclusion criteria included specific factors for each participant group which might mitigate against the validity of participation such as how much engagement they have had with STs on SP or the boundaries around their professional role.







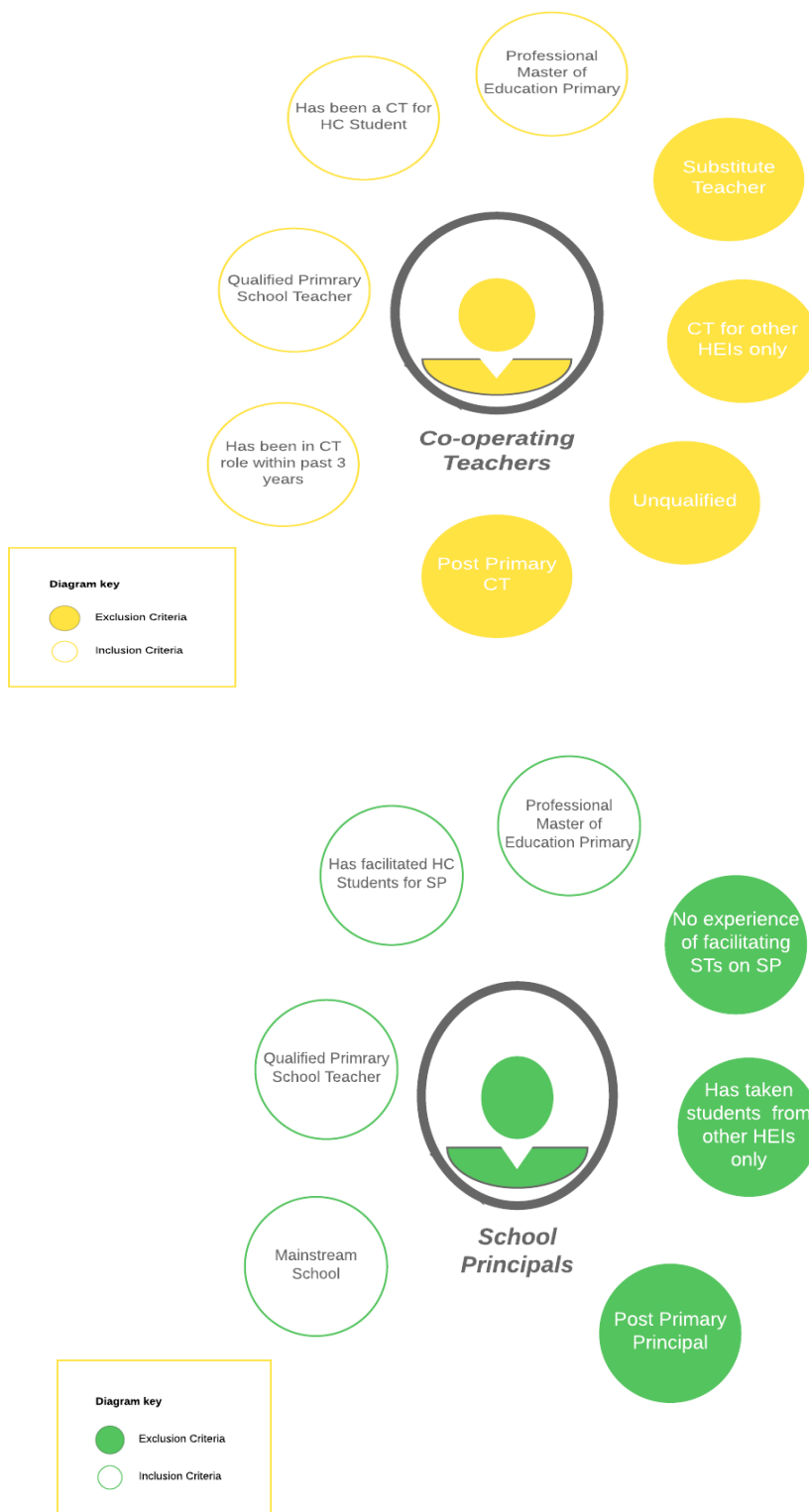


Figure : 4-5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Participants

4.8.2 Purposive Sampling

Having introduced the participants, it is now important to establish how they were selected. I chose to use purposive sampling as it allows the researcher to select participants who have specific experience and/or knowledge in order to be relevant to the research questions. This enabled deeper and more meaningful insights compared to random sampling which might include participants who are of less relevance to the study. It is also an efficient form of sampling as it enables the researcher to focus their efforts on individuals who are likely to provide valuable data, saving time and resources. A wide range of sample sizes exists in narrative research literature while in GTM a typical range is between 10 and 60 participants. The participant sample size of $n=60$ was therefore fitting. The sample size was primarily determined by three factors; 1) the population from which participants could be drawn, 2) the nature of the proposed data analysis and 3) the estimated response rate. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative and mixed - methods research. It involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups who are particularly knowledgeable or experienced in the area of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Selection is based on characteristics the researcher will need for their sample and thus includes selecting with purpose. Therefore, it was apt for use with participant groups selected for their professional and lived experiences. All the participants in this research work in or are studying to become members of the profession of teaching. They all have direct experience of the phenomena under investigation; SP, Partnership in SP and continued professional development. This method of sampling maximised efficiency and validity of results (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Purposive sampling was furthermore selected due to the potential to better match the sample to the aims and objectives of the researcher (Campbell et al., 2020). This contributed to improving the rigour and trustworthiness of the data (Campbell et al., 2020). Although purposive sampling relies heavily on the ability of the researcher to make judgements regarding the selection of participants, my professional experience as a student teacher, teacher, teacher educator, SP Director, assessor and college registrar facilitated me in this.

There are several challenges associated with purposive sampling. The first lies in identifying and applying the best purposive sampling strategy for the specific research. The use of a pilot group can negate to some extent against this concern in identifying potential challenges and giving the researcher an opportunity to address them. Despite the inherent bias in purposive sampling and the difficulties in identifying and applying consistently the judgements regarding participant criteria, these challenges can be addressed by establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria as outlined above and applying them rigorously to each participant group. It is also important to have an adequate understanding of the subject area and the participant profiles to make judgements regarding participation.

4.8.3 Research Tools with Different Participant Groups

The rationale for applying specific research tools for different participant groups is briefly outlined below. Consideration was given to the profile of the participants, their time constraints and availability and the limitations and benefits of each tool.

Type of Method Applied	Participants	Rationale
Focus Groups	Student Teachers Co-operating Teachers School Placement Tutors	Communal and unit voice Engagement and Interactions across the groups Put at ease and aid communication The triad of ST (assessed), SPT (assessor) and CT (mentor) is explored in relation to the shared/communal beliefs and expectations. Partnership as a community concept is explored
Semi-Structured Interviews	Academic Faculty Newly Qualified Teachers Principals Student Teachers Pilot Group	These groups give context to the triad (what structures and supports does the triad operate within). Principals may be reluctant to share the experiences specific to their school within a Focus Group. Availability: The busy professional schedules of these groups mean that it is easier to facilitate individual timeframes Note: Some STs- SSI and FG due to pragmatic timetabling reasons

Questionnaires	Student Teachers School Placement Tutors Academic Faculty Pilot Group	Questionnaires help to shape the themes and guides for interviews and focus groups. Give the researcher possible insights into further areas to explore. Due to busy work schedules and previous experience of host school reluctance, not used with principals, CTs or NQTs

Table : 4-4 Rationale for Choice of Data Generation

4.9 Research Methods

To address the research questions, the following research instruments were employed:

- Online Questionnaires
- Images and Concrete Resources
- Focus Groups (FGs)
- Reflective Diaries: Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)
- Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs)

4.9.1 Rationale for Choosing the Research Methods

These research methods were selected for their suitability to each participant group, and the combination of FGs, SSIs, Drop Everything and Reflect (DEAR) and questionnaires was grounded in a recognition of the limitations and strengths of each, whereby the inclusion of a variety of methods can enable mutual compensation (Kelle, 2006). Creswell (2013) notes the importance of multiple data sources to support triangulation in qualitative research, rather than a reliance on a single data source. Therefore, this curated selection of research instruments was chosen for the efficacy of their interplay as well as for their individual value. For example, the online questionnaire was appropriate for mixed-methods research as it provided quantitative and qualitative data while the FGs, DEAR and SSIs provided qualitative data. The use of concrete resources and images as a stimulus for discussion was particularly apt for the AF group as a tool to generate discussion based on professional experiences rather than regurgitation of college policy. The reflective diaries, in the form of DEAR provided opportunities to re-visit expressed concepts and thus incorporated more nuance and progression into the data generation. The use of reflective diaries to aid deep reflexivity and prevent researchers from morphing into technicians is widely recognised (Mortari, 2015). Furthermore, piloting was utilised to support instrumental rigour and bias management (Chenail, 2011).

I was also conscious of not using research methods which would be poorly received by the participants and the importance of positive attitudes and perceptions for successful implementation (Dyssegard et al., 2017). For example, establishing initial access to participants was more difficult within the SoPs than within the HEI. That access also became

more challenging with the decrease in seniority of the participant. Access to principals was moderately good however access to NQTs was extremely challenging. I was not fully aware of how difficult this access would be at the time of deciding on research instruments, but I was conscious of the constraints of time within SoPs, due to the busy nature of the school day. I consequently wanted to utilise instruments which did not require too many layers of effort or engagement from the participants. I did not want to overburden them with complex technological requirements, excessive reading material or detailed preparations. I also felt that most participants would be comfortable and familiar with the chosen tools, which would help to set them at ease.

4.9.2 Commonalities Across the Research Methods

I conducted all of my data generation via online tools; email, MS Forms and Zoom. This felt particularly apt given the fact that HC is a blended provider with the majority of programme content delivered in an online format. Consequently, participants had established familiarity with online tools. Post COVID, there is an increased level of confidence with the use of web conferencing platforms and technology for communication purposes. This enabled me to conduct the data generation efficiently as it reduced wait times and removed the need to organise suitable venues. It also greatly facilitated the recording of data, as noted individually below.

4.9.3 The Questionnaires

Selection of Questionnaires

I considered the specific advantages and disadvantages of using questionnaires for educational research. They are widely accepted as versatile, having the potential to pool data from different research domains and facilitate a structured approach to organisation and analysis (Kuphanga, 2024). Advantages include the fact that they are cost-effective, can reach significant groups in a relatively short period of time and are quite simple to use. They can also be 'self-administered' in that respondents can complete them in their own

time and space which holds the potential to increase honesty and accuracy as participants do not feel that they are being directly observed by an external party (Malhotra, 2006). However, only reliable questionnaires yield reliable results and therefore the design and review of the questionnaire is an essential process (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). Disadvantages include challenges such as low response rates, potential bias due to low response rates and difficulties in ensuring responses are representative (Kuphanga, 2024). Nonetheless, they are valuable in providing a structured approach to gathering data and when used in conjunction with other tools, can provide a uniform method for data generation.

Online questionnaires were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from STs, the AF and SPTs (*Appendix 10 -Online Questionnaires*). I chose to use online questionnaires specifically because they can reach many respondents in a variety of locations, which was appropriate for contacting participants located across Ireland. They are also useful as a first step in a data generation process as they can help to identify possible themes for FGs and SSIs (Denscombe, 2007). They additionally functioned as a testing ground for emerging themes.

Development and Design of the Questionnaires

I have been asked to complete many questionnaires over the course of my career and one universal truth is that they are rarely a priority for the recipient. For this reason, in designing a questionnaire it is important to get two factors right; 1) keep the questionnaire manageable in length, demands and complexity and 2) make it abundantly clear to the participants from the start that the questionnaire will not be an unnecessary drain on their time. I did this by emailing potential participants a very brief summary of what the research was and stating upfront how long it was likely to take to complete based on the pilot. I attempted to establish 'buy in' by emphasising the practical and applicable nature of the research. I tested the 'plain English' by sharing both with several colleagues to act as critical friends. Therefore, initial contact with participants was via email, simple and brief in content and served an introductory purpose.

Initially I reviewed the specific purposes of the questionnaire and considered whether these were being met in the development of the questions. I considered, 'Is this question gathering the specific data I require?' The 3 Ps Framework helped to establish this clarity of purpose. I then sought to establish what types of questions I wanted to include. I also utilised the criteria summarised in the table below to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the questionnaires.

Ideal Requisites of a Questionnaire-A questionnaire should be:	Main Aspects of a Questionnaire	Piloting a Questionnaire-To determine whether:
Composed of simple and specific language	Introductory Communication	The questions are properly framed
Require a response to each area/question	Question Sequence	Wording of questions is appropriate
Yield truthful and accurate answers	Question Formulation	Questions are understood by all participants
Accommodate all possible contingences	Question Wording	Additional questions are needed
Have mutually exclusive response options		Questions need to be removed
Produce variability in responses		Instructions are adequate
Minimise social desirability responses	Documentation to Support Questionnaire	The Documentation makes is clear that the participant should respond honestly, with no negative implications

I decided upon a balance of open, closed, multiple choice and rating scale questions. For each type of question, I considered the type of information I wanted to gather and whether the question was fit for purpose. I kept the number of questions to 20 and eased participants into the process with closed questions. I was mindful of maintaining a balance of closed to open questions, with more of the former than the latter - thus making the questionnaire time efficient for participants. The table below summarises the types of questions used in the pilot and the SPT questionnaire as an example of the range of questions.

Question	Open or Closed	Type	Group
1	Closed	Yes/No	Pilot, SPTs
2	Closed	Yes/No	Pilot, SPTs
3	Closed	Yes/No	Pilot, SPTs
4	Closed	Yes/No	Pilot
4	Open	Respond to Question (opinion)	SPTs
5	Closed	Agree/Disagree	Pilot
5	Closed	Yes/No	SPTs
6	Closed	Agree/Disagree	Pilot
6	Closed	Yes/No	SPTs
7	Closed	Agree/Disagree	Pilot
7	Closed	Likert Scale	SPTs
8	Closed	Likert Scale	Pilot, SPTs
9	Closed	Likert Scale	Pilot, SPTs
10	Closed	Likert Scale	Pilot, SPTs
11	Closed	Likert Scale	Pilot
11	Open	Complete the Sentence	SPTs
12	Closed	Multiple Choice	Pilot
12	Open	Complete the Sentence	SPTs
13	Closed	Multiple Choice	Pilot, SPTs
14	Closed	Multiple Choice	Pilot
14	Open	Respond to Question (opinion)	SPTs

15	Open	Respond to Statement	Pilot
15	Closed	Ranking	SPTs
16	Closed	Ranking	Pilot
16	Open	Respond to Question	SPTs
17	Closed	Ranking	Pilot
17	Open	Respond to Question	SPTs
18	Closed	Ranking	Pilot
18	Closed	Likert Scale	SPTs
19	Open	Respond to Statement	Pilot
19	Closed	Likert Scale	SPTs
20	Open	Describe	Pilot
20	Open	Complete the Sentence	SPTs

Table : 4-6 Closed and Open Questions in the Questionnaire

Questionnaires are appropriate for collecting straightforward data where significant intervention from the researcher is not needed (Denscombe, 2007). Questionnaires were not used as a single point of contact with any participant, and this countered some of the limitations of the questionnaire. The validity of a questionnaire is established in relation to its ability to provide both full and accurate information (Denscombe, 2007). The questionnaires were designed to address the research questions and as part of a broader context, thus enabling the researcher to obtain relevant information but with a caveat that the fulsome nature was specific to the questionnaire functioning as a first step in the engagement with the participants. The following steps were taken to mitigate against inaccuracies, bias or lack of clarity:

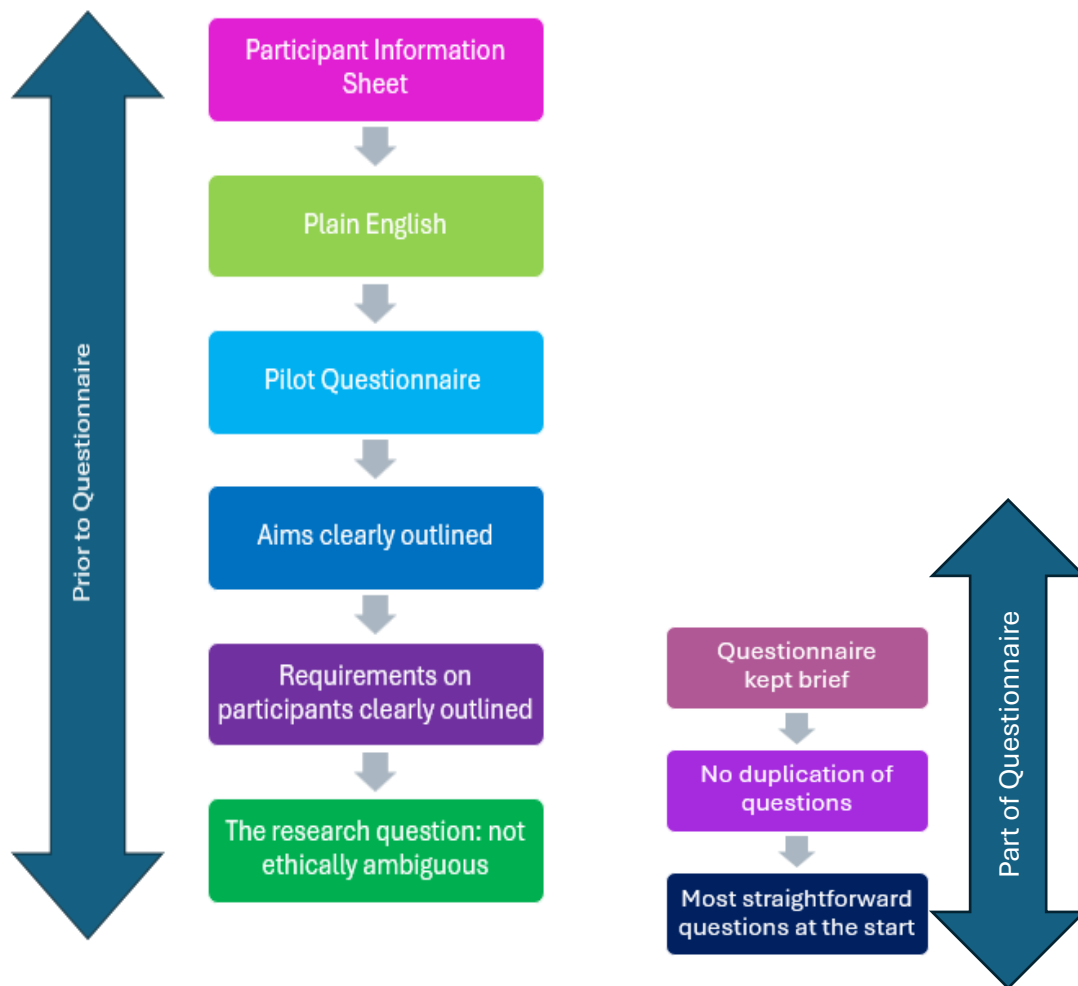


Figure : 4-6 Steps to Mitigate Against Inaccuracies

Piloting the Questionnaire

In order to establish that the questionnaire would be fit for purpose, it was piloted with the AF on HC's Post Primary PME (*Appendix 10-Pilot Questionnaire*). The initial pilot questionnaire was developed based on the areas emergent from Stages One and Two of the ITI process. The questionnaire was positively rated by all 6 of the pilot participants (average 4.33/5). They noted that MS Forms was easy to engage with, the number of questions was not onerous, and the completion time was acceptable. Advantages to MS Forms included the usability due to simple buttons icons and frames, the ease with which data could be converted to excel, the option to customise responses and the generation of simple charts to display data. The simple design was use -friendly, accessible and generally

familiar to participants. The pilot group also described the participant information as clear and containing all the relevant content. One participant noted that the language used in the questions was fine for AF but that it might need to be adapted for groups less familiar with SP. I took this feedback on board and adapted the language in the questionnaires to suit the groups.

Implementation of the Questionnaire

Due to the online nature of the questionnaires, implementation was relatively simple. Participants were emailed with a link to the MS Forms. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form were attached (*Appendix 7-Participant Information Sheet, Appendix 8-Letter of Introduction, Appendix 9-Consent Form*). The body of the email contained an introduction and overview of the research and highlighted the purpose of the attached documents. A timeframe for return of the questionnaire was included in the body of the email and participants were reminded to request any clarifications they might need. I scheduled emails to be sent as reminders in the lead-up to that return date.

4.9.4 Semi - Structured Interviews

Selection of Semi-Structured Interviews

As a qualitative research method that consists of generating data discovered during oral exchanges, SSIs help the researcher to seek out the world views of the participants in a flexible manner (Bryman, 2012). A key advantage of the SSI is that it strikes a balance between closed or structured interviews which require a limited number and type of responses and open ended or unstructured interviews which proceed freely. I primarily selected to use SSIs for this research because they hold the potential to reveal the networks of alliances and interpersonal relationships between individuals within a group. SSIs depend upon the establishment of a social interaction with a specific purpose, between the researcher and the participant. I found it quite easy to establish a rapport with participants by engaging in a short informal conversation with the group prior to starting the interview proper. I gave participants the opportunity to ask any questions they might have prior to

starting to record the interview on Zoom. A possible disadvantage of the SSI, which it holds in common with FGs and questionnaires, is that the introductory email is easily ignored or forgotten about. This is where there is a need to be ‘politely persistent’ (Aberback & Rockman 2002, 673).

Development and Design of the Semi - Structured Interview

I made use of SSI guides, informed by the ITI process, to give a flexible but focused structure to the interviews (*Appendix 3 & 4-The Guides*). These guides contained the essential questions tailored to the specific group, enabling adaptable but scaffolded content (Albaret & Deas, 2002). SSI format and questions were tested with the pilot group as there are several skills involved in the development of robust SSI skills which can be honed through pilots and critically reviewing transcripts (Harvey - Jordan & Long, 2001). These skills included active listening, knowing how and when to ask for clarifications or follow-up questions, communicating effectively and pitching the content appropriately. The process of conducting a SSI is outlined in the table below. I honed these skills during the pilot interviews and completed an entry into my reflective diary after every pilot interview to facilitate honest criticality.

Step	Action
Pre - Formal Start	Informal Conversation, Introduction, Opportunity to ask questions: Friendly tone and ‘ice breakers’
Establishing Confidence	Review Research Purpose, Reminder of Right to Withdraw, Establish the SSI as a designated ‘Safe Space’, Start Recording
Formal Start of Interview	Build confidence with simple questions
Mid – Interview	Actively Listen, Seek Clarification as Required, Given ample opportunity for involvement. Follow the Guide but have flexibility

Closing Interview	Summarise and Recap. Reminder of contact details. Express Thanks

Table : 4-7 Steps and Actions in Semi-Structured Interviews

Implementation of Semi-Structured Interviews

SSIs were conducted online using Zoom and were recorded, both visual and audio content. This recording was stored securely using Zoom’s cloud storage. The SSIs consisted of a combination of open and closed questions, based on the 3 Ps framework and ITI process. SSIs were scheduled to last no more than one hour (min. 30 mins) to avoid participant fatigue. Once completed, identifying information was removed and pseudonyms used in the transcribing and recording of data. The AF participants were given the opportunity to bring a visual or audio concrete resource with them to visualise their concepts of professionalism and partnership. This is a technique used regularly by HC College as an ice breaker at professional learning events and therefore participants were comfortable doing so.

4.9.5 Focus Groups

Selection, Development and Design of Focus Groups

FGs can be useful in accessing diverse points of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and are therefore particularly beneficial in exploring potential divergences of opinion within partner groups. They can facilitate dynamic interactions between participants although the opposite is also possible whereby communication can become stilted. Kruegel and Casey (2015) note the importance of understanding the role of the researcher as different to their role in SSIs. Furthermore, they highlight the deliberate and systematic way of listening which is necessary. In FGs the researcher primarily facilitates the groups discussions, rather than actively engaging in a direct dialogue. Many of the skills required for conducting SSIs are also relevant for FGs. However, an additional opportunity and challenge is maintaining the flow of communication between participants as well as with the researcher. It is possible for one voice to become overly dominant and for a particular group dynamic to skew the data. The presence of others can also lead participants to give responses which

they feel conform or are socially acceptable. In terms of my research, I was interested in exploring this group dynamic and the impact of the different participants upon each other, including the presence of this dominant voice. I was comfortable conducting FGs, having done so on several occasions previously. I used a very similar guide to the SSI for the FGs but adapted it to include planning for interactions between participants. I also used a 'round robin' process whereby all participants were asked for individual responses for the first questions and then, once a level of comfort had been established, I opened the floor. This meant that all participants had 'broken the ice' of making that first contribution at an early point in proceedings.

Implementation of the Focus Groups

The FGs were scheduled to last a maximum of one hour (min. 30 mins) and included engagement questions, exploration questions and exit questions. They generally consisted of groups of 4 - 5 participants, with some larger groups for SPTs. FGs followed a similar structure to the SSIs, beginning with participants being given clarity on the purpose of the FG and the research in general, a reminder of their role in the research and clarity on the terms of participation/right to withdraw. I asked each member of the FG to introduce themselves briefly. I had visual stimuli to hand for each of the themes and introduced these where the conversation was in danger of flagging. Participants were encouraged to respond to the questions but also to each other's responses. Open and inclusive communication was encouraged by initially using a 'round robin' system to include all participants and then facilitating participants in self-nominating to speak. Features of Zoom such as 'hands up' polls were also useful to co-ordinate the smooth running of sessions, but participants were not obliged to use these.

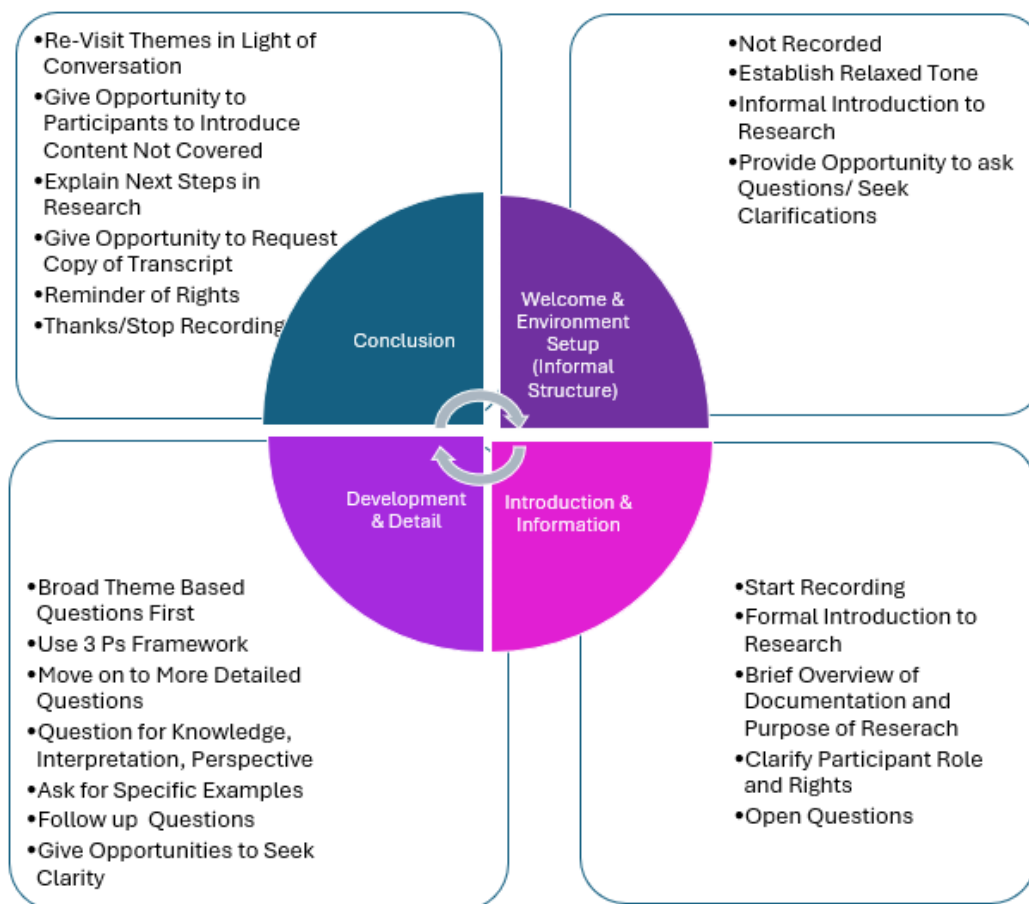


Figure : 4-7 Structure of the Focus Groups

4.9. 6 Reflective Diaries: Drop Everything and Reflect (DEAR)

Reflective Diaries were used with AF to aid transparency, in acknowledgment of the degree of closeness I occupy professionally with this participant group and in an attempt to mitigate against participants providing answers ‘in the moment’ of an interview which may have been influenced by that relationship and assumptions of expectations (Reinharz, 1992). They also provided me with the opportunity to start to review transcripts and adapt my questions based on that initial review. Initial communication with participants was via email with a link to an MS Forms. Participants were given the choice of recording in written form, using voice recordings or images. All participants, bar one, chose to respond in written form using the MS Forms option. One participant used voice recordings. A further purpose of the reflective diary was to encourage personal and ongoing reflection and a deeper analysis of and revisiting with concepts from the interview and questionnaire. The concept of ‘Drop Everything and Reflect’ is a playful reference to the ‘Drop Everything and

Read’ classroom practice with which all of the AF are familiar. In format, it encouraged and facilitated engagement by requiring only a short period of interaction spaced out at monthly (or slightly longer) intervals across 6 months. 4 DEAR entries were requested by email, with 2 email reminders. The table below demonstrates the different areas participants were invited to address. They were deliberately kept quite loose as I wanted to provide participants with the opportunity to raise items they felt were of importance and to employ some interpretation in their responses.

Diary	Theme
DEAR 1	The Use of the Word Partnership to Describe SP
DEAR 2	The Role of the CT: Do CTs have a good understanding of their role?
DEAR 3	Should Colleges Provide Training to Host Schools on CT and principal role?
DEAR 4	Relationships: Exploring how STs and SPTs view the role of the SPT: Formal or Other?

Table : 4-8 Diary Entries and Themes

4.9.7 The Timeframe and Sequential Data Generation Process

A sequential, primarily qualitative method was used to collect and analyse the data in distinct, ordered phases, where each phase built upon the previous one. From prior experience of data generation, I was very aware of the need to start the process in a timely manner and allow several months for completion. I conducted the data generation in three phases; Pilot/Initial Data Generation (February-May 2023), Data Generation 1 (June 2023 - September 2023) and Data Generation 2 (Late September 2023 - January 2024), which facilitated responsive scheduling. Despite participants being given the opportunity to meet in person, all participants chose to conduct the sessions online. This facilitated recording sessions using Zoom Record.

Pilot/Initial Data Generation:

The pilot data generation took place across February-April 2023 with 6 post-primary AF and consisted of an online pilot questionnaire (MS Forms) followed by SSIs on Zoom. The SSIs were Participants were contacted by email with the relevant information including consent forms and participant information.

February 2023: Initial Documentation (Introduction email, Consent Form and Participant Information) were shared with all post-primary AF in HC by email and they were asked to indicate by return email confirmation of availability to participate.

March 2023: Questionnaires were shared with post-primary AF (MS Forms) by email. Participants were asked to rate the questionnaire and indicate areas for enhancement. Initial email communication with SPTs, STs, CTs, principals and AF to establish interest and availability in engaging with the research commenced. I had intended to establish contact with NQTs through principals initially however as discussed below (4.9.8) this was not possible and I therefore sent this initial documentation later in March to this group. Challenges and approaches to securing the different participant groups are highlighted below (4.9.8).

March-early April 2023: SSIs were scheduled with all members of AF who had completed the questionnaire. Scheduling was via email communication and confirmed with a calendar invite, including Zoom link. Initial Documentation (Introduction email, Consent Form and Participant Information) shared by email with all SPTs, STs, CTs and AF who indicated interest and availability in participating in the research and they were asked to confirm by return email availability to participate and the consent forms.

I was aware of the impact of the Summer break on participant availability and therefore prioritised sharing questionnaires with AF, STs and SPTs for May 2023. Questionnaires (MS Forms) were shared by email with all SPTs, STs, CTs and AF who had confirmed availability. Reminder emails were scheduled for after 5 and 10 working days.

Data Generation 1:

I conducted the AF SSIs across June and August 2023 (Zoom) as they were the group with the best availability over the summer period. I sent Zoom calendar invites and electronic reminders to all participants. The DEAR-Drop Everything and Reflect questions were shared

from August 2023-January 2024, by email and using MS Forms. SPT FGs commenced in September 2023 and were scheduled across the course of the month. Participants had the opportunity to indicate preference (using an online poll shared via email) from a selection of times and dates across the month. I then sent a calendar invite confirming their participation in a FG. As participants were asked to indicate first, second and third preference, it was possible to balance participation across 5 scheduled FGs. The two CT FGs were scheduled for September 2023 and participants were asked to confirm availability for one timeslot. The ST FGs proved more complex to arrange and after repeated attempts to finalise a date, it became apparent that I would have to provide the option for one FG and individual SSIs, in order to facilitate scheduling.

At the end of September 2023, the initial documentation (Introduction email, Consent Form and Participant Information) was shared with principals and NQTs.

Data Generation 2:

The SSs for principals and NQTs were scheduled across October-November 2024 and followed the same pattern as described above for the other groups. The final element of the data generation was the conclusion of the final two DEARs in October 2023 and January 2024.

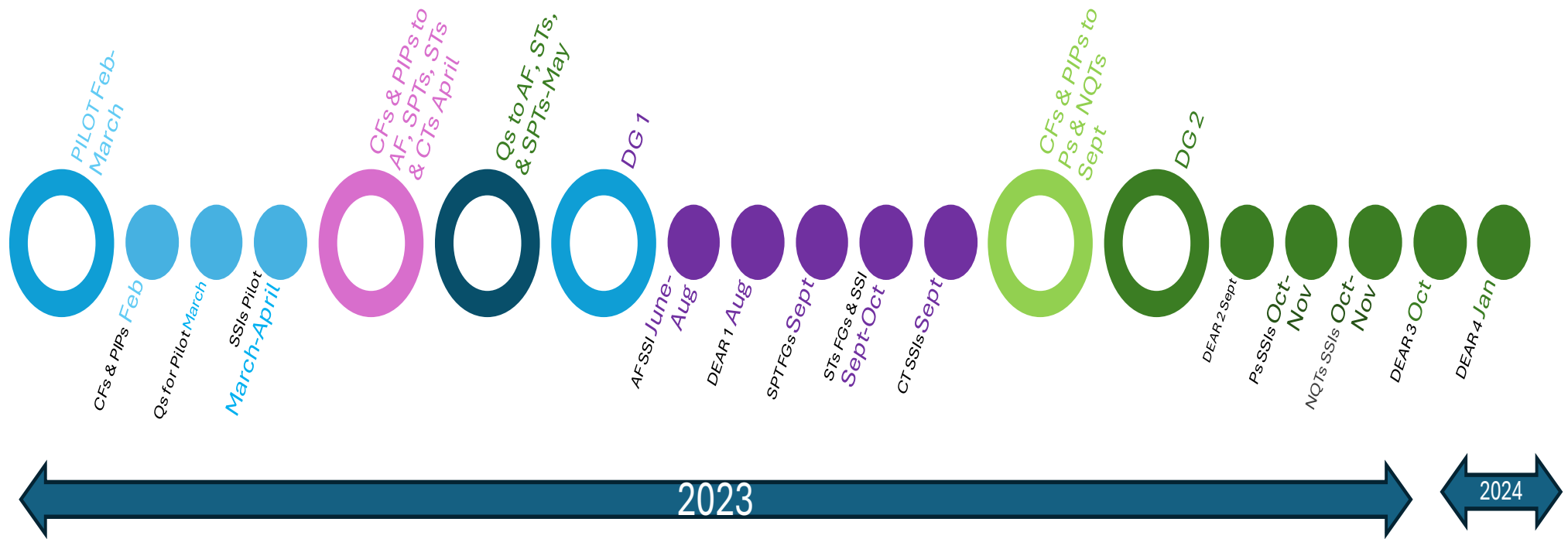


Figure : 4-8 The Timeframe

Key:

AF	Academic Faculty
CF	Consent Form
DEAR	Drop Everything and Reflect
DG	Data Generation
FG	Focus Group
NQTs	Newly Qualified Teachers
P	Principals
PIP	Participant Information Pack
Q	Questionnaires
SPTs	School Placement Tutors
SSI	Semi Structured Interviews
STs	Student Teachers

4.9.8 Participant Engagement

Participant engagement is always a challenge in research, particularly where there is a need for an element of sustained engagement. I was fortunate due to my role and positioning within the case study environment to have good access to HEI participants and overall participation rates were good. I put in place the stipulation that participants in the Questionnaire agree to also complete the next step in the data generation (SSI or FG) which helped to ensure good retention of participants. All the AF on the PME programme, bar one, participated in the Questionnaire and SSI. Maintaining engagement with the reflective DEAR activity was more challenging; with completion as follows:

DEAR 1: 6

DEAR 2: 7

DEAR 3: 4

DEAR 4: 4

SPTs proved very willing to participate in the research, with 98% of all SPTs approached agreeing to participate. I emailed 35 HC partnership schools and after two rounds of emails secured the 7 principal participants, with a positive participation response rate of 20%. Two principals provided access to staff for the CT FGs. However, principals did not accommodate access to NQTs. They primarily sighted busy schedules or did not give a reason for this. I therefore asked the Student Support Officer at HC to provide me with a list of names of graduates who had previously engaged with college surveys, questionnaires or requests for engagements. From this exercise I secured the NQT participants. I emailed all students from the Spring and Autumn 22 PME Cohorts, seeking participants repeatedly and found it very challenging to secure STs. From previous experience of ST engagement activities, I knew that it would be very difficult to secure this group and attempted to counter this by providing them with the option of 'expressing interest' only in the first place. While I secured an initial list of 35 STs from this exercise, this reduced in size due to study commitments, SP and other commitments to 7 STs.

4.10 Data Analysis

4.10.1 The Quantitative Analysis

This research was qualitatively driven. It followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The initial quantitative phase was used to guide and contextualise a more substantive qualitative phase. The questionnaires, inclusive of both open and closed questions, informed both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis, with each question within the questionnaires relating to a variable and a value. The questionnaires were pre-coded with the variable names and values for each response category. Although I initially started to use SPSS to support the statistical analysis, I found that I was able to conduct the analysis using MS Excel statistical worksheet functions, including functions for central tendency and variability, relative standing and functions for correlation and ANOVA to establish statistical significance across means across groups. I also utilised the 'Analyse Data' function in excel and the analysis functions in MS Forms.

Each question was allocated a QUAN or QUAL code for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The questions were not identical across the three questionnaires as they were phrased to take account of the roles, responsibilities and level of familiarity with the subject matter of the unit. However, they were designed around the 3 Ps framework and the ITI launch pads. Although the quantitative data was a small part of the research, it served several purposes including helping me to adapt the SSI and FG guides to address data from this phase. As the questionnaires were conducted using MS Forms, I was able to collate the data from the questionnaires easily on an excel database for the results of each of the groups; SPTs, STs and the AF. I then created a master excel database for the 3 questionnaires. Data was cleaned and checked for errors. Data cleaning included checking for respondents who answered only a small percentage of the questions, respondents who sped through the questions and respondents who gave extremely unrealistic answers. As testament to the quality of the questionnaires and the willingness to engage of the participants, none of these items occurred across any of the responses.

4.10.2 The Qualitative Analysis

I conducted the qualitative data analysis of the questionnaires iteratively - firstly immediately on receipt of a full group of results to ascertain patterns and themes within the group and then as a comparative exercise once all groups had completed the questionnaire to identify convergences and divergences between groups. Wilson and Hutchison (1991) argue for the use of two qualitative approaches in a piece of research to provide breadth, depth and triangulation. I used narrative analysis, with aspects of discourse analysis and elements of the coding structure of the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to analyse and organise the data. It should be noted that these sat within the overall ITI framework as stages three and four. The narrative analysis facilitated the generation of sociological information, empirical evidence, and a broader contextual picture (Nie, 2017). It enabled the consideration of linguistic nuances and the important role of storying by participants. However, triangulation was aided, and rigour supported by elements of GTM which provided assurance that the analysis was sufficiently meticulous. The aspects of GTM structure appealed to me as the 'ying' to the 'yang' of narrative analysis. It balanced the creative and complex process of narrative analysis with a very systematic and structured coding process. In the first place, I used a manual system to initially review the data, using a simple colour coding system aligned to the launch pads. This helped me to establish initial familiarity and confidence. I then progressed to using excel to assist with preparing, organising and exploring the data (Appendix 11-Sample Coding).

4.10.3 Narrative Analysis

Narrative functions as a means by which individuals and groups make sense of their experiences (Bruner, 1990). A priority of this research was to provide participants with opportunities to comprehensively convey the complexities, possible contradictions, and evolving nature of their perspectives, and in doing so, recognise their agency and active participation in meaning construction (Elliott, 2005). Churchman & King (2009) underscore the significance of how participants grasp who they are and how this is impacted by their

professional context and actions. Narrative analysis enabled the presentation of expressions as stories which reflect both the participant and their context and depict multiple ways of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) while facilitating an element of the interpretative (Barone, 2001). The participants or 'partners' became characters, the institutions and schools became the settings and SP functioned as the story arc connecting all the narratives. Denzin (2016) emphasises the ethical dimension of stories, stating that they can provide insight into the human experience while also facilitating a relational aspect; thus, providing a framework for comprehension within the research narrative (Sikes & Gale, 2006). I employed narrative analysis to integrate the codes into a cohesive narrative that tells the story of partnership in SP from the perspectives and contexts of the different groups. The specific narrative approach was to build case and unit vignettes and present a response through narrative analysis of these, focusing on the use of language to construct meaning and shape perceptions and the development of recurring themes. Through an analysis of discourse, character, values, ethics and contextual understandings, I built a response to the vignettes which gave insights into the perspectives, values and understandings of the participants.

The Researcher and the Participant in Narrative Analysis

Riessman (2008) emphasises that narrative analysis focuses not only on the details of the story but why certain events form part of a story for particular individuals or groups. This was an integral starting point for this research; I wanted to explore why participants in different groups placed emphasis on particular character or events in their telling of the story of partnership and not on others. Specific to this research and more broadly to teacher education, the profession of teaching requires paying attention to both the individual person of the educator and the group or profession to which they belong, as they recount their lived experiences. The narrative of the individual is at least partially constructed by the contexts within which they operate. In this research, it was important to provide the participants with the opportunity to tell the story of their professional experiences through dialogues with each other and/or with me as researcher. As an 'insider researcher' I found that narrative analysis helped to mitigate against bias by providing a

structured framework for examining accounts of participants and by treating narratives as data points which could be evaluated against certain criteria. The use of narrative analysis also facilitated establishing some context-specific understanding by giving agency to participants in storying their perspectives and thus contributing to avoiding distortion of those perspectives. As narrative analysis has the potential to include a wide array of voices and perspectives, this also helped to navigate against researcher bias.

Elliot offers a simple definition of narrative as the organisation or sequencing of events into a whole so that the significance of each specific event is clear in relation to the whole (Elliot, 2005). Furthermore, McAlpine (2016) describes narrative, both in oral and written form, as something which feels familiar. This can enable research participants to construct a plot within their account, inclusive of those features the reader expects to see in a narrative; at a simple level; a beginning, middle and end, but also features such as temporality, a social context, complicating events and a conclusion, all leading to a sense of coherence (McAlpine, 2016). Riessman cites attention to sequences of action as fundamental to narrative analysis with a focus both on the events and experiences of characters within specific contexts and the self-understanding that emerges (Riessman, 1993). Riessman also notes the importance of the type of language which is utilised by the participants to convey intention (Riessman, 1993). Narratives are aspirational, often complex and layered with multiple meanings; what is being said, how it is being said and possibly most importantly, what is being left unsaid. Narratives can also influence how the recipient sees the storyteller (McAlpine, 2016) and thus how the story is re-structured within the context of what the 'reader' chooses to believe or discount.

There are some broad potential pitfalls, which include the challenge of presenting complex and changing phenomena within the confined space of a dissertation and the research questions and the even more confined space of a story. This involves the researcher in a decision-making process as to what to include as relevant to the story and what to leave out as inconsequential within the confines of this narrative. There is a risk of the researcher overstepping their role and imposing narratives on participants which do not reflect their perspectives accurately or fairly. A process for sharing research outputs and engaging with participant feedback can counter this risk. For this reason, I conducted a mid-point presentation of initial findings with Academic Faculty (including participants)

in February 2024. Furthermore, I presented initial findings at conferences (IICE Conference, April 2024, BERA, September, 2024). I found this to be highly beneficial in motivating me to keep on schedule. More significantly, I received some useful feedback. The use of vignettes was widely positively received and conference participants expressed finding them interesting and engaging. Moreover, there was widespread acknowledgement of the need for research in the area of SP and partnership. I would accept that there was a lack of criticality in the feedback received.

4.10.4 The Grounded Theory Method

GTM, emerging from the work of Glaser and Straus (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), involves systematically collecting and analysing data through a logical process. It facilitates a pluralist and flexible approach to data coding (Strauss, 1998) and includes applying guiding principles to data organisation in order to articulate a clear methodological framework which is therefore rigorous, systematic and replicable. Furthermore, it enables a progressive and verifiable mechanism for establishing codes, their origins and relationships to each other (Williams and Moser, 2019). I incorporated elements of GTM to enhance the inductive coding of qualitative data process. However, it should be noted that narrative analysis was the primary form of analysis and that I adapted selected coding elements of GTM into my approach.

A Systematic and Replicable Coding Process: Establishing Rigour

The coding process needed to be defined, rigorous and consistently applied. It involved moving from lengthy transcripts to segments of text, to broad codes and then on to reduced codes and finally the construction of meaning. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) define rigour as ways to establish trust or confidence in the findings of a research study. It relates specifically to the trustworthiness of the research. It enables the authenticity of research and the ability of the researcher to actually measure what is intended and come to accurate and defensible findings (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011; Hastie & Hay 2012). A strong coding process is essential for rigour in research. However, there is some debate as

to how best to ensure rigour in mixed -methods research. Morse et al. (2002) draw attention to a shift away from 'ensuring rigour' to 'evaluating rigour'. There are some inherent threats to rigour in qualitative research with variables within such research preventing the researcher from exercising control over these. I took four approaches to promoting rigour: 1) aligning with a criteria for trustworthiness, discussed below 2) using a variety of sources of data, methods and theories to support triangulation, 3) engaging in a systematic coding process (Wellington & Szczerbinski 2007), and 4) embracing a reflexive approach to the research.

4.10. 5 Transcribing and Coding

Phase One - Transcribing - First Review

As an initial step, I listened to each of the recordings from the FGs and SSI without any written transcripts. This allowed me to gain familiarity with the nuances in tone of voice, pauses and interruptions. I then reviewed (first review) the Zoom transcripts (Zoom transcript function) and used Descript Transcription to clean the transcripts. Subsequently I reviewed the cleaned transcripts again while listening to the recording to assure myself that the transcripts were accurate accounts.

Phase Two - Transcribing Second Review

These transcripts were then reviewed (second review) with the purpose of constructing an accurate case narrative for each participant (SSI, DEAR) and participant group (FG). At this point, accuracy and a comprehensive reflecting of the individual's voice were key (Coulter & Smith, 2009). A structure of narrative was imposed with minimal or low inference. This involved reducing full transcripts to shorter abridged narratives.

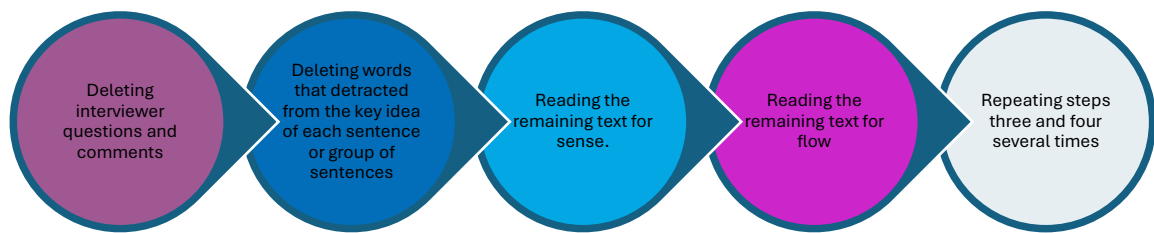


Figure : 4-9 Abridging the Narrative

Phase Three - First Cycle Coding

Initially, I employed open coding to these abridged narratives, breaking the data down into discrete parts and closely examining and comparing codes for differences and similarities. I used a simple 5Ws,1H structure to conduct this first cycle coding, Who, What, Where, When, Why and How (*Appendix 11-Sample Coding Process*). I did this manually using a very simple colour coding process, incorporating the launch pads to guide me as I highlighted different emerging areas of significance and then arranged them according to the 5Ws, 1H. At this point I cross-referenced the emerging codes with the DEAR data and inserted as relevant.

Phase Four - Second Cycle Coding

I followed this process by conducting the axial coding, examining the narratives for Causes, Contexts, Contingencies, Consequences, Covariance and Conditions (*Appendix 11-Sample Coding Process*). This involved identifying larger themes relevant to the research questions and drawing connections between the codes from the open coding process.

Phase Five - First Level Narrative Construction and Third Cycle Coding

The next step was to transform the narratives into vignettes, informed by the coding process from phases three and four, without losing the participant in the process. This included applying a selective coding process to the emerging narratives; abstracting, elaborating and aligning the codes into the beginnings of the vignettes. This involved the following steps:

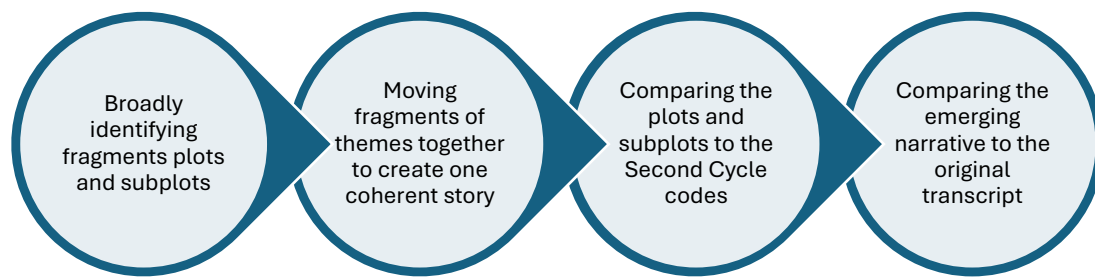


Figure : 4-10 Narratives into Vignettes

Phase Six: Second Level Narrative Construction: The Vignettes

Further and deeper interpretation was brought into the process at this point. To do this, a keen awareness was needed that the researcher is representing and interpreting the voice of another and that this must be done respectfully and with humility (Hunter, 2011). I utilised vignettes to accurately represent the voice of the participants. Vignettes are broadly defined as written descriptions (sometimes real life, sometimes fictitious) of events which related to a central topic of study, presented so as to prompt responses (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020). As part of the analysis process, a case narrative was constructed for each participant who engaged in *both* the SSI and DEAR, namely the AF. This was due to the fact that they engaged with the most sustained data generation process. Unit narratives were constructed for participants in the FGs and participants who completed a SSI but did not engage in DEAR, namely SPTS, STs, NQTs, CTs and principals. The unit narrative sought to represent the voice of the unit as accurately as possible, by seeking out repeated and representative language, areas of convergence in opinion and commonly expressed opinions for that unit. However, it is important to note that the unit narrative is an amalgamation of individuals within an embedded group and as such is to some extent a generalised representation. The narratives did not seek to fully represent one unified voice for the group, but to act as the glue between the voices of other participants in that group.

The potentials for bias and inaccuracy in this process were mitigated against using detailed GMT coding process and narrative analysis phased approach described above.

4.11 The Vignettes

To give cohesion to the vignettes, the narrative content was edited to fit the narrative structure below. This simple story structure was guided by the themes and patterns which emerged from the phases of the coding process and the 3 Ps framework.

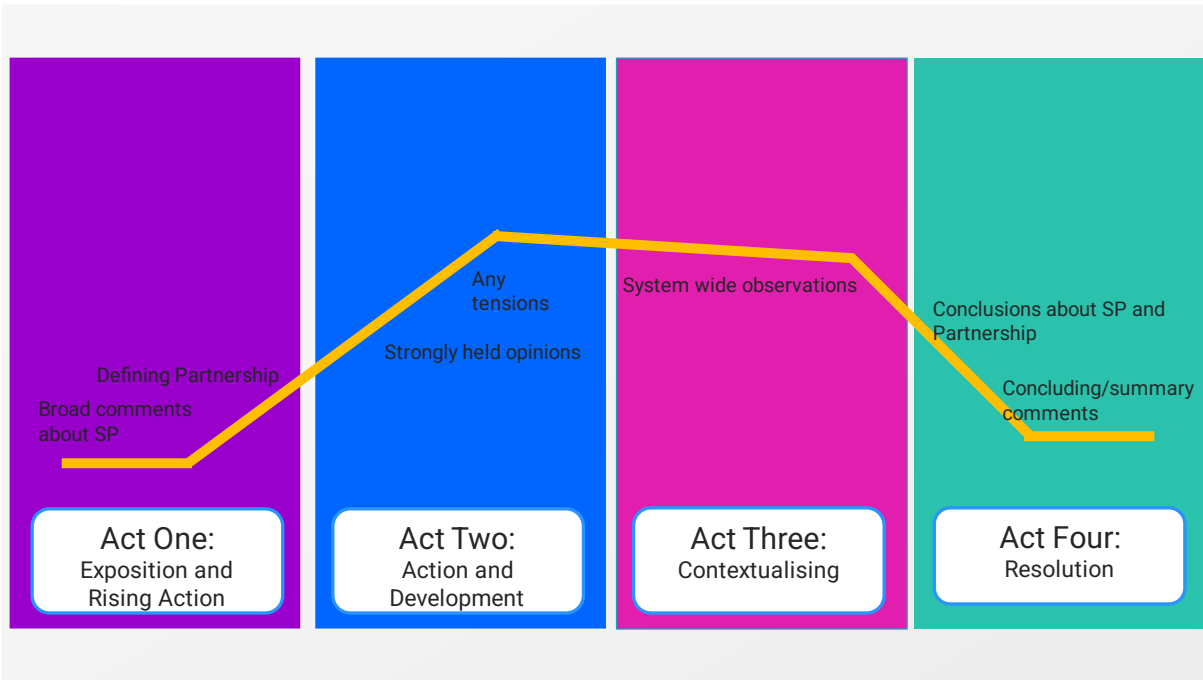


Figure : 4-11 Narrative Structure of the Vignettes

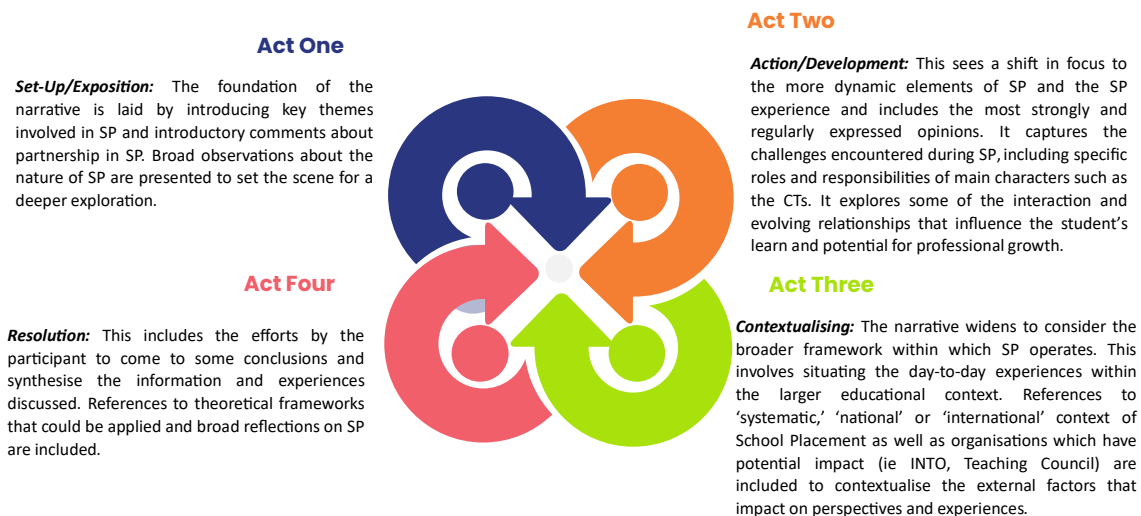


Figure : 4-12 Detailed Narrative Structure of the Vignettes

I crafted the vignettes into the chapters of a story, told from the perspectives of characters. This story has been presented in the Findings Chapter-Part Two. This storytelling approach supported a cohesive and engaging narrative flow and facilitated making connections between the experiences of the characters. The vignettes focused on expressing the experiences and perspectives of the participants and the meanings constructed through their dialogues and language. By using vignettes as carefully crafted narratives I was able to provide a more vivid, contextually rich depiction of the participants' experiences and perspectives. This was crucial to understanding the depth of the experience of participants. Ultimately, this approach not only respects the participant's voice but also leverages their stories to deepen analysis.

Regarding case and unit narratives, both were written in the first person. For the case narratives, the language of the participants was preserved; no additions made other than syntax, however the dialogue was re-ordered to give cohesion to the story and in response to the coding process. The language in the unit narratives met a threshold of comprising of a minimum of circa 65% of the language of the participants i.e. the words taken from the transcripts, DEAR and/or questionnaires. I highlighted the text which was directly the language of the participants and visually assessed whether this criterion was

met as well as using the word count feature. I judged this to be high enough a percentage to accurately represent the participants. Additional narrative was included for the purposes of story flow and to enable a knitting together of dialogues (*Appendix 12-Storying a Vignette*). However, every effort was made to ensure that this language did not detract from the words of the participants or impose narrative upon them. The work of Boyd et al., (2020) guided the careful process of curating language and words from the transcripts to build the stories. They advocate for a recognition of the significance of and between function words, cognitive words, and psychological processes involved in the language participants use as verbal behaviours which can reveal information about the narrator. Therefore, I have reviewed the use of these types of words carefully in the transcripts and critically evaluated their relevance to the story and to accurately reflecting the participants.

4.12 Trustworthiness and Validity

Establishing trustworthiness and validity are integral to ensuring the quality and credibility of research, with the former primarily ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and the latter assessing the construct, content and accuracy of the research. Trustworthiness refers to quality, authenticity and trustfulness of findings and to the degree of trust readers can have in the results. It primarily relates to employing methods which offer assurances about the quality of the research process and is a key goal of the research (Cypress, 2017). According to Adler (2022), for research to be relevant it must also be trustworthy.

The use of case studies in educational research is well established (Thomas, 2022 Bassey, 1999) and their trustworthiness has been the subject of significant scrutiny (Zucker, 2001, Porter, 2007). At its best, the case study functions as a complete method which covers the activities of planning, data collection and analysis. For a case study to have validity the research finding must be verifiable and clearly supported by the data. Key aspects of trustworthiness in a case study include the manner in which transcripts are generated and engaged with (Yin, 2013) and the assurances which the research methods provide the reader about the credibility of the findings. Clarity in the presentation of the findings can also significantly aid trustworthiness. Cloutier and Ravasi (2021) point to the use of tables

in qualitative research to support trustworthiness by increasing transparency and helping with the organisation and analysis of data efficiently. I have made use of tables repeatedly across this research with the purpose of providing clarity to the reader. The table below outlines the criteria for establishing and maintaining trustworthiness which guided this research. In the first place, trustworthiness depends upon the worthiness of the topic. Demonstrating the significance of a topic helps to establish credibility. The worthiness of this area of research is underpinned by the timely nature of it in a post COVID era and in light of the increasing pressures placed on ITE due to the teacher supply and retention crisis discussed in the Context and Literature Review Chapters. My professional experience working directly in the area of SP also affords credibility in terms of having experienced directly the need for this research. Throughout the research I have also emphasised the fundamental significance of reflection; my own reflection through the use of a diary and memoing and the encouragement of reflective practices in participants through the DEAR process and combined use of questionnaire with FGs and SSIs - facilitating a re-visiting of concepts.

The sincerity of the research is evident in the level of personal and professional reflection throughout. The use of a variety of complementary research tools and a detailed and multilayered data analysis process which places a high value on the voices of the participants, speaks to the rigour of the research. The internal validity of the research has been supported by a detailed piloting process. This enabled me to identify potential pitfalls and to refine procedures prior to engaging more widely with participants. Peer review through discussions with colleagues across the different stages of the research process also supported this validity. I also made every effort to use rich, thick description of participant responses in order to contextualise the study.

Criteria	Description	Research
Worthy Topic	Relevant, timely, significant and interesting	Timely in context of recent developments in ITE including Céim (2020a) and SP Guidelines (2019), Significant in context of overall reform agenda in education and challenges of teacher retention Post – pandemic opportunities and challenges Interesting to a wide sector directly impacted: the partners
Rigour	Sufficient theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, context, data collection and analysis processes	Theoretical construct detailed. Data analysis process is appropriately detailed. The Notion of Partnership is explored in detail through the literature review. GTM aids rigour
Sincere	Self – reflexive about subjective biases, transparency about methods and challenges	Personal and Professional Reflection, Reflective Diary, Potential bias acknowledged and mitigated against
Credible and Dependable	The researcher has provided enough detail about the processes that the research could be replicated in similar conditions (Stenfors et al., 2020) How well does the study capture and portray the world it tries to describe?	Detailed and comprehensive literature review, extensive experience of the researcher of the research area in practice

	How well backed up are the claims made by the research? What is the evidential base for research? How plausible are findings?	
Impact	Has the power to influence the reader	The work of the TC, the impact it has on teachers, the role of SP and the responsibilities of stakeholders are topics of interest to educators and have an immediate impact on their own practice
Significant Contribution	Conceptually, Theoretically, to Practice, Heuristically, Methodically	Have an impact on SP going forward: partnership model of SP As a contributor towards the continuum of professional development
Resonance	Affects or moves particular audiences	Focuses on the Teacher Voice and empowering that voice, regardless of stage (ST, NQT, CT, SPT,TE, Principal)
Ethics	This includes procedural ethics, situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics and exiting ethics	Participant Information Sheet, Consent Forms, Ethics Applications, Storing of Data, Sharing of Data
Meaningful Coherence	The study is capable of achieving what it sets out to do and there is clarity from start to finish	Detailed timeline, realistic approach to data generation, attainable within the timeline, resources in place to support the work

Table : 4-9 Criteria of Trustworthiness (Adapted from Tracy, 2010)

Acknowledging the Challenges to Transparency

Ferber (2000) holds that narratives do not offer transparency in reflecting experiences but rather give meaning to those experiences. Furthermore, Ferber states that a narrative approach forces a need to interrogate the relationship between narrative and the participant's construction of reality. McAlpine (2016) describes narratives as inherently agentic; a means by which participants both express and navigate their hope and desires and potentially construct a new persona. What is potentially excluded by participants from a narrative is equally as important as what is included, particularly when looking at different versions of the same story across participant groups. Inconsistencies in accounts can also be telling; notably in how different participant groups interpret the roles, opinions or actions of other groups. This places a significant burden on the researcher not only to make informed decisions based on a consistent set of criteria as to what is included in the narrative but to acknowledge and account for what is excluded. In light of the challenges outlined above, a combined approach of narrative analysis and GTM coding techniques provided for enhanced transparency.

4.13 Reflexive Practice

Dewey defined reflexive practice as an action that involves, *'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads'* (Dewey, 1933, p9). It involves the key element of not only reflecting on what you have done but also reacting, planning and adapting. Reflexive practice has been built into this research in several ways including the keeping of a diary and engagement in a constant process of re-reading and reviewing of work through the ITI process. Reflexive practice was particularly important to me for two reasons; firstly, due to my position within the ITE system and the necessity to acknowledge the potential impact of that and secondly because I am keenly aware of how reflexive practices can become sidelined as a 'tick box' activity. I have seen many STs wearily roll their eyes at the thought of another assignment demanding evidence of reflexive practices. The keeping of the diary helped to maintain an awareness of the impact of the research and enabled a fluid approach. I kept the diary as a handwritten document which

I found encouraged me to use it at different points of the day, while I was away from the desk and as a genuinely reflexive process.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter has served the function of detailing the research design and data analysis process. I have engaged in an extremely detailed, iterative and relatively complex data analysis process and have therefore dedicated a significant amount of this chapter to clarifying the phases involved. The chapter has outlined the conceptual framework, research methodology and research design, with particular attention paid to establishing the pragmatic approach to the interpretivist and constructionist paradigms which have influenced that design. The research methods have been detailed with a rationale provided for their use and interplay. While a mixed-methods approach has been outlined, the priority given to a qualitative data has become evident. The case study approach has been established as fitting for this research. The forms of data analysis have been presented for both the qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, ethical concerns and the establishment of criteria for trustworthiness have been addressed repeatedly and specifically across the chapter. The following chapter presents the findings.

The next chapter details the findings in the context of their roles within the story of partnership in SP. It addresses the findings through the participants as characters in the story of partnership in SP and their engagement with the data generation process.

Chapter 5 The Findings: Part One: The Characters and Narrators

5.0 Introduction

Over the course of the two findings chapters, I present the findings as the story of partnership in placement from the perspectives of the participants as the ‘characters’ and ‘narrators.’ Part One explores these ‘characters’ in the context of their roles within the story, familiarising the reader with them through a cyclical process growing from the basic building blocks of their broad assumptions and perspectives to a detailed ‘meet the’ encounter. The etymology of the word ‘character’ derives from the Greek word *charaktêr*, referring to marks impressed on coins. It has evolved to mean the distinctive features of an individual (Baniki, 2017) and within the context of narrative, the range of individuals who contribute to the story to varying degrees. Accessing the inner world of the characters and thus gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives and how they interpret experiences, was facilitated by contextualising short vignettes within a wider understanding of the characters themselves, their interactions with each other and their viewpoints on one another (Sato et al., 2012). The fractious spaces within which groups attempt to assert dominance over differences in knowledge and understanding in their professional field, outlined in the Literature Review Chapter (Tatto, 2021), is analysed through this engagement with the character’s perspectives. However, the participants are also narrators and their credibility as such is dependent upon an acknowledgement that their stories are a combination of accurate real-world facts, interpretations and agendas based on their own positionality within the story of SP (Houghton et al., 2023). The characters also have individual and group perspectives. This focus on the characters was a crucial process as the research centres on their perspectives and therefore a cognitive and emotional engagement with the characters was necessary in order to engage with their inner lives (Koopman, 2015). The accuracy of partnership as a definition of SP is tested through questioning whether there is one unified, identified and acknowledged model of partnership between the groups.

Part One of this chapter consequently addresses the findings through the characters and their responses to the questionnaires, FGs, SSIs and DEAR exercise. The qualitative and quantitative data are presented together as the purpose of the latter is to contextualise the former. Part Two functions as the 'storying' of the findings as vignettes. These vignettes serve as a key method for conveying the research outcomes and are grounded in the process for construction outlined in the Methodology Chapter. The use of vignettes facilitated addressing the research questions through an informed discussion of divergences and convergences in participant perspectives across and within the groups.

I probed the perspectives and contexts of the characters, their use of language to define SP as a partnership and how they interpreted and evaluated the nature of that partnership in relation to their own role, particularly in relation to its potential stance as the initial stage in the continuum of professional development. Thus, the introduction of the characters serves a dual purpose: it humanises the research by grounding it in the lived experiences of the participants, and highlights specific findings related to language use, partnership interpretation, and perceived efficacy.

5.1 The Role of School Placement in the Continuum of Professional Development: Happily Ever After?

The term 'continuum' refers to the ongoing and interconnected stages of an educator's professional journey (TC, 2011). The idea of a continuum is very familiar to most educators with many theorists having emphasised the significance of a continuum within educational practice and professional development. For example, Freire focused on the importance of a dialogical learning process through engagement with peers and the concept of praxis, incorporating a cycle of action and reflection (Freire, 1970, 1976). Dewey also highlighted the importance of a continuous process of growth and development, where experiences build on previous ones (Dewey, 1938). Moreover, Bruner's theory of cognitive discovery learning, and the spiral curriculum underscores the importance of revisiting and building on previous knowledge (Bruner, 1961).

The concept of a continuum can refer to the wider professional journey inclusive of ITE, induction and CPD but it is also used here to describe the progression points within each of the participant roles and how they link with specific roles and responsibilities for SP. It is noteworthy that a 'continuum' represents an ongoing, seamless process of development over a period of time. In terms of teacher education, it is used by the TC to refer to both CPD and the professional journey from ITE through to end of career, encompassing stages inclusive of Droichead and Cosán (TC, 2011). However, the idea of a 'continuum' becomes more complex when, in relation to SP, the educators sometimes bypass the continuum instead of progressing forward in order to engage with SP. An example of this is undertaking the CT role. It is not apparent that taking on additional training, roles and responsibilities specific to SP contributes towards progression along the professional continuum. 'Points of Progression' refers to specific and discrete points marking specific milestones. Although it is not necessary for a continuum to include progression points, they are usually interconnected in order to enhance clarity for participants in the continuum, offer checkpoints along the journey and enable self-assessment and reflection, thus helping to set goals and make plans for next steps.

In fairytales, the completion of a story is often announced by the infamous words, *'and they lived happily ever after.'* Does SP position educators to experience a happily ever after, through meaningful and fulfilling career progression? In other words, *'Can School Placement function as an early step in the continuum of professional development?'* Three overarching areas emerged from the ITI process regarding the continuum of professional development and SP:

1. Supporting developing professionalism through SP
2. Reflective practices in SP guiding career decisions
3. Encouraging and facilitating creativity and diversity in teacher identity through SP

5.1.1 Supporting Developing Professionalism Through SP

For the continuum model of professional development espoused by the TC to have efficacy (TC, 2011), participants need to 1) position themselves and others as sitting on that continuum, 2) place value on progression along the continuum, 3) understand how to actualise and recognise progression and 4) be capable of recognising where this may ultimately lead them to, thus enabling realistic aspirations. The figure below illustrates the professional development continuum, showing the progression from the ST stage to the AF stage.

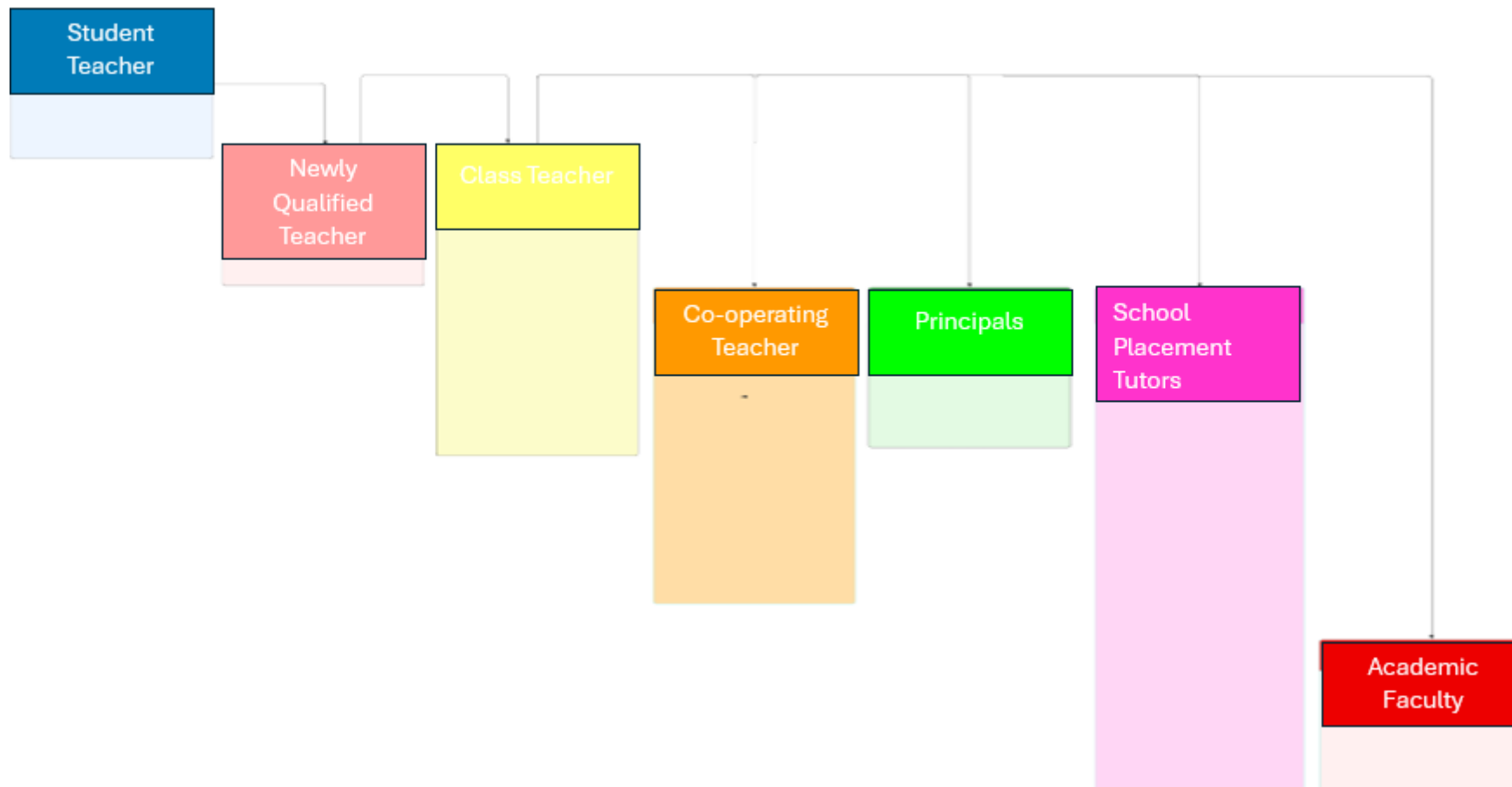


Figure : 5-1 The Continuum of Professional Development

Most educators begin their careers within the ITE system as members of the ST group. After completing their qualification, they transition to NQTs. The history of ITE, detailed in the Context Chapter, emphasises the fact that within Ireland all aspiring teachers now follow either the consecutive or concurrent model and therefore receive similar input on subject content knowledge and pedagogy, in addition to SP. Although NQTs are early career class teachers, this is a distinct point on the continuum and all successful educators move beyond this stage. Educators may then become part of one or more of the CT, principals, or SPTs groups. These roles are not necessarily sequential and can be concurrent with each other or/and with the class teacher role. Each role represents a different aspect of educational leadership and support. Eventually, some educators will go on to become part of the AF and may simultaneously hold an SPT role. Consequently, all CTs, principals and SPTs have been in the role of NQT and ST with some progressing to the AF role. The majority of educators do not progress beyond the CT role and will therefore not follow the full trajectory above. However, the figure above highlights how some of the groups are comprised of more experienced participants who have occupied all or some of the other roles.

All participant groups displayed some awareness of their place on the continuum, with the STs universally acknowledged by all groups as the 'beginning point' but significantly less consensus existed on where the continuum ends or what marks progression along the continuum. SPTs and principals indicated more awareness of seniority and positionality against the other groups, although this was expressed in terms of feeling a strong sense of responsibility in the case of the former towards STs and the integrity of the profession and in the case of the latter towards their staff and the school community. Therefore, emerging from the findings was the experience of doubt as to the existence of a clearly defined, valued and enabled continuum model, from the perspective of the participants.

When STs were asked directly whether they viewed SP as a first step in the continuum of this professional development, 100% affirmed in the questionnaire that they did. They highlighted the immersive nature of SP, the opportunities it afforded to apply theory to practice and the chance to engage with 'real' children within the structured environment of a placement. This was moderated by a single ST, who noted that excessive

lesson planning does not accurately reflect ‘real’ teaching. In the SSIs and FG, all STs interpreted ‘continuum of professional development’ within the confines of initial experiences and their early experiences of the classroom. No reference was made by STs to research or the whole school environment. One ST, Millie, referred to being,

‘equipped with invaluable experiences shaping my trajectory towards a fulfilling career in education.’ (ST, Millie)

When probed to describe how she would identify success in achieving a fulfilling career, Millie fell back on the language of the Code of Professional Conduct (TC, 2016), describing the values of a teacher rather than specific career points or goals. Early codes of ‘professional identity,’ and ‘the career continuum’ took on nuances through the coding process with the concept of ‘professional identity’ varying depending on the perspectives of the group. For STs ‘professional identity’ within a continuum was a very immediate experience of learning skills, knowledge and competencies and then applying these to a higher standard as they progressed along the continuum. Professional identity and the continuum emerged as vertical in structure; time, practice and experience were valued commodities which contributed towards progression along the continuum. STs did not refer to the possibility of moving down the continuum through lack of engagement with ongoing learning nor did they place emphasis on the potential for development outside of the teacher in classroom role.

Some members of the AF cited a lack of evidence of SP having a place on the continuum or of it supporting the development of any sort of emerging teacher identity, while other members of the AF noted informal opportunities through school vacancies and the relationships that develop through SP with staff to develop a sense of professionalism. One member of the AF, Liam, stated that he was unaware of SP as having a place alongside Droichead and Cosán, while another, Timothy, acknowledged the connection between SP as part of ITE within a structure inclusive of these elements but said there was a need for clearer stakeholder involvement in shaping this continuum structure. Another member of the AF, Emma, highlighted the need for clarity in implementing and developing measurable deliverables through SP linked to the continuum and professional identity. Although there emerged significant diversity in how this group viewed the continuum, they tended to take

a criteria-based approach to assessing how well the concept of a continuum functioned and broadly found it to be lacking but for different reasons.

SPTs generally responded that SP positively contributed to the continuum and sense of professionalism by equipping educators with essential skills for starting their professional journeys on a strong footing. For instance, Willow highlighted the role of the ST as proactive in this regard, actively seeking out areas of interest to pursue in their early career while on placement. Anna noted that specific professional interests could be developed through SP but that the onus was currently on the ST to find these opportunities. Zoe stated that SP might help STs to consider particular areas of professional development, which they might return to over the course of their career but that this only happened incidentally and was not a focus of SP. The introduction of Taisce into SP is an attempt to bring a practice-based reflective element into SP however participants did not highlight its use as such. There emerged a sense of unfulfilled potential for SP to support ongoing professional development, summarised by Ellie as,

'I think that a more cohesive vision could exist in a more grounded space, while policy and the grey literature related alludes to this, it is perhaps not joined up in everyday practice and enactment on the ground.' (Ellie, AF)

NQTs described the continuum as something they were beginning to develop an awareness of. When probed on this, all the NQT participants noted the potential for development of skills, interests and knowledge within education but external to the classroom. For example, Bobby described his new appreciation of the history and philosophy of education introduced during ITE and felt that he was beginning to understand how a deepening of knowledge beyond the *'day to day reality of the classroom, and the repetition that you can feel there'* could help to sustain enthusiasm for the profession.

Although all the participant groups recognised the existence of the continuum, it was not specifically prioritised by any group. Reference to the continuum was most frequent with the groups at the start of their careers; namely STs and NQTs and least referenced by those at mid-point, namely CTs. Only the AF participants volunteered the notion of SP as a first step in that continuum, however all other groups agreed, once the

idea was presented to them, that it could potentially function as such. Reasons cited across the groups for engaging with CPD included intrinsic motivation, self-improvement, societal pressures and improving pedagogical practice. NQTs were most vocal regarding the potential for SP to guide CPD decisions and cited some examples of experiences from SP sparking interests they intended to pursue. The initial launch pad of 'impact and efficacy of systematic planning and policy for CPD' was aligned with this theme as the systematic and structured side of supporting CPD through SP. The lack of impact of the TC policy on the continuum (TC, 2011) or goal 3 of the Strategic Plan (TC, 2022) was evident through the near complete lack of reference to either document across the groups. The only groups to refer directly to the policy were the AF and the principals and this was done briefly and only to note its existence. Policy in this area was primarily characterised as inefficient and lacking in detail. Those participants in leadership roles, the principals and the AF with leadership responsibilities, expressed particular frustrations around the lack of practical implementation support.

The Continuum: A Guided Journey but who is the Guide?

SPTs, STs, the AF and NQTs made frequent use of the word 'journey' to describe SP within the continuum, emphasising that the ST is at the start of that 'journey.' When asked whether the experiences STs have on SP have an impact on their continuum of professional development, one SPT, Willow, noted the confidence gained through good SP experiences as a motivating factor for STs to start the teacher journey in a strong position and with a sense of self-belief. Where opinions differed within and between groups was regarding the degree to which the 'path' was determined by the ST and the professional decisions they made in SP or by the more knowing and more experienced 'other' - the CT, the SPT, the AF and colleagues. One NQT, Bobby, summarised this as,

'I remember thinking when I was a student that everyone else knew more than me - and to be fair they did a lot of the time. But sometimes I didn't feel like I had the skills to actually identify what I was interested in or to make a leap of faith. I think looking back - that curtailed me a bit early days. It stopped me from being a risk-taker in my career.' (Bobby, NQT)

SPT Anna noted the potential for the final extended placement to be enhanced in order to help STs develop specific professional skills and link these directly with the formulation of a CPD plan. This would result in the pathway for professional development being initiated by the ST directly and through their SP experiences. She suggested the use of formal partnerships with Education Centres to provide short courses as part of the final placement preparations, thus starting good practices around engaging with CPD from the outset. When SPTs were asked to address how SP could better support the ST in considering their own professional development as they transitioned to becoming an NQT, there emerged a juxtaposition between an emphasis on the need for STs to respect and gain from the 'wisdom' of experienced teachers and a focus on the requirement for STs to be proactive in seeking out opportunities to grow professionally.

5.1.2 Reflective Practices in SP Guiding Career Decisions

This theme emerged from the discussion of the potential for SP to facilitate innovation, integration and improvement in the profession through a progressive and iterative process of CPD. The participants all recognised the potential value of reflection. Nonetheless, early experiences of reflective practices through SP were generally seen as ineffective. Participants expressed concerns, primarily due to time pressures, that it could not be prioritised as regularly or meaningfully as they would like. STs and NQTs expressed some doubts and frustrations regarding the volume and quality of reflective activities which they were required to engage with during SP. NQTs noted reflection as one of the least effective aspects of SP and one which they did not feel they were adequately prepared for in embarking on their early professional practice. Several members of the AF also admitted to experiencing challenges in understanding how to frame reflective practices so as to avoid repetition and surface level engagement. The opportunities for reflective practice to inform professional development emerged as popular, with NQTs, CTs and principals recognising the practical benefits of having time allocated towards considering and planning their own careers and deciding on what actions, training or experience might be needed.

Several SPTs highlighted the unfulfilled potential for SP to embed good reflective practices at an early point. They emphasised that this could guide informed career decisions and as Katie stated,

'I would hope that they [STs] learn that they need to be reflective practitioners for life, that they are never the finished product - that they will be proactive in seeking out how and where they can enhance their learning.' (Katie, SPT)

The AF respondents provided a wide variety of interpretations of what reflective practice in SP can look like, indicating some lack of consistency in how it is defined by HEIs. It was described as 'at its best' informal by one member of AF and 'ideally' formal and recorded by another. The words 'reflective' and 'reflexive' were also used interchangeably. However, the AF universally emphasised the potential for the experiences and learning from SP to be transferred into the classroom being enhanced by good research practices and embedded reflective practices. NQTs were tepid in their experiences of reflective practices from SP guiding early career decisions with Georgia noting,

'Reflect, reflect, reflect. I came to really hate that word. It really meant, 'write a 500-word summary of something you just did.' I do now, in hindsight see the benefit but it is really surface level. And at a time when your body is in fight or flight mode. The stress from SP means you just aren't able to slow down enough - physically or mentally - to actually reflect. For reflection to inform practice and I guess the decisions we make about our own careers, the link needs to be much, much more explicit. It needs to be called out. Like construct a plan for the next 5 years - where do you see yourself?' (Georgia, NQT)

NQT Bobby, also suggested that NQTs could be utilised to share their experiences of their first year teaching and give advice as to what types of decisions STs could start to make in order to set themselves on a career path rather than seeing graduation as the end goal,

'I'd actually really enjoy coming back to talk to students - I don't know of anyone being asked to do that. I know that I've already had experiences that could be helpful to share, and I think it would give more of a sense of 'life after' graduation. Students

can be too focused on just getting that piece of paper but if they were able to make the links between SP and actual real-life challenges then I think they would appreciate it [SP] more.' (Bobby, NQT)

Reflection and Self -Conceptualisation

The self-conceptualisation of the educator as a professional and the potential for that understanding to inform professional development was discussed by the participants. The AF participants in the FGs were given the opportunity to bring concrete items with them to the sessions to help them to discuss their vision of SP and professionalism. Four members of the group chose to do so. One member of the AF, Emma, brought a Rubik's cube. She explained that it represented the 3 dimensions of CPD in education as comprising of developing professionalism, partnership with colleagues and developing teacher identity through reflection. She noted that STs often neglect these dimensions, particularly reflection, due to the immediate pressures of assessment.

In the FGs, CTs were generally positive about the opportunity for SP to give some initial experiences of a real learning environment and thus facilitate a sense of professionalism, despite acknowledging the challenges and perceived disconnect between SP and the reality of teaching. In SSIs, principals did not express strong opinions on the functioning of SP as a first step in developing a sense of professionalism but were broadly favourable. One principal, Grace, noted the opportunity to spot leadership potential from this early stage and another, James, emphasised that the onus was on the ST to make the most of SP. NQTs were the group who expressed during the SSIs the strongest opinions on the continuum of professional development and the only group to make explicit and repeated reference to research. NQT Julia noted how SP helped her to identify the types of school settings she could flourish in and those where she felt less affinity with. NQT Bobby noted that the final extended SP gave him the opportunity to put his research from his dissertation into practice and this has since become an area he would like to continue to build upon in his practice. NQT Georgia felt that the pressures of assessment made it difficult during SP to see it as a first step but that the reflective exercises during SP could be adapted to support this. All of the NQTs felt that excessive lesson planning from SP did not

accurately reflect the reality of teaching, but overall, they agreed that it prepared them for the classroom. They also recognised significant opportunities to integrate SP more with the Droichead process and expressed interest in extending the NQT role as a mentor to SP students. Two NQTs noted that their professional development would likely culminate in leaving the classroom to work in ITE.

5.1.3 Encouraging and Facilitating Creativity and Diversity in Teacher Identity Through SP

The lack of diversity in STs and the teaching profession was something I was very aware of from my own professional experiences and was an early theme in Stage One of the ITI, cemented in Stage Two by the literature review. During the Stage Three Coding process, as I probed the 5Ws, 1H, the link between creativity and diversity began to take on more definition. The limited pool of experiences, backgrounds and interests of STs entering into the profession was reflected in the homogenous nature of the responses given by STs and NQTs. The lack of trust exhibited by some CTs in the abilities and standards of STs, was linked with a concern that STs no longer represented the values and status of the profession, as the CTs interpreted them. It was notable that these were not specifically the values of the TC Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2016), but a set of ill-defined expectations for someone to reach in order to be a 'real' teacher. This led to the expression by CTs of an emerging distrust in change, intellectualism and the imposition of 'impracticable' theories by HEIs, which was echoed by some STs in their discussions of their learning from SP. The opinions of STs were deeply impacted by their experiences with CTs, inclusive of the practice they observed and extending to the relationship they either enjoyed or endured with the CT. STs often mirrored the opinions recounted to them by CTs, when they enjoyed a positive relationship with the teacher, or expressed feeling deeply upset by the judgement they received from the CT, where the relationship was not good. In both situations, the relationship took precedence over any other factors in deciding the fate of the ST. This discouraged risk-taking and innovation as STs expressed wanting to stay within the practices the teacher felt comfortable with.

The theme of SP supporting creativity or diverse approaches towards different aspects of the profession emerged through references to the lack of opportunities granted by SP in this area. STs spoke to feeling hindered by the excessive demands of SP assessment in engaging with risk-taking or more creative pedagogy. Opportunities for self-expression and risk-taking were noted by most groups as completely lacking in SP or severely hindered by the current assessment model. SPTs were particularly cognisant of the fact that STs felt hindered by the assessment structure and the focus on assessed visits in taking calculated risks. Several SPTs noted that this led to a ‘fill in the blanks’ approach to lesson planning with ‘tried and tested’ being favoured over creative or innovative approaches to lesson planning. SPTs linked this curtailing of creativity with a lack of professional exploration within SP, thus impacting on the ability of SP to act as a strong first step in the continuum of professional development. One SPT, Cara, summarised this as follows,

‘So even in their research you see it. They will pick certain topics that they know will be well received or students have done well in over the last couple of years. Or when they plan lessons - they will do ‘all singing, all dancing’ lessons that they have seen, and they know look good. But that really doesn’t encourage them to actually think outside of the box at all.’ (Cara, SPT)

AF participant, Emma, made a distinct link between the definition of SP as a partnership and the concept of teacher identity and the creation of a sustainable professional environment,

‘Partnership is wrapped up in the central nexus of identity and identity formation - in the positioning of people as students or tutors or mentors and more broadly as members of a community of initial teacher education.’ (Emma, AF)

5.2 Setting the Scene: Our Story Begins

‘Setting the Scene’ refers to the world the characters occupy - in other words what broad ‘truths’ about SP are presumed by the characters in their narrations. By setting the scene, we can probe the research question, *‘Partnership and Innovation: Is School Placement accurately defined as partnership?’* Firstly, ‘setting the scene’ as to how

participants viewed the facilitation of SP. In the questionnaires, 100% of the SPTs, the AF and STs agreed that SP is currently adequately facilitated by host schools. In addition, 100% of SPTs and STs also confirmed that SP, is accurately defined as ‘partnership.’ However, only 37% of the AF agreed that SP, in its current state, is accurately defined as such. 58% of SPTs felt that host school settings do demonstrate an adequate understanding, valuing and implementation of their own role as a partner within SP, with 32% disagreeing and 10% strongly disagreeing. 50% of the AF agreed and 50% disagreed. This question was asked slightly differently for STs in recognition of the fact that they could only speak with any accuracy to their own experience of support rather than speak more widely to the adequacy of understanding, valuing and implementation. 57% of STs felt that the host school provided a ‘highly supportive’ environment for them during their SP experience and 43% considered it to be ‘somewhat supportive’.

Concerns expressed by the AF regarding the applicability of ‘partnership’ as a definition for SP included the variances in willingness, availability or capacity of schools or members of school communities to participate in collaborations with HEIs to initially build a shared concept of partnership in placement and ultimately take on a more active role in the mentoring and formative assessment of students. While some participants saw partnership as being blocked by practical or logistical issues, others felt that a lack of mutual understanding was also at play. This was expressed succinctly by AF Fraya:

‘Schools are busy places - we do understand that - although I am not sure that schools believe we do. I think CTs often feel we are disconnected from the real life of schools and that we have sold out. So that is dispiriting, and it makes partnership challenging. It creates an ‘us and them’ mentality. But I do understand it - I think I probably felt the same myself when I was teaching.’ (Fraya, AF)

In an SPT FG, a discussion emerged around quantifying the value of partnership when it is ‘applied’ to, or as one participant described it ‘*enforced on*’ participants rather than arising organically or willingly. SPTs expressed concerns that partnership should be a willing engagement, as Bonnie noted,

'the Teaching Council tells schools they are partners, but it hasn't provided the resources or training or even pathways to establish that training. So that breeds frustration and a blame culture. And who gets stuck in the middle? The student.'

(Bonnie, SPT)

However, another SPT, Zoe, expressed a desire for the TC to take on a more authoritative and 'hands on' role,

'So I think it is the responsibility of the Teaching Council to clarify what partnership should be - maybe through Case Study schools - examples of best practice. They need to go beyond guidelines and actually require schools to participate - or the system is in danger of collapsing on itself.' (Zoe, SPT)

5.2.1 Partnership: Part of the Environment or Part of the Language?

The data presented above, was indicative of a need to probe the language used to describe partnership. A frequency analysis of the words used across the participant transcripts from the FGs, SSIs and DEAR to describe partnership in SP was conducted. I used co-location with key terms; checking if the words appeared alongside terms commonly associated with partnership and SP. I then used semantic meaning to determine whether the words being used to describe partnership carried positive, negative or neutral connotations related to the concepts of working together or co - functioning specific to SP. Finally, I looked at functional implications to assess whether the words related to partnership (or commonly used alternatives) were being used to describe the participant's own understanding of the balance of relationships, interaction and/or modes of engagement during SP. This helped me to arrive at a list of 112 frequently used words. The raw frequency of words commonly used to describe partnership is presented below (larger version in *Appendix 13-Raw Frequency of use of words to describe SP*).

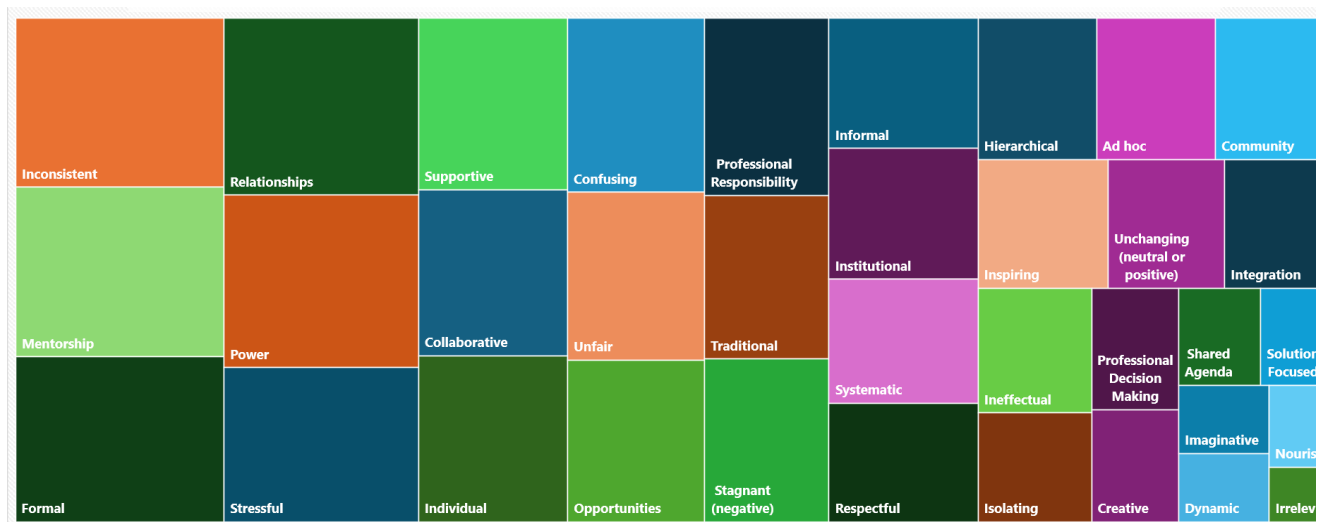


Chart : 5-1 Raw Frequency of use of Words to Describe Partnership (across groups)

I then normalised the use of descriptive words across the groups, the results of which can be seen below (see *Appendix 14-normalised words for partnership*). The normalised top 10 words and bottom 10 words are presented below. Finally, the positive and negative terms to describe partnership as employed by the different groups was analysed. STs were the most represented group in the Frequency of Descriptive Words, with ten of the twenty words being used by this group: 50% positive words and 50% negative words. STs and the AF prioritised ‘Shared-Agenda’ significantly more than other groups. The only group to describe partnership in SP as irrelevant were the CTs who also did not use the terms ‘solution-focused,’ ‘shared-agenda’ and ‘power.’

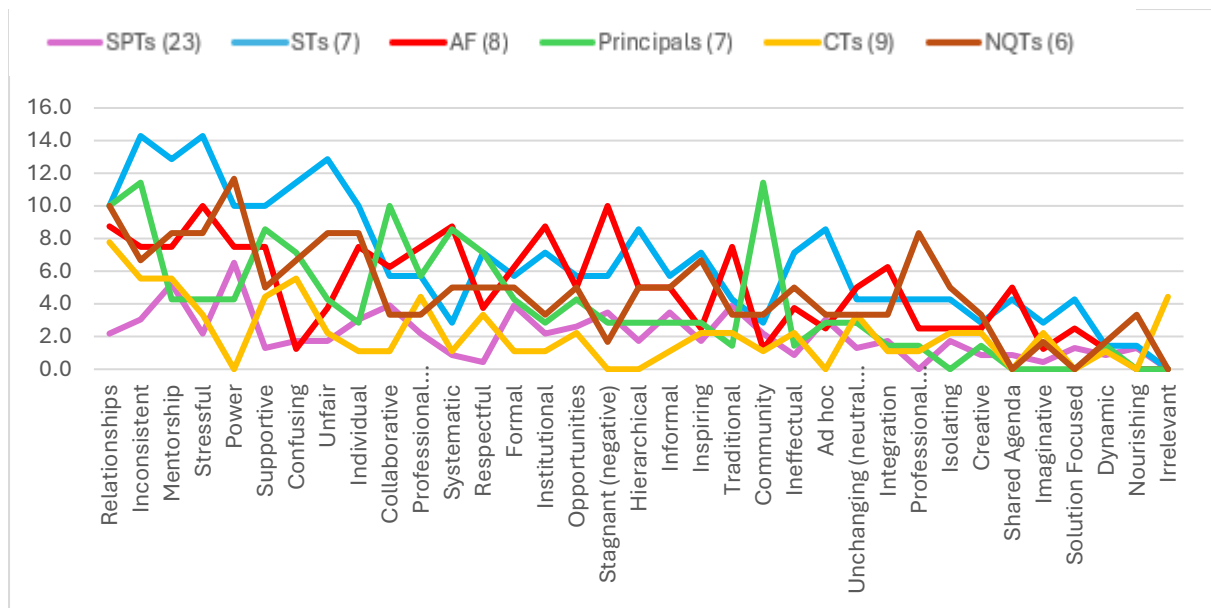


Chart : 5-2 Normalised Words to Describe Partnership

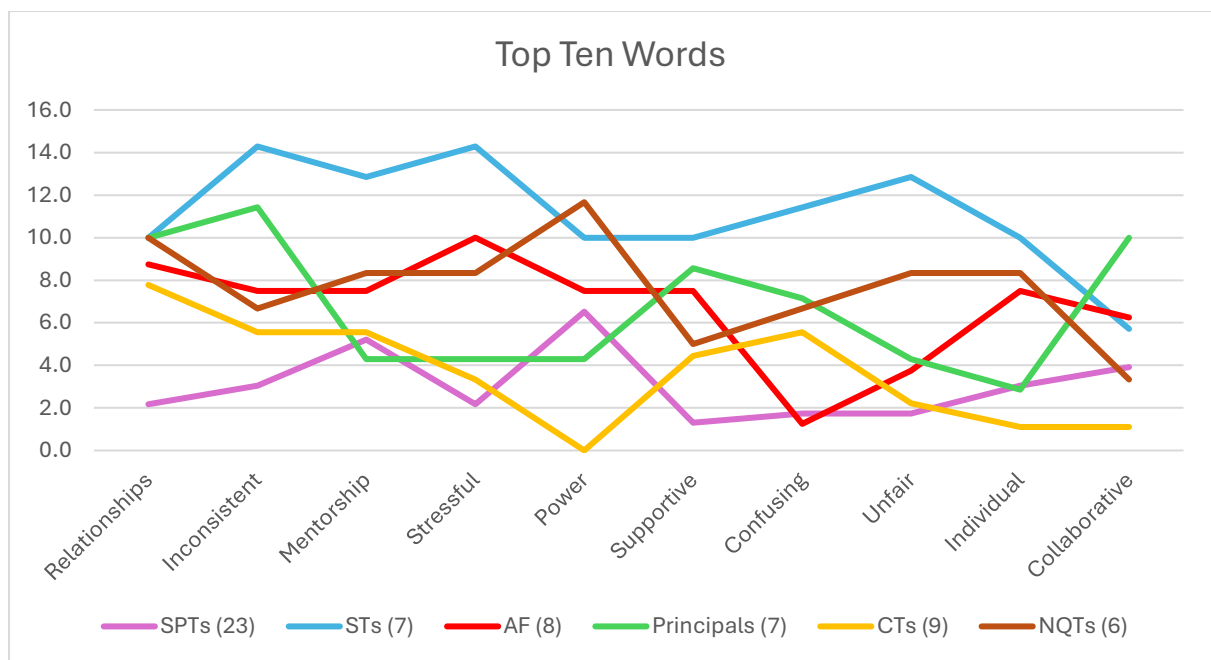


Chart : 5-3 Normalised Top 10 Words

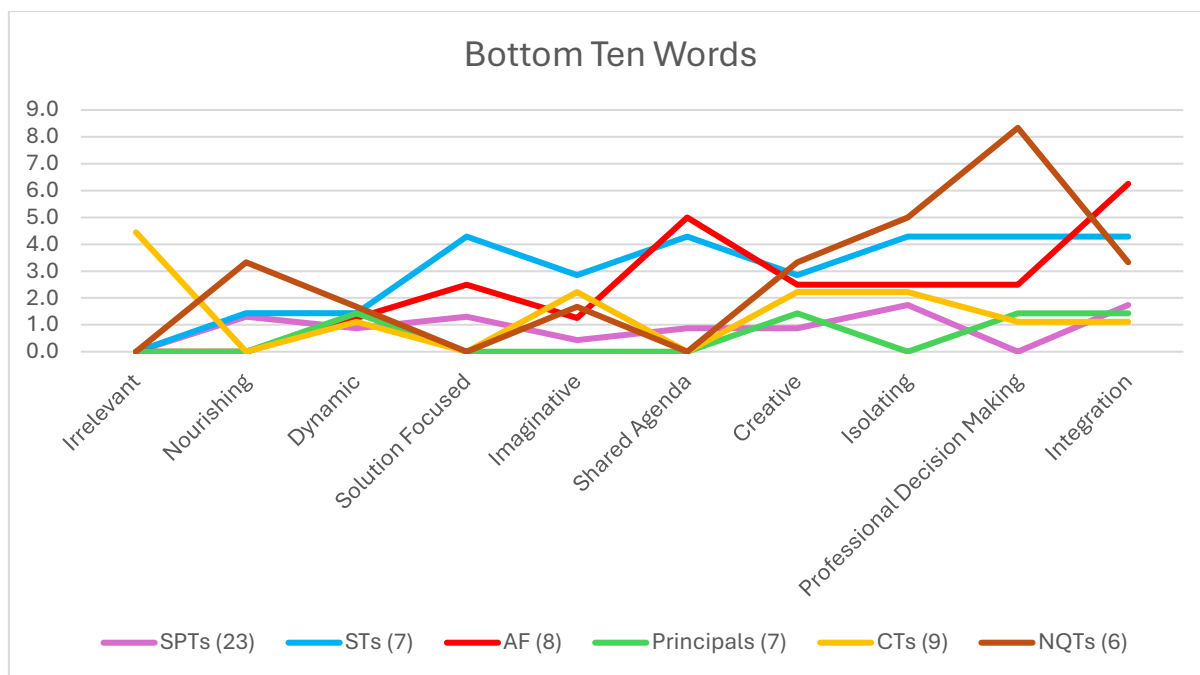


Chart : 5-4 Normalised Bottom Ten Words

Positive and Negative

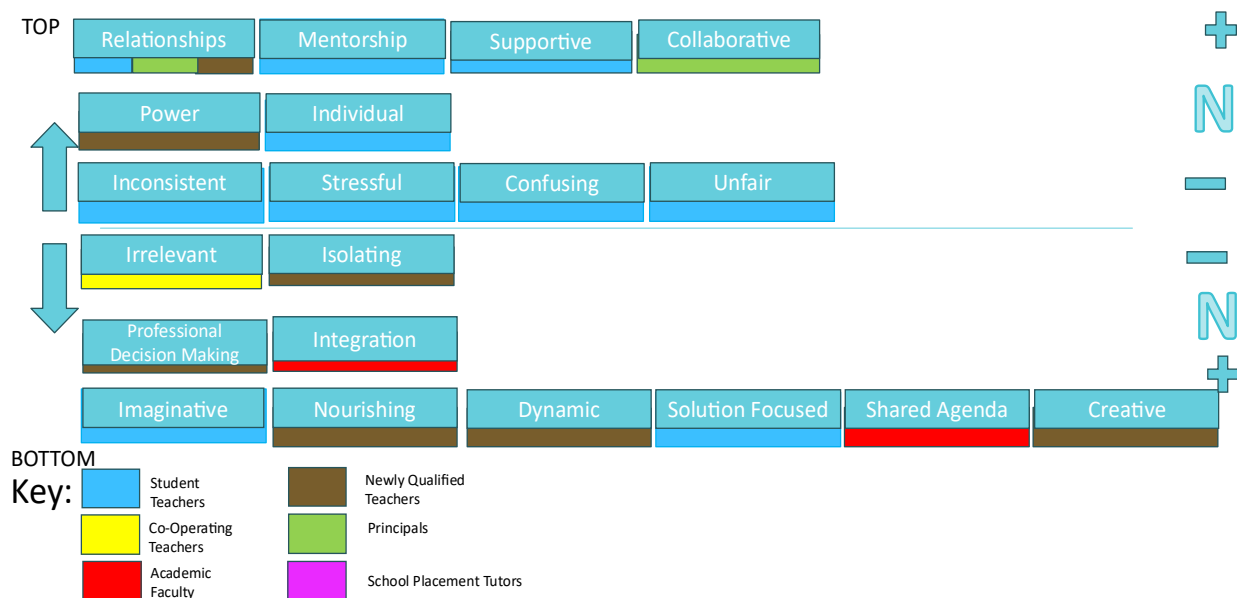


Figure : 5-2 Positive and Negative Use of Descriptive Words

5.2.2 Partnership: The Ideal or the Reality: Student Teachers and Academic Faculty

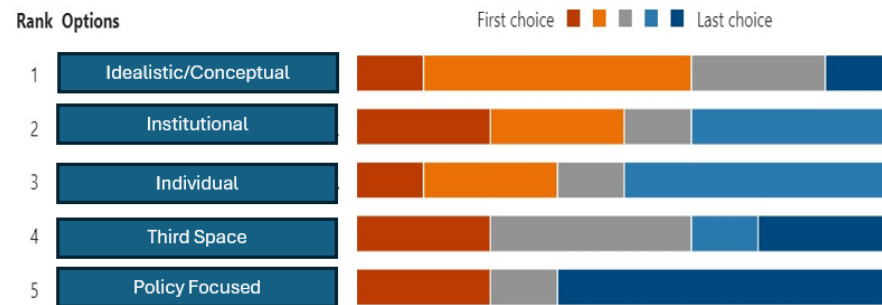
I conducted a comparison between the 'ideal' and 'reality' (as perceived through experiences) of partnership in SP according to two groups: the AF and the STs. I chose these two groups due to their accessibility and sustained nature of the data generation for the former and the centrality to the research purpose and context of the latter. There emerged a significant disparity for both groups between what they perceived as the reality of partnership in SP and the ideal. There was broad convergence *between* the groups on the reality and to a lesser extent on the ideal. Policy ranked least important for both groups in the ideal, with a shared-vision or idealistic/conceptual partnership model seen as the best version of SP. Both groups noted an individual based model as the reality currently.



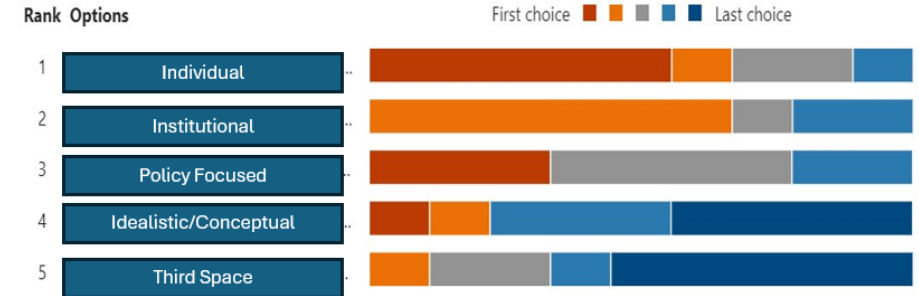
Student Teacher: Best to worst version of partnership (Ideal)



Student Teacher: According to Accuracy (Reality)



Academic Faculty: Best to worst version of partnership (Ideal)



Academic Faculty: According to Accuracy (Reality)

Key:

Idealistic Conceptual (based on shared vision)

Institutional Partnership (between school and ITE)

Participatory Third Space (based on communication, collaboration and negotiation of spaces)

Policy Focused Partnership (based on Teaching Council and Department of Education Requirements)

Chart : 5-5 Best to Worst Version of Partnership: Ideal V Reality

5.2.3 Opportunities for Agency through School Placement Partnerships

Delving slightly deeper into the ‘supportive’ nature of the SP environment, participants were asked to address the potential for STs to exert agency within the SP environment and through partnerships. Agency is highly dependent upon a supportive environment as it is widely recognised that agency requires engagement with the environment where agency is enacted, the support of agentic capacity and the facilitation of agentic spaces (Priestley et al., 2015). As Biesta & Tedder state (2007), teacher agency is by means of the environment rather than simply within the environment. In other words, a ST’s ability to act and make decisions is shaped and influenced by the environment they are in, rather than occurring independently of it. Their surrounds play an active role in enabling their agency. In the questionnaire, 87% of the AF expressed concerns that ST agency is not well supported in the current model of SP. Furthermore, 75% of the AF considered practical concerns, such as the location of school, rather than the pedagogical, to be the primary deciding factor for STs when choosing a host school for SP. Only 12% of the AF believed that the ethos of the school was the primary consideration for STs in choosing schools. However, 100% of STs felt that they did experience genuine opportunities to exercise their agency within SP. In response to a question regarding how SP could better support ST agency in terms of making decisions around their own professional development, one SPT, Isabelle, noted that the use of electives within the PME programme would support student agency and another SPT, Daniel, suggested encouraging STs to take more accountability for their own teaching during SP. A third SPT, Roisín, stated that encouraging students to develop their own reflective practices and agency in more practical ways across SP would be beneficial.

5.2.4 School Placement: An Agile Model? The Pandemic

Moving from broad views on the current facilitation of SP to addressing the opportunity for change to the SP model and its facilitation, the AF confirmed in SSIs that they experienced SP as slow to change, and this was evidenced in their responses regarding the COVID Pandemic, a potential disrupter to the system. According to 48% of the AF, there

is no longer any evidence of impact of the pandemic in SP today. This was supported by STs, with 100% responding that they had not experienced the impact of the pandemic in their own SP. One ST, Marianne, noted during her SSI,

'It is a very staid model and it's like you have to do this because it's always been done...Maybe there is something that could be done from [COVID] that would improve the tutor and mentor piece and make it more collaborative.' (Marianne, ST)

SPTs were less unequivocal with only 26% feeling that the impact of the pandemic was no longer evident in SP, 37% believing that it is still evident and a further 37% unsure either way. The SPTs also recognised value in continuing with some elements from the pandemic, particularly around the potential for online engagements to support mentoring, with one SPT, Erin, stating,

'I'm not sure for assessment but I think the mentoring part worked very well...I thought a lot of students were more comfortable asking questions in that way online.' (Erin, SPT)

Another SPT, Cara, emphasised the potential for online meetings to provide more context to the student thus supporting a holistic approach to their assessment, rather than focusing everything on the school visit,

'I think there is scope there to develop...giving students opportunities to present a side of themselves that maybe didn't emerge during the actual visit, you know, and sometimes happens to them when you talk to them after the lesson, but you might have formed a provisional view as to how the student got on already then.' (Cara, SPT)

5.3 The Characters in School Placement

The scene has been set, now the characters join the story. This section focuses in detail on establishing the perspectives of the different characters and positioning those characters within the story. In doing so, it begins to directly address the research question, *Perspectives and Integration: What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?*

5.3.1 Perspectives: The 'Others' in SP

Some characters took on more prominent roles than others, acting as key figures driving the narrative, guiding its progress, or as minor, supporting characters. Throughout the data generation, participants were asked to reflect on the effectiveness of other characters in the broader story of SP. Initially, they were prompted to consider how they would identify the role of other characters within the story of SP more generally. I posed specific questions regarding the significance of the roles within SP, whether each of the roles had an important part to play or not and what evidence, if any, they had to support their opinions. The visual below represents a synthesis of how each of the characters have been portrayed by other characters specific to the context of placement. It is based on the frequency with which the roles were discussed unprompted, the direct responses to questions about the roles and the type of language employed.

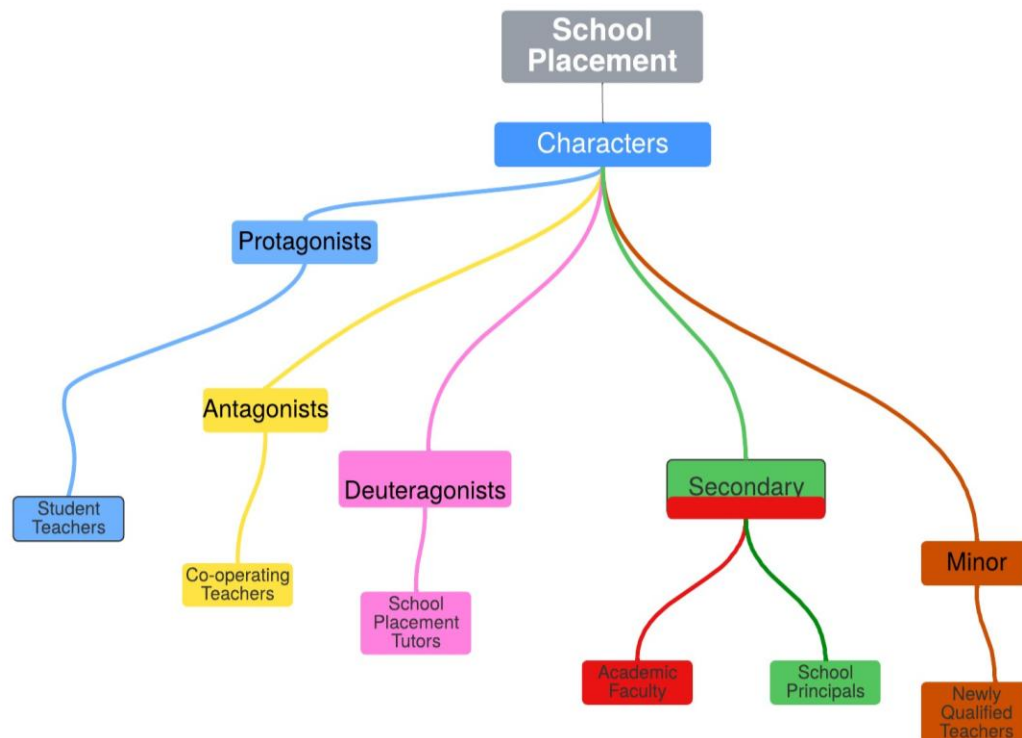


Figure : 5-3 The Characters: Describing the 'Other'

5.3.2 Key, Secondary and Minor Characters

All groups agreed that the ST and their experiences are fundamental to SP and as such act as the protagonists of the story. SPTs rated their relationship with the ST as extremely important but also a source of concern due to the dual nature of it as mentor and assessor. When asked to describe their relationship with the ST in the questionnaire, 42% of SPTs described it as 'Supportive' and 42% described it as 'Assessment Focused'. Only 10% of SPTs described it as 'Formal' and 6% as 'Collaborative'.

Principals frequently referred to STs as potential members of staff to be recruited and saw SP in terms of giving back to the education system but also as an opportunity to assess ST abilities and whether they were a good fit for the school. However, principals also expressed concerns that they were often taking on the 'unknown' in agreeing to accommodate a student. Aileen expressed this as,

'the vast majority will come, and you won't know their strengths or their talents. If we could have some sort of resume that would say show their experience and how they could contribute say to the green flag or the active flag...you might get them more involved in school life.' (Aileen, Principal)

Less equivocally, but still with consensus, there was agreement that the SPT role is key to a good functioning and supportive placement, placing them in the deuteragonist role. 50% of the AF in the questionnaire described the SPT as a primarily 'Supportive' role and 50% described it as a primarily 'Formal' role. 71% of STs described the role as primarily 'Supportive' and 29% as primarily 'Formal.'

The roles of the AF and principals were generally only discussed by other characters in response to direct questioning and responses were often generalised and lacking in clarity or detail. 58% of SPTs agreed in the questionnaire and 21% strongly agreed that the principal has 'a significant impact on the experience and learning of STs'. However, 71% of STs felt that the principal was not actively involved in their experience of SP. One ST, Millie, noted of the principal role,

‘They seemed nice, they introduced themselves at the start and I said thank you at the end, but I didn’t really have much to do with them. I guess if things had not been going well that is where I might have had more input from them. I’m not sure that I wanted to have more to do with them at the time - I probably would have been a bit anxious or nervous but looking back on it now - I guess it might have helped with the whole school involvement part.’ (Millie, ST)

67% of the AF responded to the questionnaire that principals were not active partners with significant impact on STs during placement. Despite this, 57% of STs confirmed the host school environment as ‘highly supportive’ and the remaining 43% found it to be ‘somewhat supportive.’ There was very little reference made to the role of the NQT, to the degree that all groups either expressed that the NQT did not have a role in SP or that it was very minor.

5.3.3 A Complex Character Emerges

The most emotive language in relation to ‘the others,’ or other partners, was used across the groups to describe the CT role. I present an overview below of that characterisation by the different groups of the CT. The presentation of the CT as the ‘antagonist’ character reflects the ‘negative’ language which was used across all groups to describe aspects of the role and its fulfilment. This negativity was often framed within specific descriptions of individual CTs who were experienced as unsupportive or unwilling participants in SP. The ‘negative’ language was balanced by references to individual CTs who performed the role well or as well as they could within the busy structure and multiple competing demands of the average school and classroom. NQT Ciara, described her own experiences of CTs as either very good or neutral but was aware of difficulties fellow students had experienced,

‘I know some [students] had teachers who were kind of picking on them, not picking on everything but kind of criticising what they did. I think the CT may need to be trained on what to expect of the student and what the standards expected on them are too.’ (Ciara, NQT)

These two areas of concern expressed by Ciara; lack of training and the emphasis on the personality or goodwill of the CT, were prevalent across all groups. Frequently occurring words to describe the fulfilment of the role of the CT were *'inconsistent'*, *'disinterested'* and *'unfair.'* However, outside of the fulfilment of the role, the conceptualising of the role was also frequently presented in negative terms due to the *'untrained'*, *'unprepared'* and *'arbitrary'* nature of it. While individual CTs were regularly applauded for their kindness and generosity towards specific students, at a systematic level, they were presented as regularly unprepared for their role and quite frequently as disrupters to SP. The TC Guidelines (2021a), and the review of those guidelines, were not represented as impactful or of particular relevance to improving the definition, training for or support of the CT role. The principal group were particularly dismissive of the TC, with one describing the revision of the Guidelines as,

'a somewhat pointless exercise. I'd be hard pressed to see what impact they've had on my practice, how I make decisions-I certainly don't turn to them for guidance.'
(Aileen, Principal)

A pattern emerged in describing CTs of firstly introducing the role in positive terms, contradicting this with examples of how it is restricted, complex and ill-defined and then tempering this with individual examples of good CTs. SPT Leigha, summarised the CT role as,

'I think a lot of the time the co-operating teacher is unsure of their role, and I've often heard them say, 'Oh, I didn't know if I should say that' - so it doesn't really come across like they feel they have any strong partnership in placement.' (Leigha, SPT)

SPT Cathy, used stronger terms,

'the CT in some places, they literally just disappear and leave you to it. You can't even find them to have a word with them...When the teacher is really on board, they are a wealth of knowledge [about the student] and how they are doing. But I have come across situations where they don't want the student - the student has been foisted on them - they're not happy - sometimes what they are saying could be undermining to the student.' (Cathy, SPT)

84% of SPTs ranked the relationship of the CT with the ST as core to the experience of partnership in SP. When asked to choose the word which best describes the CT relationship with the ST, 44% of SPTs ranked 'Facilitator' in first place with an equal 44% ranking 'Mentor' in first place. No SPTs ranked 'Gatekeeper' in first place and only 6% ranked 'Confidante' and 6% ranked 'Colleague' in first place. 'Facilitator' had the highest joint first and second place ranking of 89%.

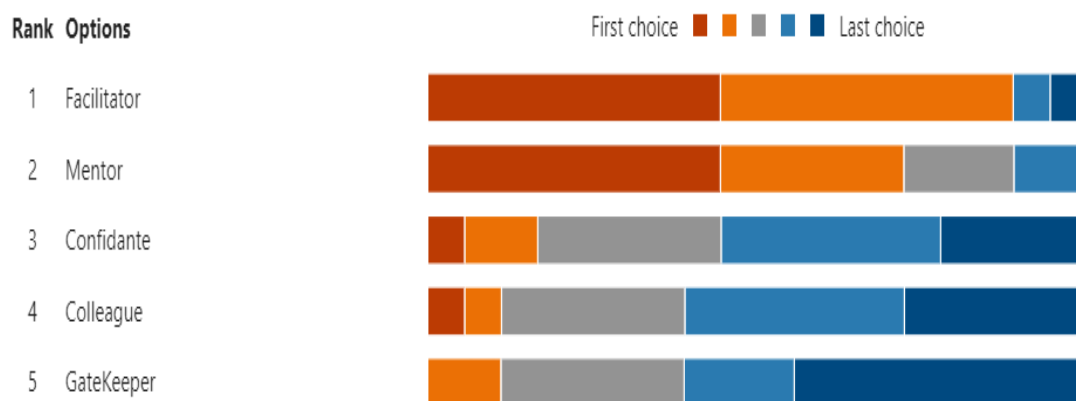


Chart : 5-6 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (SPT)

63% of the AF in the questionnaire described the CT role as 'Supportive' however 37% described it as 'Hierarchical'. When asked to rank potential different terms for describing the role of the CT, 50% of the AF ranked 'Mentor' as first choice however 33% ranked 'Gatekeeper' as first choice. No AF participants ranked 'Confidante' as first place. 'Mentor' had the highest combination of first and second place rankings, at 83%, with 'Facilitator' having the second highest at 67%.

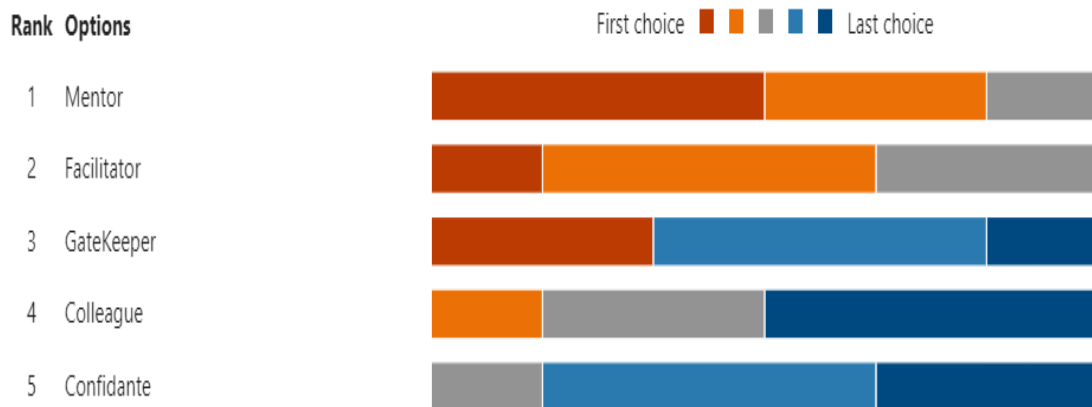


Chart : 5-7 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (AF)

STs ranked 'Facilitator' and 'Mentor' equally in first place (40%) and second place (40%). 'Gatekeeper' was not chosen in first place by any ST and was ranked last place by 80% of STs. 'Confidante' was also not ranked in first place by any STs but was in second place for 20% and third place for 40%.

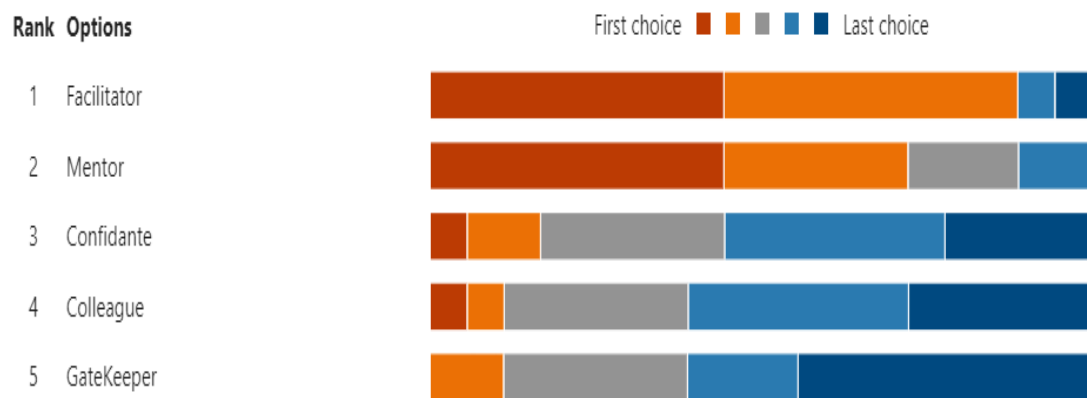


Chart : 5-8 Ranking Terms to Describe the CT Role (STs)

5.4 Meet the....

In this section, we 'meet' each of the groups as a character in the story. Leading on from the introduction of to the literature around the perspectives of the different participant groups in the Literature Review Chapter, this section sits within the findings as it focuses on how the participants view their role and those of other partners. The figure

below summarises the specific characters who narrate the vignettes in Part Two. They are described as ‘Case Narratives’ where a specific individual voice is highlighted and ‘Unit Narratives’ where a culmination of different participants has been used to develop the vignette. This process has been outlined in the Methodology Chapter.

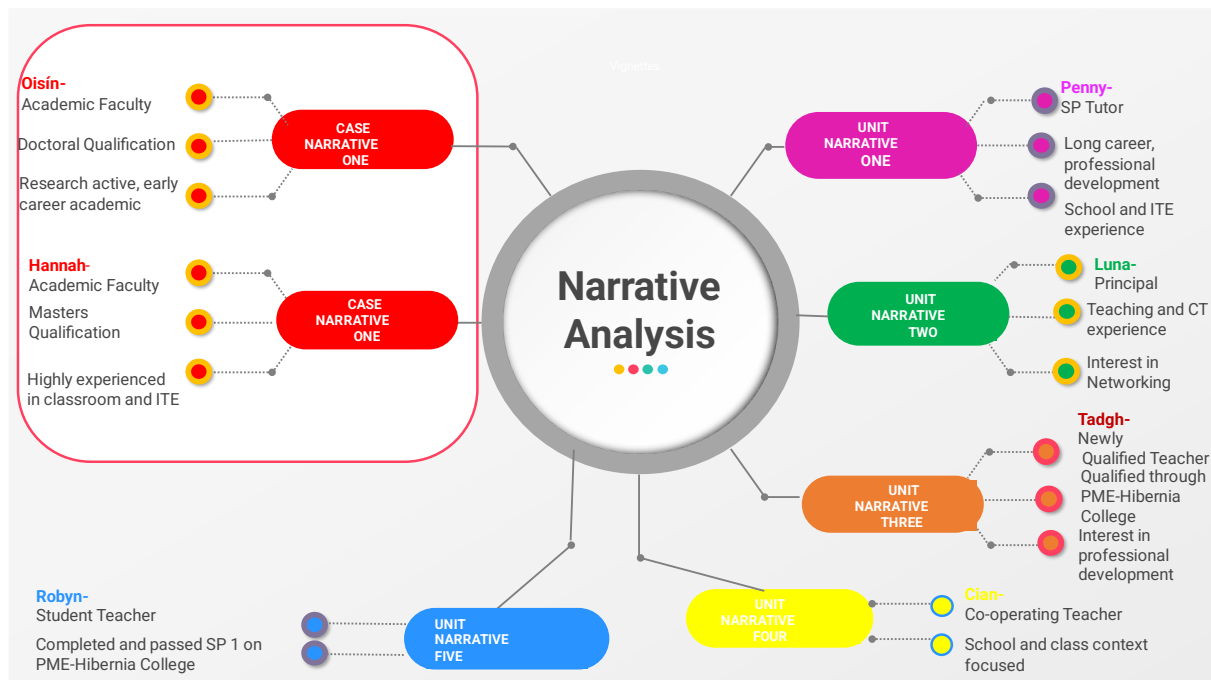


Figure : 5-4 Meet the Characters

In the next section I focus on the perceived value of participants by themselves, and other groups involved in SP. To clarify what I mean by value within the context of SP and this research: perceived value refers to how each group of participants views the importance and effectiveness of the roles played by the other participants in the SP process. It involves understanding the appreciation, recognition and respect (or lack thereof) that participants have for each other’s contributions and responsibilities during the placement. Participant’s emotions and motivation are shaped by how much they value their roles and feel in control of contributions (Pekrun, 2006).

5.4.1 Meet the Academic Faculty

The Perceived Value

The role of the AF and how that role is perceived, reflects the complex relationship between theory and practice, how each of these is defined and the spaces and places for both. The fostering of strong and meaningful relationships between theory and practice through SP was noted as a central concern by all the AF participants during SSIs. Over half of the AF expressed concerns that both STs and CTs do not place adequate value on the theory taught at college and its impact on SP, and the majority of these participants linked this to a diminished sense of their own value as educators and/or partners. The majority of the AF also reported feeling that STs did not consistently see or apply the connections between the theoretical knowledge taught by the AF and their own practice on SP. This disconnect led to the use of words such as *'frustrating,' 'disheartening'* and *'complex'* to describe the role, despite generally affirming the fulfilment they derived from their work. The other characters rarely made any direct reference to the work of the AF, referring more regularly to the broader context of 'the College' rather than the AF. Even within the context of references to 'the College', these generally focused on the administration of SP, providing feedback on those who are seen as poorly performing students and other practical or task-based issues. Just under one third of the AF participants described their role as either *'complicated'* or *'ill-defined'* during SSIs. Several of the AF described a sense of isolation in their work, despite emphasising the collegiality of the College community. A desire for informal but structured opportunities to engage with colleagues was expressed by 3 participants. Margaret described one such example,

'I find this worked really well - a coffee and conversation initiative - there was no focus - you showed up, you brought your coffee, it was online, and you just spoke. It was just about building relationships, and it was done in very small groups.'
(Margaret, AF)

All the AF grounded their opinions about SP and its efficacy with examples from the classroom, either from their own practice or those observed on SP visits. This contrasted with the vast majority of NQTs and CTs, the two groups functioning daily within the classroom, who did not make any reference in SSIs or FGs to pedagogical theory guiding their practice.

The College Context of AF

All members of the PME AF at HC, apart from one individual, chose to contribute to the research as participants. Therefore, the 8 AF participants - 5 females and 3 males - can be seen as highly representative of the attitudes and perspectives of the AF at HC at this time. Within the context of HC, and specifically this research, all the AF teaching on the PME programme hold a minimum of Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), with 4 participants holding a Level 10 qualification. In the immediate period prior to the research commencing, several new members of staff had joined the faculty, all of whom chose to participate. Recruitment to the College had focused on attracting individuals with a strong research profile in addition to classroom experience. This was partially in response to the Céim programme validation process with which the College was engaged. Areas of study engaged with by the AF at this level were highly varied; with no apparent patterns emerging beyond the broad connection of 'primary education.' Areas of study included leadership in education, technology in education, inclusive practices, social-emotional learning and school transitions from primary to post-primary level. On review of the transcripts against the academic profile of each of the AF participants, it emerged that they all, without exception, repeatedly referenced their own research background and research interests in their responses, making links to what they observed or experienced in SP to what they knew from their research. An example of this was Margaret, who has a strong research background in neurodiversity and communication. She noted during her SSI,

'We need to think about how we check in with those students who are neurodivergent...really effective communication impacts professionalism because it builds effective relationships. It also allows people to approach conversations, you know, at staff level, at parent level, with management...It builds trust...it is empowering for everybody. It's also about learning to listen.' (Margaret, AF)

All the AF had worked as schoolteachers, but they varied considerably in the length and seniority of that experience (from 2 years teaching in the classroom to vice-principal and principal level). Additionally, the AF came from a teaching background. Across the SSIs, the AF participants countered the benefits of this practical experience with the newness and

alien nature of the role compared to the structure and clarity of the classroom. One participant, Timothy, noted the difficulty they experienced in letting students make their own choices and knowing when to step back, even when their own professional experience suggested that the student was on the wrong track,

'It is important to give the students the chance to make choices, reflect on them and draw their own conclusions. But the quality of those reflections! Not always ideal. I try not to impose my own 'experiences' on them but it can be very difficult...particularly when you feel they are going down the wrong pathway. But I have to remind myself to facilitate and guide - not impose.' (Timothy, AF)

The AF participants used a variety of different labels to self-define including teacher, teacher educator, lecturer, lecturer in education, subject lead and assistant professor. They used more diverse terms to describe themselves than any other group. They generally identified as proud of their role, using words such as *'valuable,' 'creative'* and *'fulfilling.'* However, these positive terms were balanced by reference to workload, uncertainty around how they were perceived by others and a sense of lack of connection with schools.

The Academic Faculty Continuum

Broadly, the AF are responsible for preparing STs to enter the profession of teaching, conducting educational research and in some cases, contributing to educational policy. Their work involves acquiring a deep understanding of pedagogical theories, subject matter expertise and the ability to navigate the intricacies of a complex education system. Two broad categories to which the AF participants in this research can be designated are *'Adjunct Faculty route'* and *'Academic route.'* Within the HC model, there is a significant reliance on the Adjunct Faculty to deliver module content, author module content, conduct assessments and act as School Placement Tutors. Adjunct Faculty are defined by the College as *'persons contracted to provide key academic services to Hibernia College in areas including but not limited to admissions interviewing, authoring, lecturing, tutoring, assessment, placement and research supervision,'* (Engagement and Management of Adjunct Faculty Policy, Hibernia College Quality Framework). Faculty is further defined as,

‘employees of Hibernia College whose primary role is to lead key academic activities along with other responsibilities. Faculty play a critical role in the coordination and support of Adjunct Faculty in their respective areas’ (Engagement and Management of Adjunct Faculty Policy, Hibernia College Quality Framework). The Adjunct Faculty are experienced educators, with expertise in specific module areas and/or significant practitioner experience, who work on a part time basis with the College. Most are retired from teaching or leadership roles in schools although some are on a career break. Some Adjunct Faculty make the transition into the AF role, becoming full time members of the College faculty. 2 of the AF participants came from this background. Both demonstrated a very strong understanding of the processes and policies for SP specific to the College. The second broad category is ‘Academic.’ This term is used to describe participants who came directly from working in an academic role in another third level institution, are currently undertaking studies to enhance their academic and research profile or have been working outside a school in a different aspect of education (curriculum development, inspectorate, research). These participants were more inclined to reference SP, partnership and the continuum of professional development at a systematic level than in terms specific to HC.

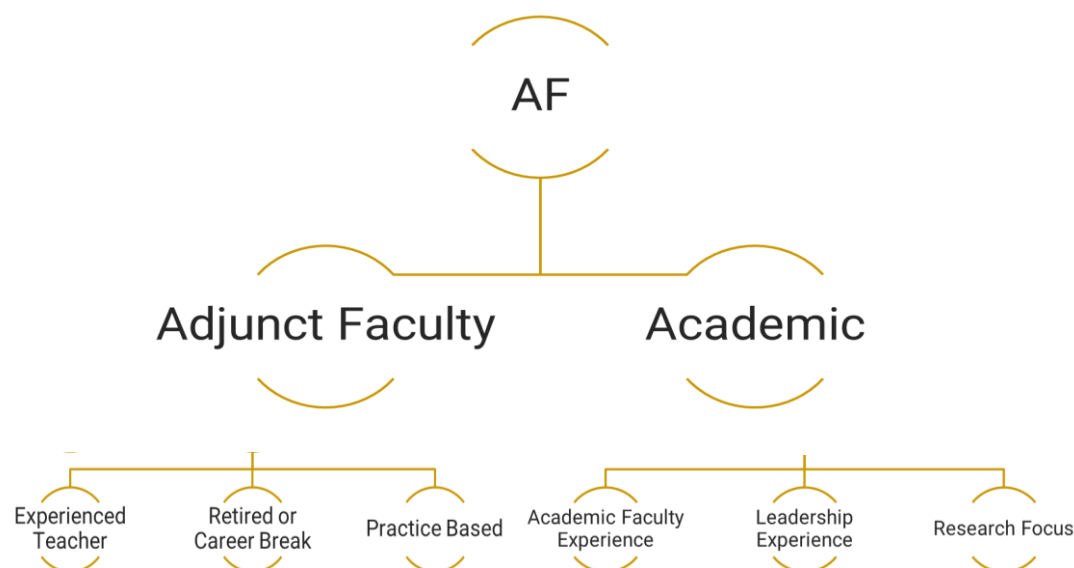


Figure : 5-5 The AF Continuum: Background

Some of the AF participants previously held different roles within education, at a senior level, in policy development or the inspectorate and most described examples of how they were research active but to varying degrees. Areas of research interest were broad, including leadership in education, inclusive practices and diversity in education and subject specific areas. The age profile of the AF participants was diverse, including early career participants in their 30s, mid-career participants in their 40s and 50s and late career participation, approaching retirement. The level of seniority within the College structure was also well represented with participants in leadership and non - leadership roles. All the AF participants have experience of undertaking the SPT role within the College, with 3 participants holding a role at the time of the data generation directly connected to preparing STs for SP.

■ Classroom Teacher ■ Leadership-School
■ Leadership-Outside School ■ Academic

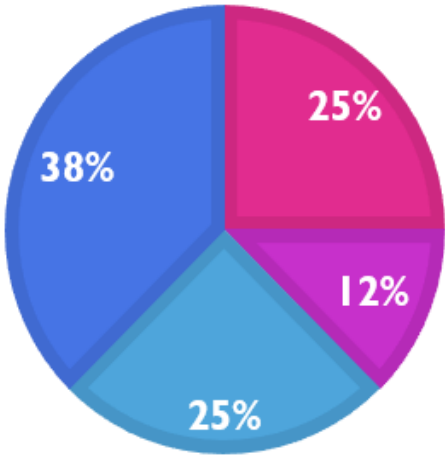


Chart : 5-9 The Academic Faculty Participant Profile

5.4.2 Meet the School Placement Tutors

The Perceived Value

The role of the SPT in SP is widely regarded as central to the success of three key elements of placement: 1) assessment, 2) support and 3) communication. All other participant groups frequently referenced the role of the SPT and how integral the fulfilment of that role was to the student's experience and the validity of the assessment value of SP. Within the FGs, the pride SPTs took in the value of their work was clear, with one participant (Willow) summarising this as,

'I certainly really enjoy my work - I love working with the schools, but the most enjoyable part is mentoring the students - seeing them blossom because of the advice you've given them. It feels very good to be part of something like that.'
(Willow, SPT)

Although many challenges were referenced, all the SPT participants described the role in positive terms using words such as *'positive change,' 'have impact'* and *'support and mentor.'* In contrast, there was a distinct emphasis on the volume of *'paperwork,'* timetabling multiple school visits, engaging with CTs who are not supportive of the ST and issuing fail grades. SPT Cara, summarised those challenges as,

'One thing I found challenging came from the conflict between being supportive and a mentor and then your role as an evaluator. And I'd say that's always a conflict and certainly that's a very personal judgment in my own head.' (Cara, SPT)

Several SPTs referenced the challenges of an *'inappropriate'* classroom environment due to a lack of supportive or professional relationship with the CT. Ruby described this as being,

'If a student is in a classroom where the systems in place are difficult for the student to work with, be it in particular in relation to management, classroom management, that's one of the bigger ones, and if they're constrained by what the teacher, the scope the teacher is giving them, even the wall space that they're giving them to display their work, those kind of things...they have impact.' (Ruby, SPT)

SPT Holly, expressed these challenges strongly as,

'...you find students in the school that are absolutely getting no support. They're just being thrown in there and, there's nobody helping them, in fact [they] might be constrained as I said earlier, by the systems in place in the school or in the classroom, and that's a challenge.' (Holly, SPT)

SPTs such as Anna expressed a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of the ST in these situations, based in their own sense of professionalism and the importance they attached to the fulfilment of the role,

'My role with students is to aspire to inspire. I am a true professional myself, so I want to inspire them to be totally professional...But I need the student to feel safe and free to learn - possibly to make mistakes in their role - I have a role in helping them to feel safe and protected to an extent.' (Anna, SPT)

Without exception, the SPTs emphasised the importance of the supportive aspect of their role; primarily in relation to mentoring struggling students but also in terms of engaging with members of the school community and acting as a bridge between the College and the school. 89% of SPT participants in the questionnaire self-identified as 'partners' in SP in their role, with the remaining 11% unsure. When asked to identify the key aspects of their role, SPTs offered a very extensive list of areas centred on support, assessment, communication and somewhat more nebulously 'connection,' as demonstrated in the figure below. Although SPTs agreed about the high value of their role, the main challenges and the key priorities, differences in opinion emerged during the FGs around how best to fulfil those key aspects. For example, regarding mentoring, while it was universally regarded as an important aspect of the role, one SPT, Roisín, brought a completely different slant to the discussion, focusing on the need to remove the anxiety from SP, prior to the formal commencement,

'We're evaluating students and mentoring them - so we need to not so much to break, maybe just bridge our role as mentors with that - maybe innovative technology could help with that - or holding focus groups with students. It would be

good to engage with them in a non - judgemental way before we go out on the first visit.' (Roisín, SPT)

Another area where the details around broadly agreed stances revealed differences in opinion was the communication of an unsatisfactory result to a student - this varied from a long, detailed conversation to a direct and clear approach.

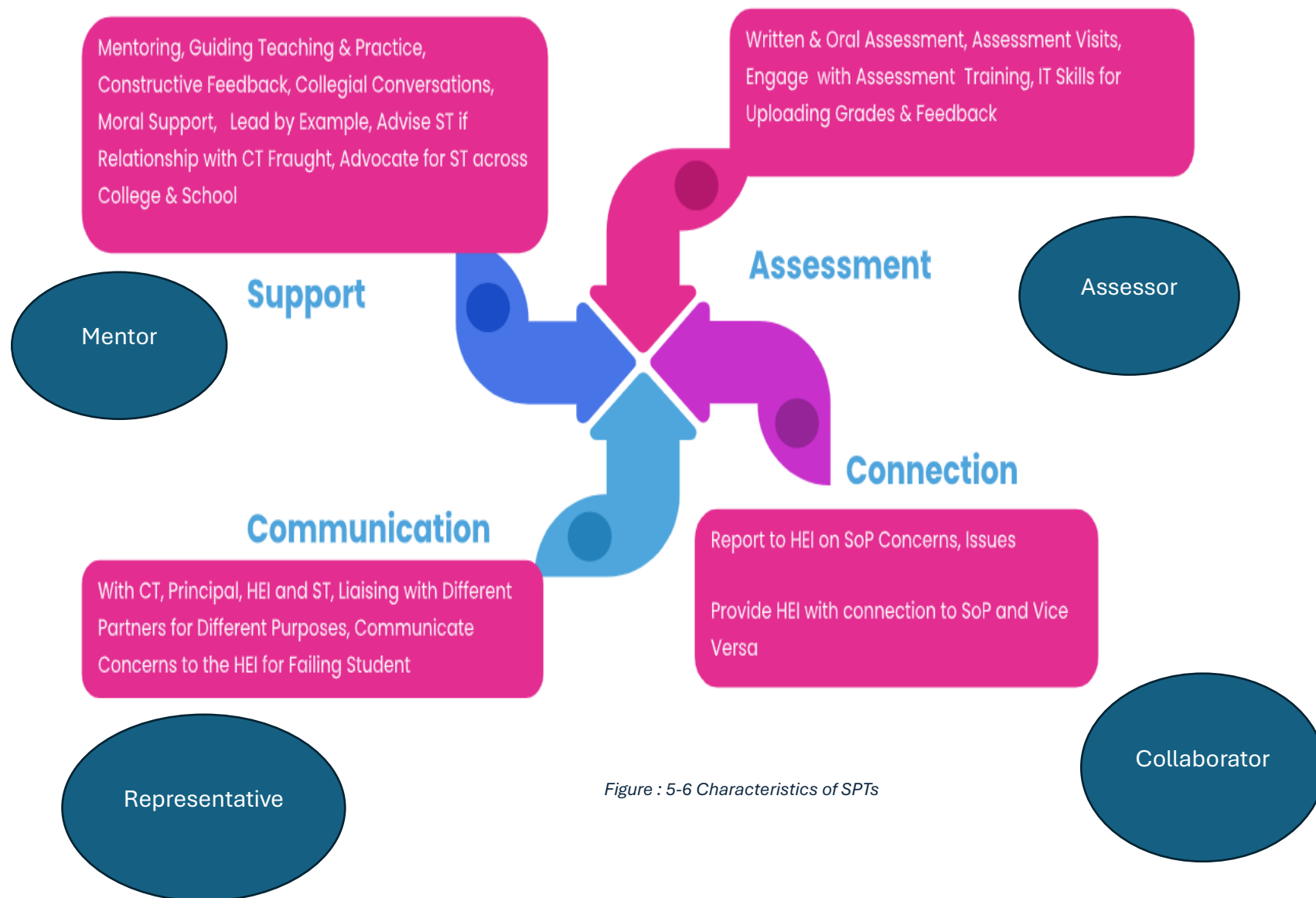


Figure : 5-6 Characteristics of SPTs

The College Context of the SPTs

While selection processes and training for SPTs vary across providers, there is no specific set route or qualification for the role. This also applies to professional development opportunities. The TC does require, that as of May 2022, at least 50% of all SPTs be registered as teachers with the TC in accordance with the Routes of Registration as outlined in the Teaching Council Registration Regulations (2016). The TC Guidelines (2021a) make the statement that the SPT role centres around ensuring that the ST is appropriately supported in all matters regarding their placement. They outline responsibilities including observing the ST teaching, engaging them in dialogue on their practice, assessing according to requirements and giving constructive feedback. They are additionally tasked with encouraging the ST to engage fully in school life and engaging in dialogue and collaboration with the CT and principal as appropriate.

At HC, SPTs are members of Adjunct Faculty (defined above). When a member of permanent faculty takes on the role, they are described as 'Academic Faculty' and are not included in this group. SPTs are trained by the AF SP team on a bi -annual basis. This training varies in content but primarily focuses on familiarising attendees with changes to the curriculum, pedagogy and best practice, preparing them for the assessment role (including the use of rubrics, oral communication) and communicating key messages from the College. The SPTs were very complementary of the level of training received, offering unprompted praise of the staff involved and level of detail.

The School Placement Tutor Continuum

The 23 SPTs across 5 FGs in this research are a group with several key areas of homogeneity, namely they are all experienced primary school teachers, they have occupied the role for a minimum of one year and they undertake the role in a part - time and contracted capacity. The role of the SPT is attractive to those nearing the end of their professional career and wishing to continue to have some input into the education system

and those who need or want to step away from the classroom, primarily for family reasons or to pursue research. This results in a split between the ‘time rich’ and ‘time poor.’ The time challenges associated with the role were referenced numerous times in relation to evenings spent completing paperwork but also in terms of the ability of the SPT to see the student at their best, due to timetabling constraints, as emphasised by Daniel,

‘Sometimes I feel the constraints get in the way of the student. Sometimes I feel a little bit sort of dissatisfied or almost guilty at the end of the visit that I have done justice to what the student is able to do.’ (Daniel, SPT)

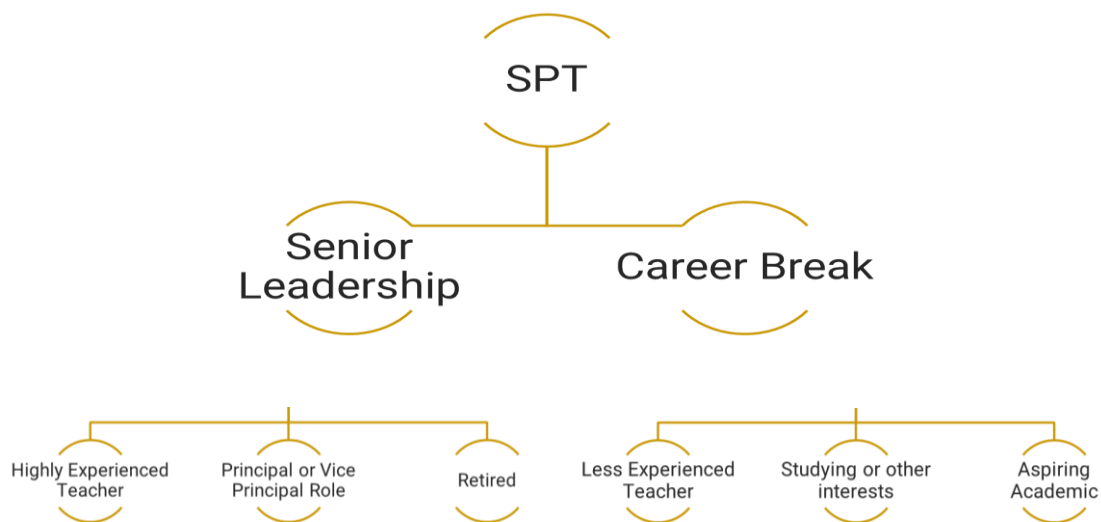


Figure : 5-7 The SPT Continuum: Background

Many SPTs fulfil this role across several Colleges and therefore can draw on comparative experiences. HC has not maintained records to facilitate addressing across the entire SPT faculty how many are retired school leaders, retired schoolteachers or on a career break. However, I have noticed and had this orally corroborated by members of the SP AF, that there has been a significant increase over the last couple of years at SPT training days of younger teachers on a career break or job sharing. Having consulted with colleagues, anecdotally the evidence suggests that more teachers are making the move to roles in education outside of the classroom, thus impacting on the SPT profile. At the time

of the data generation, a minority of participants were working part-time in schools in senior leadership roles or as class teachers engaged in job-sharing. However, the vast majority were retired educators. It is noteworthy that this group have all been members of a minimum of 2, but generally more, of the other participant groups across their continuum of professional development - namely STs and NQTs. Therefore, it is appropriate that this is the largest group, as their opinions are drawn from and often reference their prior experiences in other roles.

SPT Profile

■ Retired School Leader
 ■ Retired School Teacher
 ■ Career Break/Job Share

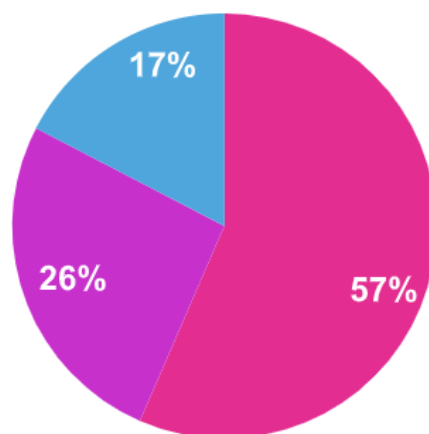


Chart : 5-10 The School Placement Tutor Profile

5.4.3 Meet the Student Teachers

The Perceived Value

The STs were universally recognised by all groups as central to SP. A concern for their welfare during the high stakes environment of SP was expressed strongly by all groups, balanced by an interest in protecting the value and integrity of the profession. CTs expressed this concern for the student's welfare as secondary to the needs of the classroom and pupils therein. All groups discussed STs and their experiences of SP from a standpoint

that assumed assessment anxiety, time pressure and trepidation when faced with a new environment would be part of the experience. As one principal, Grace, noted,

'It is very tough; I still have nightmares about it myself but you get through it and I suppose you are more resilient for doing so. Or at least most students do. I would be concerned about some students coming through after the pandemic - they have so little resilience - they wear their emotions on their sleeve. Principals, teachers - they can't be babysitting so that is a worrying trend.' (Grace, Principal)

References to the adverse impact of the pandemic on this group were frequent amongst other participant groups. STs were described as less resilient, more anxious and lacking in transferable skills.

STs placed a great deal of emphasis on their own agency within placement and expressed the efficacy of placement in terms of their ability to engage well with the challenges, without becoming overwhelmed. Words frequently used by STs to describe SP reflected a strong valuing of it as a learning and professional experience and included, *'rewarding,' 'realistic' and 'engaging.'* These were balanced by an undercurrent of anxiety around assessment through SP, the volume of work required and their own mental and physical resilience to withstand the pressures. Words such as *'stressful,' 'overwhelming'* and *'exhausting'* were frequently used by STs to describe these aspects of SP. The STs referenced their relationship with the SPTs as a possible source of support in the majority of cases, although there were several references to the potential for relationships to break down.

The College Context and ST Continuum

The 7 STs, engaged with through questionnaires and either FGs or SSIs had all completed a minimum of one placement at HC on the primary PME programme (PME Autumn or Spring 22 Cohort) on which they achieved a satisfactory outcome. As a group, they occupy the unique position of being evaluated by, facilitated by or supported by the other case groups. Unlike the SPTs, their continuum of professional experience within teacher education was limited to their current role. The often-emotive language they used reflects the direct and significant impact of SP on them as students and developing

professionals but also on a personal level. The concept of 'fairness' and 'transparency' were prevalent across the experiences of all members of this group. Although all STs referenced a lack of consistency in practices, particularly regarding assessment, as an area of concern, this differed across participants between a generalised perception of this being an issue (5 participants) to specific personal experiences of it as such (2 participants).

A Homogenous Group and Diversity Constraints

The homogeneity of STs in general was reflected in the participants' similar views on various aspects of SP including the main challenges and benefits. They consistently emphasised concerns such as the burden of assessment, the need for transparency in grading practices and the impact of 'paperwork and planning' on their ability to engage with the placement. Opinions diverged more notably in relation to how they viewed the relationship with the CT and the wider school community. Specific to this research and the homogeneity of the participants, 6 of the 7 STs were female, 1 male. This is broadly reflective of the gender breakdown for the wider PME Cohort and general trends towards higher numbers of females in primary teacher education. Students at HC are facilitated in coming from a geographically diverse pool as they can attend from different locations due to the blended nature of the course and this is reflected in the sample. This geographical diversity is an accurate reflection of the wider cohort. There is also some diversity in the age profile of the participants, which ranges from 23 years old to 43 years old. Again, this reflects the wider cohort. However, they are a predominantly white, middle class and female group.

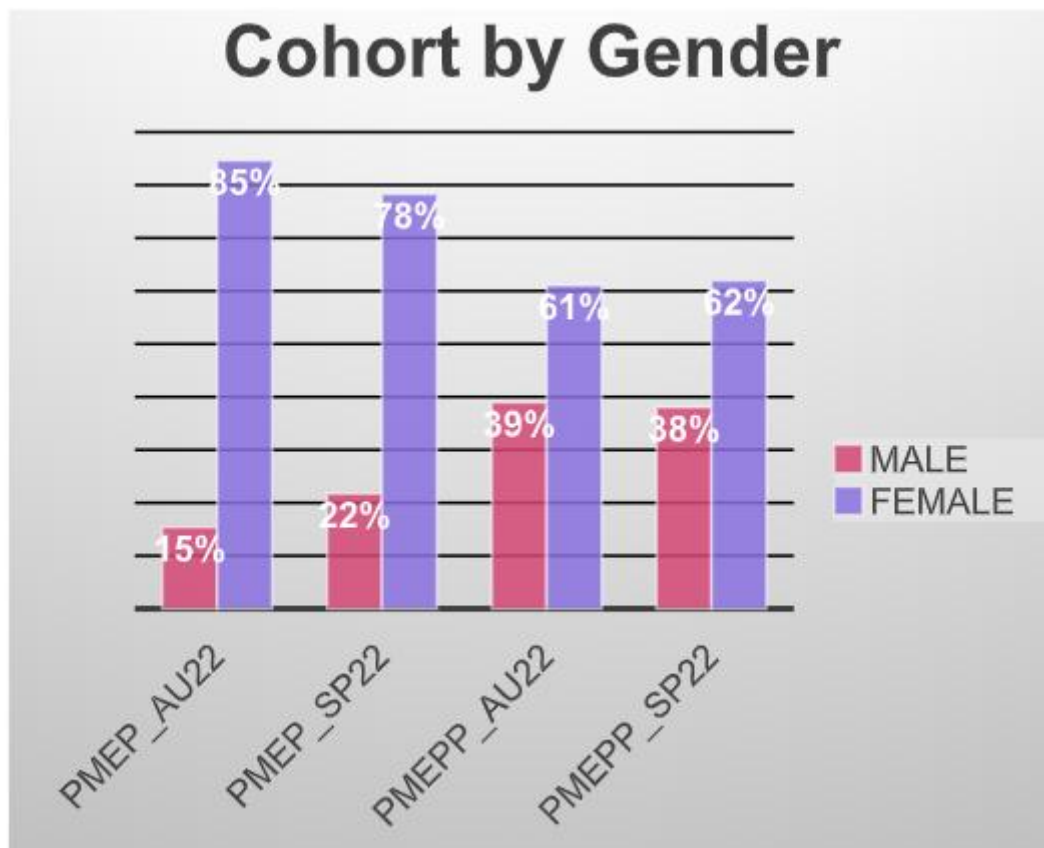


Chart : 5-11 Cohort by Gender

Students by Geographical Location

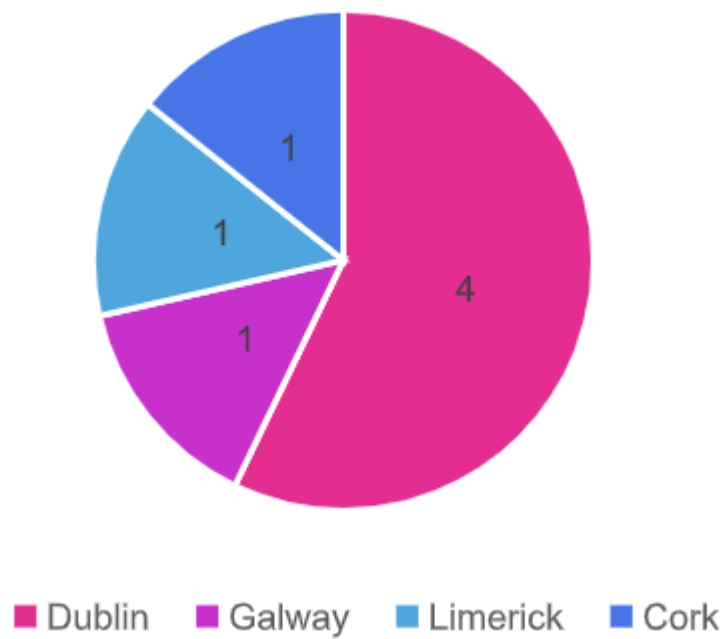


Chart : 5-12 Participants by Geographical Location

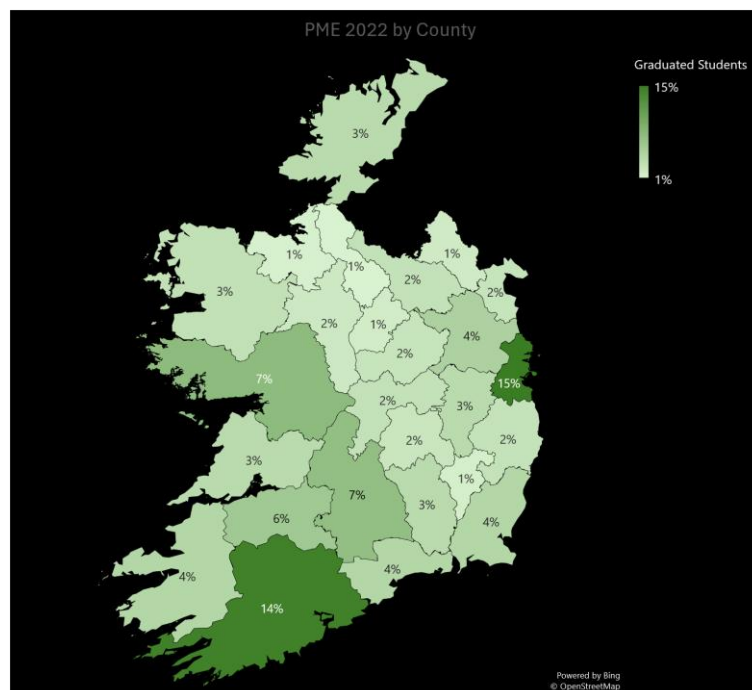


Figure : 5-8 Cohort by Geographical Location (HC Online Database Resource, 2024)

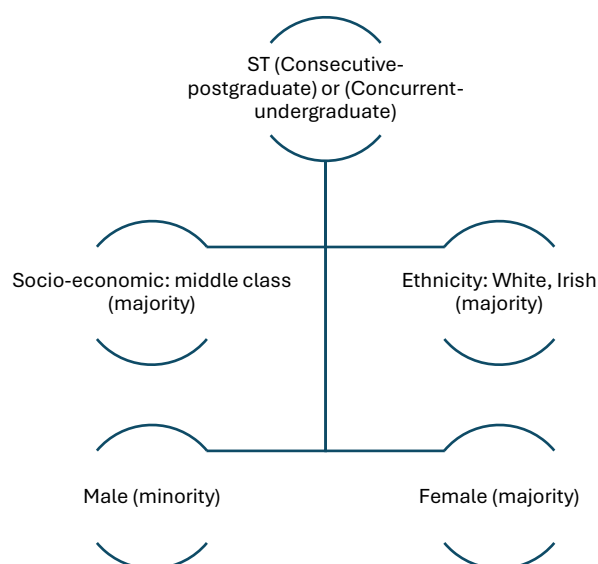


Figure : 5-9 The Student Teacher Continuum

5.4.4 Meet the Co-operating Teachers

The Perceived Value

We have already met the CTs, primarily through the eye of other characters in this chapter. Therefore, this section focuses more on the CT's own self - identity and whether they identify as CTs specifically. 71% of STs, 70% of SPTs and 64% of the AF felt that CTs demonstrated a strong understanding of their role and responsibilities as partners in placement. However, no CTs in the FGs identified the facilitation of partnership in education through SP to be a significant aspect of their role. CTs are therefore largely experienced as understanding their role and place as partners in SP by the other characters but CTs did not express a valuing of partnership themselves as significant. The CTs emphasised the value of their role in practical terms, repeatedly referencing the 'reality' of the classroom as opposed to the 'theory' provided by the College. One CT, Lily, noted,

'I like showing the student the practical side of teaching because sometimes in teacher training it can be a lot of theory...I can show them the real, practical daily grind and little tips...classroom management stuff. Pass it on.' (Lily, CT)

The use of outdated terms such as 'teacher training,' 'teacher practice' and 'inspector' was common amongst the CTs, as was the use of casual language to describe 'practical' tasks.

For example, Charlie used very casual language to describe his approach to play - based learning,

'It is important to get the kids up and moving. I know Colleges really push the whole active side of things - all singing all dancing lessons. But I'd get them up and about too - keep them interested.' (Charlie, CT)

Another CT, Mia, noted the disturbances to the 'real' work of teaching brought on by 'taking on' a student. This CT, alongside others, inaccurately quoted College requirements,

'I had a ST last year and I just found after the month, we'd missed like a whole chunk of the curriculum, not that she wasn't brilliant, and she wasn't trying, but obviously teaching practice is all singing, all dancing and sometimes teaching does need to be that but then they do need to knuckle down and do a worksheet or a book. And obviously on placement, the students don't use the books. The have to kind of create their own worksheets.' (Mia, CT)

Some CTs, such as Charlie, who had attempted to mentor STs and provide feedback expressed frustration that their opinions were not valued,

'You are trying to give pointers and different things like that, they just aren't taking it in, taking the hint...they're not learning from any of the feedback.... they're just new and they're only learning, but it is the whole point of placement to learn from colleagues, I would have thought.' (Charlie, CT)

When asked to expand upon how the CT could be valued more, an emphasis on the valuing of feedback was evident although this was moderated by a concern that this could lead to additional workload. One CT, Ava, commented that,

'There is a lack of initiative, a lack of drive, a lack of energy, just a lack of taking on board what we're saying. But teachers would say No I'm not interested to extra paperwork. This needs to be quite an easy avenue by which we communicate.'
(Ava, CT)

The College Context of CTs

The 9 CT participants, engaged with through FGs, at the time of data generation, were broadly inclusive of the spectrum of the profession; just post NQT, experienced (between 5 - 20 years), nearing retirement and principal status. They have all completed the role of CT within the context of supporting HC students, although most were also able to reference experiences with other institutions. The voluntary nature of the role makes this group stand out from the other triad partners; they do not have as clear a stake in the game as STs (assessed) or SPTs (employees and assessors). However, their role is experienced by STs as highly impactful. The fact that STs were from HC rather than another institution did not appear to resonate particularly with CTs as an important factor. Their level of familiarity with course content, requirements or differences in placement across HEIs emerged as limited. Although the key role of CTs in partnership is emphasised in The Guidelines on School Placement (TC, 2021a), the Cosán Framework (TC, 2016) and the School Placement Innovation Report (TC, 2021), the CTs did not self - identify as such at any point during the FGs.

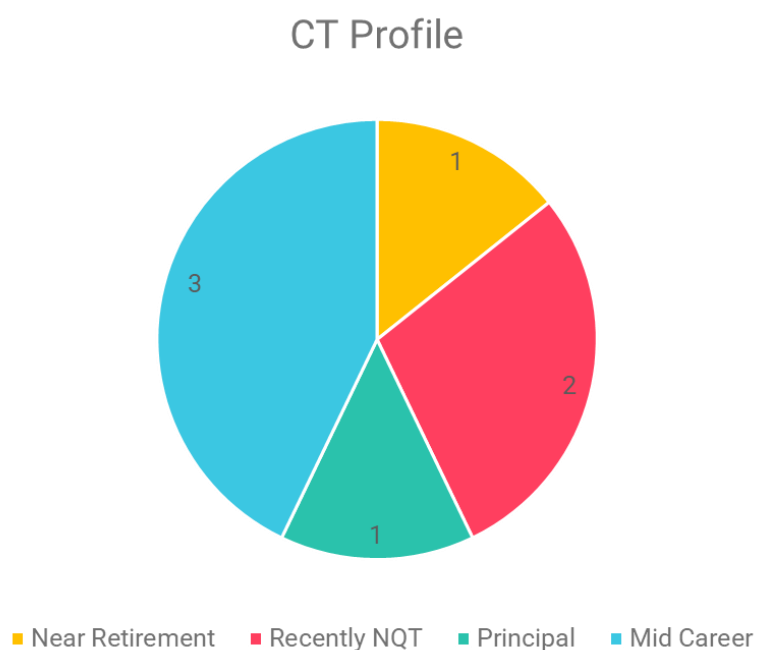


Chart : 5-13 Co-operating Teacher Profile (note: 2 participants did not provide their details)

The Co-operating Teacher Continuum

Not all teachers will take on the role of CT over the course of their continuum of professional development and it is not currently linked to professional development or career progression. The only requirements of a teacher to take on the role are to be qualified, registered with the TC and to have completed their probationary period. I have included the figure below to illustrate this lack of specific competencies, requirements or experiences. One participant, Charlie, emphasised this lack of formalised role for the work of the CT within the continuum of professional development as,

‘It really is a lot to take on - and it’s not that we need to be paid per say but surely it should feed into your progression or opportunities for posts of responsibility. Teaching is a caring profession but that doesn’t mean we can’t care about our own progression too. Sometimes you are made to feel like you should just get on with things to be kind and nice and not draw attention to yourself or your own career.’
(Charlie, CT)

Over the course of the FGs the voice of the more experienced teachers was dominant in the discussions, despite attempts on my part to draw more reticent members into the discussion. A clear understanding of some colleagues as more ‘senior’ than others emerged in the discussion, with less experienced CTs generally echoing or expressing very similar opinions to their more experienced colleagues, with the statement ‘I agree’ being used a total of 14 times by the post NQT participants.

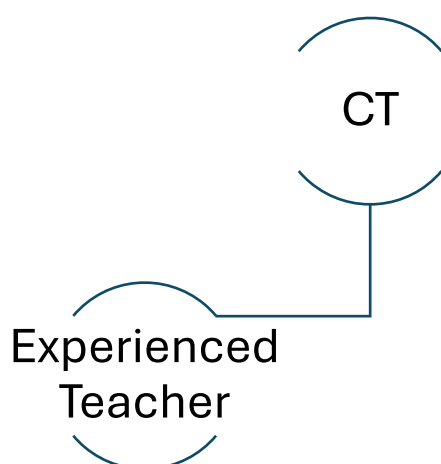


Figure : 5-10 The Co -operating Teacher Continuum

5.4.5 Meeth the School Principals

All of the school principals had accommodated HC students. School principals are widely recognised as invaluable within the immediate structure of the school environment. As the leader on the ground, STs expressed some anxieties around how to engage with them through SP. SPTs emphasised the importance of being respectful towards the principal however there was a tendency to present interactions with principals as formulaic and as a courtesy rather than for any specific educational purpose. Despite the respect afforded to principals by other groups, there was a lack of engagement with the notion of the principal as a key agent in SP.

The role of school principals in Ireland is guided by evolving educational leadership policy and practices, significantly the 'Looking at Our School' (DES, 2016a, 2016b) educational leadership framework. The framework is inclusive of a series of leadership standards, for teaching, learning, leadership and management. The modes of enactment of the policy are school self - evaluation (SSE) and a distributed leadership model (Murphy & Brennan, 2024). However, the reality faced by school principals is rapidly changing and difficult to keep pace with. School leaders are confronted by an increasingly complex set of challenges, leading to the necessity for new and adaptive skills sets (Sancho et al., 2024) The 7 school principals all contextualised their responses within an environment which they described as escalating in complexity and challenges. The principals are broadly representative of a variety of school contexts; small rural schools, large urban schools, DEIS school, medium size suburban school, mixed and single sex and a variety of patronage models. This group were the only group in the research whereby all members occupied a specific leadership and management role at point of data generation, although it is noteworthy that some of the AF and the SPTs also held senior leadership positions. They were the least commented upon by other participants of all the groups - in all cases only referenced when I asked a specific question regarding their role or in a very broad definition of partnership.

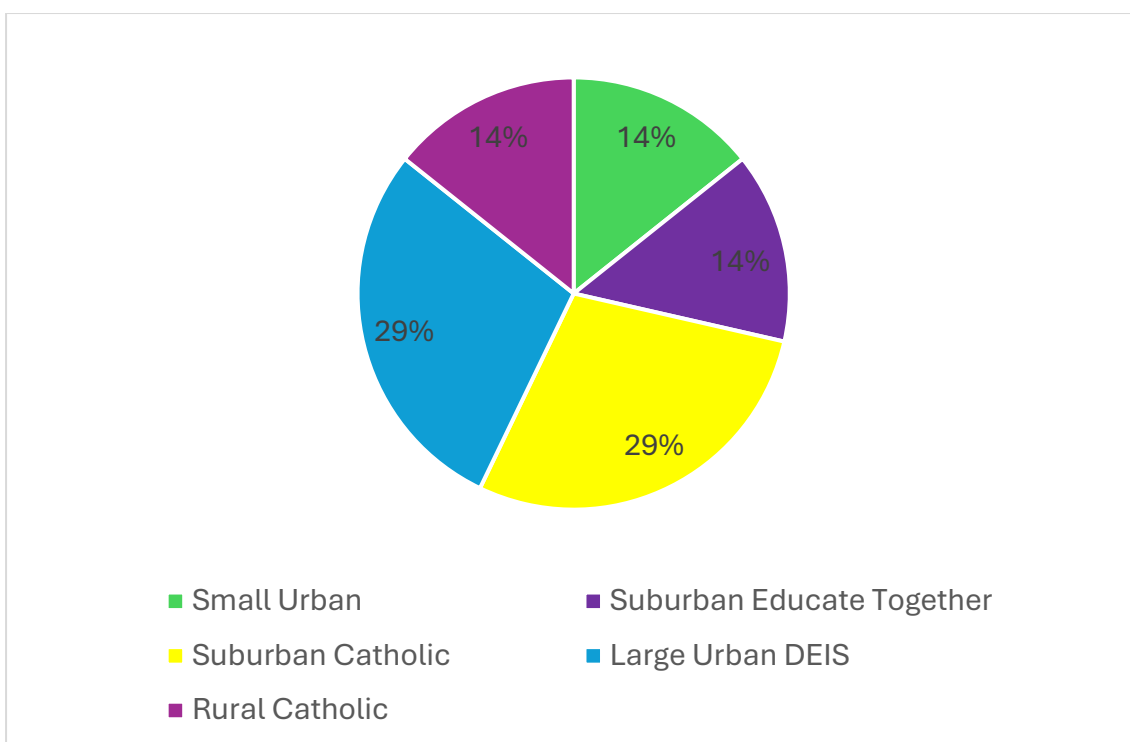


Chart : 5-14 School Profiles: Principals

One of the most notable factors in my engagement with the principals, was their protectionism. Access to NQTs was not facilitated directly by any principals. The primary reason given was the busy schedules of teachers, followed by some references to the lack of experience of this group. This group also spoke in the most ‘high level’ terms about SP - generally linking it to leadership challenges and practical issues such as scheduling SPT visits to facilitate the school, allocating STs to CTs who would not be inconvenienced by the presence of an ST and ensuring that school standards were not compromised. Principals also referenced the opportunities to use SP as an extended interview process and ‘fill the gap’ during the teacher retention crisis.

5.4.6 Meet the Newly Qualified Teachers - The Perceived Value

All of the NQTs had attended the PME at HC and graduated successfully. They were also employed in mainstream schools at the time of the data. This group were the least accessible participants in the research. Difficulties in sourcing participants were linked to protective practices on the part of principals, as noted above. Their perspectives often aligned either partially or fully with those expressed by STs in the majority of areas. Minor

variances were detectable in relation to the role of the CT and the value attached to planning in SP. Unlike the school principals, who expressed some ambiguity around their own fulfilment of a partnership role in SP, NQTs were generally favourably disposed towards taking a more active role in SP. They identified value in their unique position as recent STs and new members of the school community and considered themselves well placed to contribute towards linking SP with the continuum of professional development. A unique characteristic of this group was their eagerness to contribute towards improving SP and supporting STs. This was particularly significant on consideration of the fact that they do not have a role allocated to them currently in SP and are not identified as part of the partnership structure. Although NQTs were very cautious of offering any form of critique of their employer, Georgia summarised,

‘I feel like I could help to join the dots. I know what went well for me and I know what I experienced as really challenging. Now that I am not under the pressure of SP, I feel I can actually reflect - but I want to see a real purpose to that.’ (Georgia, NQT)

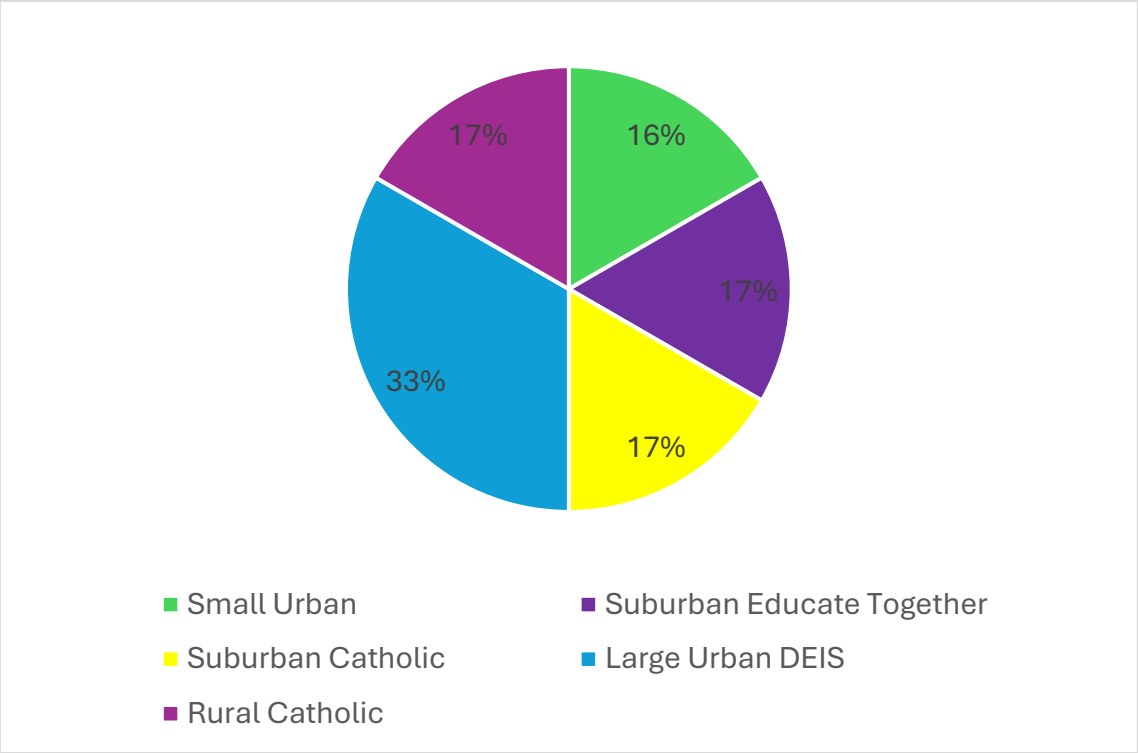


Chart : 5-15 School Profiles: Newly Qualified Teachers

5.5 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter have focused on the participants and how they perceive their roles and responsibilities specific to SP. The findings also related to how participants view the role of other groups in relation to SP. The roles of the CT and NQT have come to the fore through the presentation of the findings: the former due to its contentious nature and the latter due to the potential for development. The concept of a continuum of professional development has been teased out within the context of SP and the values participants bring to their interpretation of how best to meet requirements and make improvements in that sphere. It is a complex emerging picture, and one made even more so by the layers of perspectives and agendas.

Chapter Six presents the story of SP and includes the presentation of the vignettes. Each of the characters in the story are introduced and the connections and points of departure between those characters are highlighted.

Chapter Six: The Findings: Part Two: The Story of Partnership in School Placement: The Vignettes

Part A: The Traditional Triad Partners

In this chapter, I present the story of the traditional triad partners in Part A and the story of the proposed partnership triad in Part B. The traditional triad has been introduced in previous chapters. It refers to the participant groups most frequently and consistently accepted as central to SP: the ST, the SPT and the CT. Although all members of the triad have a significant role to play in SP, they are not equal in terms of responsibilities, power and impact (Lillejord & Borte, 2016). In Ireland, while the triad exists informally in established 'best practice', a formalised triadic model has not been proposed or expanded upon by the TC. However, the benefits of such a triad include the cogenerated conversations which expand the assessment experience and support mutual gain (Mtika et al., 2013).

Meet Robyn, Penny and Cian; the Traditional SP Triad of ST, SPT and CT. They tell the story of their experiences of partnership in SP and the impact it has had on their continuum of professional development. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the unit narratives are an amalgamation of the voices of the different participants across those groups. I present these vignettes as a narrative and in the traditional form of chapters in a book in order to aid the reader in engaging with the vignettes as an unfolding story - with discrete voices contained within that overall narrative.

Chapter One: The Student Teacher

Robyn: The Strongest Will Survive

I put myself in the position to experience it [SP] as partnership. I had to be open to that - not everyone is. A real example of partnership is the relationship with SPTs, sharing email and mobile details and being trusted and supported by someone with all that expertise. Not all SPTs are brilliant at that- but I've been lucky. You hear horror stories! I'd say I experienced partnership in SP when the school and CT were aware of their role and responsibilities and the college set clear expectations. I completely agree that SP helps you put theory into practice and encounter real life challenges. That is where you get the most value from it. Actively collaborating with the CT and the principal too sometimes, but maybe not that often with the principal in reality. Although I had some good principals who were very kind. By fostering open communication and shared goals (providing the best education for children), this partnership can create the best educational landscape for the students while promoting a strong sense of belonging and facilitating a comprehensive professional development journey for the ST.

Planning on SP is where things can come undone. It is so stressful! Lessons plans are excessive and not always conducive to a real teaching career. CTs tell us they are pointless. Exhaustion can be the killer, and success is from grit and pure determination more than talent or ability. The strongest will survive! But SP, when it works, is an immersive experience and a first opportunity to actually be the teacher. If teachers tell us they don't plan the way the College tells us, or value the things the College does, it puts us in a really complicated place- you feel torn.

SP is a first step to professional development and lays the foundation to future growth but only when everything falls into place. It equipped me with invaluable experiences and skills, shaping my trajectory towards a fulfilling career, but I know plenty of people who were ground down by it. When it works, it provides us with safety nets to rely on, like the CT, teachers, colleagues, SPTs. And the feedback can be valuable. Lots of small conversations with the CT, lots of questions asked and experiences shared.

If I could fix one problem in SP, it would be the need for specialised guidance on dealing with pupils showing specific behavioural issues. To help STs deal with student behavioural issues, the College could provide helpful guides and resources. These guides would explain why pupils behave in certain ways and give tips on how to handle different problems. They would cover issues like trouble paying attention, disruptive behaviour, emotional difficulties, and social challenges. The guides would give practical ideas, based on what has been proven to work and show real- life examples. Colleges could also organise a specific face- to- face day where experienced teachers teach STs directly. This would give them a chance to learn from experts and practice effective strategies to support students with behaviour problems. By giving STs these guides and training, colleges would make sure they have the knowledge and tools to handle behaviour issues well. This would create a positive and inclusive classroom where all students can learn and feel supported.

The lesson plans are far too long. There is no need for that level of detail- they are clunky documents and needlessly detailed. The CT, who sees you for the length of the placement, should have more input in your assessment- but they need more of a sense of what their responsibilities are and how they can be supported. A 30- minute zoom with the SPT and CT together before the placement starts would be really helpful- simply putting a face to a name. Often the tutors have a very particular way of doing things and they do contradict each other. So more consistency is needed there.

Overall, I've enjoyed SP- it is exhausting but I can see myself that I have learnt so much. It could be improved but I do think that when it works it is a good model. If it could work as well as it can, all of the time, it would be ideal.

Chapter Two: The School Placement Tutor

Penny: The Big Bad Wolf and the Woodcutter

Partnership in SP is complex. It includes a lot of different partners; STs, CTs, SPTs, principals, the College- really it is everyone the student interacts with as part of their placement to some degree- even other school staff –all with a responsibility to the pupils involved in the placement. The pupils can be forgotten but actually they are the most important piece of the partnership, and of course their families and all the networks around them. I am in favour of being seen as acting as a partner in my role, however that is not always how we are going to be seen when we have an assessment role. Sometimes I feel like I need to be the big bad wolf and the woodcutter all in one! But genuinely, I am very aware that the responsibility, and you could say the power, sits with me, to make very impactful decisions which have a huge effect on the student and their confidence and their ability to progress. With great power comes great responsibility! But actually, the potential for a worrisome power imbalance.

A key aspect of my role- and one I really enjoy- is to lead by example; how I interact with the children and encourage the student during and post inspection. Being empowering ideally and guiding the student in planning and preparation, outlining expected standards, giving objective feedback and in many ways acting as the face of the College in the host schools; this is how I see my role. Evaluation is part of the role but also affirmation of good practice, providing mentoring, guidance and advice. I am a professional adviser and enabler. I offer professional encouragement but have a monitoring role. It can be a very challenging balancing act- I am not entirely confident that it is possible to get it right all of the time. Of course, the ST needs to be willing and able to accept all of that support- and sadly that is not always a given.

The most challenging aspects of the role are delivering an unsatisfactory outcome or when a CT has unrealistic expectations of a ST. CTs need training, possibly from HEIs, on their role. There are so many excellent teachers who want to support the student but not all CTs know how to, and a small number take on the role for the wrong reasons. Mostly they do want to

support the ST but not all CTs know how to. If they are a weak teacher themselves, or antagonistic, nobody is controlling how that relationship works. Where is the oversight? I feel like I sometimes have to step in and referee the relationship but is that really my role?

The TC may have a more significant role to play in SP, but it is important that schools and HEIs have autonomy too. It is true that the STs can be very constrained by planning and assessment and some HEIs put a huge emphasis on that- maybe too much, possibly the TC could regulate that or give guidance. But I don't know if the TC is adequately positioned to engage fully with the real challenges of placement. I think the HEIs need to step up to the plate here and work together on this- practices differ and STs suffer!

The Droichead process has potential, maybe it could serve as an example. But we have to be cautious of putting a burden on schools- they are in a vulnerable position at the moment, staffing is at crisis point. But maybe there is scope within colleges to support principals more. They could facilitate the principal's support role more. Teachers could do courses to mentor - possibly the TC could have a proactive role here or maybe the HEIs. Principals are talented people with experience that could bridge the gap between practice and colleges, but they need guidance. We need to never lose sight of the fact that we are visitors in schools, and we owe them a huge gratitude. So, anything that is done to change placement- or to improve partnership- it has to be practical and actually help the schools too- there needs to be a reciprocal element.

Partnership in School Placement is hard to fix to any one clear definition. I am in favour of being seen as and acting as a partner however, nobody is controlling how that relationship works. I think that guidance needs to come from somewhere soon.

Chapter Three: The Co-operating Teacher

Cian: A Complex Character

Overall, I think taking on a student can be worthwhile. I'd say the main advantage of taking a student is having the time for me to work with small groups or individual pupils. If they are decent then it can free me up and having that time freed up is very useful. Also learning about new practice can be interesting, although the student can learn a lot if they are willing and able to, from the class teacher. I do sometimes wonder what the Colleges are teaching them- there is real work that needs to be done- it can't all be play. But mostly, if I have the time, I'm willing to take on a Teaching Practice student- ideally a final year.

I find colleges have very different demands and students often don't know what exactly is expected of them. It's actually quite frustrating and we really don't have time to work out what it is they want. And so much paperwork- they [STs] often have to sit at the back of the class writing away instead of actually observing the class. It can be quite shocking how ill-prepared some of them are- I mean I've had to pull them aside and tell them not to call the children 'naughty' or 'kids' or talk about them being 'the bold one.' How do they not learn that at college? They can't use textbooks and have to do all these practical lessons but sometimes the pupils need to learn, and the curriculum needs to be covered instead of filling bottles of water and playing with sand. A bit of realism is needed. Parents will complain if they are seen to be just playing or 'experimenting' all day. It would be very useful to be given a checklist or one single sheet with the information I need- I don't have time to read lots of documents and I might not even see emails that are sent to the office.

I would not be at all in favour of colleges telling me what I should do in my role. I certainly would not be attending any training- not with my years of experience of actually teaching. I have been teaching for years and the experience I have in the classroom is worth an awful lot. I would honestly find it quite insulting- actually a lack of respect- to be offered training by a lecturer in a college- no, not for me. So no, I am not in favour of that.

I don't find that I have much contact with the Colleges- probably only really when something goes wrong. I honestly wouldn't have much of a sense of what is different between the Colleges- they all produce good, bad and something in between students. My main contact is with the inspector. They are a real mixed bunch, most are fine. They are not consistent- some will ask my opinion, take the time to hear what I have to say- but many don't. I am the one who has been with the student all week- I have insights. I don't want to have an assessor role, and I certainly don't have time for more paperwork. But I do know good teaching when I see it- and I know the opposite too. I'd say the quality of students really varies- some are very good; most are fine but there are some really weak students- I don't know if they are weak or disinterested but it's like they think they know it all. I think there has been a decline since the pandemic- social skills are certainly lacking. I don't know if that's something the colleges can teach but I guess it relates to confidence and professionalism too. I'd have concerns for the quality of the profession based on some of the students I have seen.

Chapter Four: Summary of the Traditional School Placement Triad

Robyn and Penny reveal several areas of convergence in their praise for and concerns around the efficacy of partnership within SP. Both highlight the informality of SP and the relationships within SP, and both note an opportunity for the College to take more ownership of guiding and supporting SP in a practical and direct manner. Robyn and Penny give the impression of being conflicted about the informality in SP, valuing the benefits of informal one-to-one relationships, informal conversations and the unique attributes of the individual but lamenting the lack of consistency and structure. Robyn and Penny also describe their own direct experiences as broadly positive but reference the experiences of others as negative, demonstrating a lack of faith in the process of partnership in SP to consistently work well.

The tone of Robyn's narrative is quite formal, however, it should be noted that this is partially due to the fact that some of the content is from written responses to the questionnaire and therefore the participants had the opportunity to carefully choose their language. The ST is the protagonist of the SP narrative. They have the most to gain and the most to lose from the implementation of the partnership model. Robyn's narrative offers a reflective account of her experiences of SP, emphasising partnership, the opportunities for practical application of theoretical knowledge, the challenges encountered and some suggestions for improvements. She begins by framing the SP experience as a partnership and highlights the importance in this model of trust and support. She offers a definition of her experience of partnership as scenarios where roles and responsibilities are well understood by all partners involved. This, for her, involves a clear setting of expectations from the College and the creation of a structured and supportive environment.

Robyn speaks more directly to the role of SP in setting a teacher on the right path in their continuum of professional development than other groups do. SP is characterised as an immersive and foundational experience in the journey towards becoming a teacher. The progressive nature is noted and the role of SP as an initial step towards further professional development is highlighted. The role other partners play in SP is mostly seen as positive, and CTs and SPTs are characterised as offering a safety net and offering valuable

feedback and guidance. Concerns relate to the lack of consistency in the fulfilment of these roles. Although Robyn does note the challenges of SP, including the potentially excessive paperwork, she focuses her proposals for improvement on items which would support her development as a teacher and her pedagogical knowledge. The narrative concludes with a positive reflection on the overall experience of SP, despite the notable challenges and areas for improvement. Effective and consistent implementation of the partnership model emerge as key themes in the narrative.

Penny claims a high-level acceptance of the use of the term 'partnership' in placement but also emphasises the dichotomy felt between that partnership and the assessment elements of the role. She links partnership specifically to the concept of mentoring and generally interprets partnership on the level of individuals rather than systemic. She highlights the inclusion of non-teaching/core roles in partnership such as the school secretary or caretaker, indicating a very broad partner membership.

Penny speaks to the tensions within the diverse aspects of her role: mentoring, supporting, quality assuring and assessing. Penny also expresses concern regarding how she feels she is perceived by the other groups in SP and worries that she is sometimes seen or experienced primarily as an enforcer and assessor. She uses words such as 'power' or 'power imbalances' multiple times throughout the discussion. Ironically, this is in stark contrast to Cian, who expresses no discernible concern as to how he is perceived by other partners despite the fact that other groups repeatedly comment on the CT role. A strong sense of responsibility, balanced with a desire to be empathetic emerges from Penny. Although primarily expressed in relation to responsibility towards the individual student, a professional responsibility to the integrity of teaching and assurance of standards is also evident.

Penny describes her role as multifaceted and based in interactions and communication as much as in assessment and mentoring. However, no other group describes the SPT role beyond primarily as assessor and secondarily as mentor. She makes some humorous comments, such as the reference to the story of Little Red Riding Hood, to convey an understanding of the complexity of her role. The word 'power' is used by Penny repeatedly, indicating a significant concern regarding imbalances in partnership relationships. In contrast to Cian, she gives an impression of having a strong sense of her

own significance in the SP process and more widely the importance of SP to the profession. Penny focuses on 'the weight' of the responsibilities of her role and appears to have a strong level of self-awareness regarding the tensions between mentoring and assessing. Penny is cautious around using negative language in describing the CT role, but she does call into question their motivation and commitment to the role.

Cian looks at the benefits of SP from a very practice-based and immediate perspective. His view of the ST depends on whether they can offer value to him in the fulfilment of his role within the classroom. His assumption is that there is a high degree of probability that a ST will hinder his own good practice in some ways. He sees himself as the expert in the scenario and the role of the ST is to observe and absorb. There is no evidence of reflexive or reflective practice or critique of his own approaches to any aspects of education. He emphasises the need for better supports from the Colleges but then contradicts himself by rejecting any consideration of training offered by those settings. He expresses a pointed desire for simplified communication alongside a resistance to external control and training. While expressed differently, Penny, Robyn and Cian all express a desire for 'more' from the College. They all see opportunities for the College to be more consistent, transparent and proactive. Cian's discussion of the College reveals some anti-academia and anti-intellectualism undertones- with the learning experienced by STs in HEIs represented as lacking value and practical application. There are several references to the fluctuating quality of STs. His perception of STs varies from a focus on their range of abilities to a commentary on their attitudes and levels of preparedness.

Cian recognises some benefits of SP including how it facilitates his own practices however there is more of a focus on the challenges including unclear expectations, excessive paperwork and unrealistic practical expectations. The tone of the narrative is informal, at times verging on aggressive. There is a pointed lack of engagement with 'Teaching Council' language such as the use of 'School Placement Tutor' instead of 'Inspector' or 'School Placement' instead of 'Teaching Practice.' Repetition is used frequently to emphasise certain points such as the disinterest in engaging with HEI facilitated training.

There are multiple references by Cian to the poor practices of other partners, or a lack of value attached to their roles. The tone is edging towards confrontational and is

broadly defensive. On consideration of the fact that this group is often negatively described by other groups, this is unsurprising. Cian expresses the benefits of having a ST in the classroom in very practical terms; focusing on the time that is freed up for the class teacher as the primary advantage and any reciprocal learning as secondary. This reflects a disinterest in the pedagogical and professional purpose of SP or the potential for professional development. Overall, the narrative reveals a complex perspective of SP. There is some appreciation of practical benefits and opportunities for professional growth, but the frustration of administrative burdens, unclear expectations and impractical requirements is more evident. There is also an emphasis on the need for respect for the CT role and a clear preference for autonomy in the teaching role.

Part B: The Partnership Triad

Meet the Partnership Triad: Luna, Tadgh, Oisín and Hannah. They recount their experience of partaking in the story of partnership in SP, linking it with the continuum of professional development. Luna and Tadgh are unit narratives and Oisín and Hannah are case narratives. I have included the two case vignettes as the AF group engaged in the most sustained data generation process which resulted in the compiling of the detailed case vignettes as described in the methodologies chapter.

Oisín and Hannah

Oisín, a member of the AF, obtained his doctorate in 2021 and came to the College via the 'Academic' route. He has a keen interest in teacher education, academia, teacher - researcher identity and social-emotional learning. At the time of the research, he occupied a module lead role in core classroom pedagogy within the College but also undertook the SPT role during placements. His perspective is particularly interesting due to the convergence of these different roles and functions: educator, assessor, leader and academic. Oisín chose to use voice recordings for his DEAR responses and extracts from these were interwoven into the narrative derived from the SSI. The use of voice recording was helpful in facilitating analysis of tone. The vignette narrative was selected due to the richness of content, the fact that many of the opinions expressed are similar to those of other members of the AF and for comparison purposes with Hannah.

Hannah is a member of AF who has worked with the College for several years, including as Adjunct Faculty and as a SPT. She returned to study as a mature student at master's level, having already taught as a class teacher and held posts of responsibility. She has a wealth of school and classroom experience and knows SPTs well as professional colleagues, having worked with many of them in a variety of contexts over the years. Hannah has a module lead role but works primarily in supporting students prepare for School Placement. Her DEAR responses were in writing and have also been interwoven with her SSI responses.

Chapter Five: The School Principal

Luna: A Busy Professional

I believe strongly in respectful partnership between the school, staff, board of management, Parents Council and student body. The optimum is achieved for any educational institution through partnership. Partnership and the opportunities afforded by networking with schools and the local community are integral to my work and key to collaborative practices. In placement, I would say I mostly currently experience the partnership through the conversations with the inspector which can be very supportive. Especially when a student is struggling, and they come to me to discuss this. I'm open to more partnership with the Colleges. I will say that communication from the Colleges can be very frustrating. Principals are extremely busy people and schools are constantly demanding on the principal's time. Multiple, long emails are not helpful and not likely to be read. What I want is somewhere to go when I need advice, or something goes wrong. Or a summary of what the student needs to do, how they will be assessed, what our role is. That sort of practical communication is much better than all of this over-the-top rhetoric. Maybe a representative could come down from the College and talk to schools or to our leadership and management team. If Colleges take the time to understand our leadership system and how partnership could fit within it, then that would be very beneficial.

Allocating a ST to a class depends on a number of items; you need to be careful as there can be a conflict of interests. Some teachers don't like taking students and I wouldn't be inclined to put pressure on anyone. I talk to the teachers to establish if they want one. I have teachers who will- for a variety of reasons- never take a student. I also have teachers- very good teachers- who I know would not be quite right for the role and might not be the best support for the student.

You can get very good insights from students as to what is happening in education and the curriculum and new theories. Some think it is too much work or have been burnt before. I know some very good teachers who would not be the right fit for this role. Excellent teachers but with a strong sense of how they like to run their classroom. Taking a student into the

school can give established teachers a new lease of life. I think it is good now the way that students are helping out with extracurricular activities and getting involved in the school a bit. They are rising out of the world of the classroom and the CT. However, I do feel students are not as resilient as they used to be post pandemic. It is rare, but sometimes the relationship with the class teacher doesn't work for whatever reason- and the student needs to be able to stand up and deal with that. Or sometimes they don't see the big picture- like how to talk to parents or how parents will react to things they say or do- that is a huge part of teaching- and sometimes I think students only plan in the short term and forget about all the issues outside of the classroom.

While I am broadly open to the idea of networking with organisations and people in education, I'm not sure who leads that. There are mixed feelings in schools and on staff about the role of the TC and the payment of the fee. I would like to see them more hands on in promoting the profession and the status of the profession and perhaps SP is a way they could do this.

Although I would say I have mostly had very positive experiences of taking students on for placement, there are challenges, which could be addressed in the system at a wider level than the individual school. I think you need to be cognisant of getting the balance right between helping the system and looking out for the school. We get far more applicants than we have places and sometimes I have to put my pragmatic hat on. If I think a student can fill a gap and help the school, then I will take them on but if I get the sense that they will need a lot of handholding then no- this might not be the place for them. Overall, placements are a very positive experience for the schools, and we are happy to help out the system and support students when we can.

Chapter Six: The Newly Qualified Teacher

Tadgh: Looking Back and Looking Forward

Being quite new to a school I think partnership is important with the staff and becoming part of the culture of the school. I remember that as a student it was really nice when a school made an effort to make you feel welcome or the principal came to talk to you and that felt like partnership. The SPTs were mostly very friendly and helpful, maybe they were partners but more mentors I suppose. So I certainly didn't have any great sense of being part of a partnership network or anything formal- but looking back now- I can see how I probably was to some degree.

SP has had a big impact on my continuum of professional development, I think. I still use elements of the planning- not to the same detail- but I needed to experience that to know how to do it well. I guess now I would use AI a bit to help with the planning, but I have that experience from SP to fall back on. I would wonder do STs now use AI a bit too much? I think they must be tempted to- so does that make assessing the planning a bit pointless?

SP showed me what I might like to do more of and more importantly what I really don't like. So, I thought I would really like teaching in a particular type of school, similar to the one I went to. But I had a really negative experience of it on SP and it did put me off. So, I would say that SP impacted the type of school I would teach in. I did enjoy researching some areas and I think that has made me think about what I might like to focus on in a few years. I am interested in education and teacher education so maybe in a few years I would like to explore that. I guess I think I am in quite a good place because I am close enough to SP to look back on it but I am looking forward to my next steps too.

I remember we were under so much assessment pressure that it was hard to focus on anything else. Like I really wanted to get involved in extra- curricular stuff- and the College was encouraging us to do that- but when? I had so much planning to do. So, I think if the partnership thing is going to really work then there needs to be time set aside for it- outside the classroom time.

I still remember how stressful placement could be and the CT could have a huge impact on that. I think communication skills are massive for the CT. Mostly, my CTs were supportive and

helpful but when they weren't it made the placement really challenging and mentally stressful. I know some of my friends had really awful experiences- like genuinely highly stressful and upsetting. I would be very open to taking on the role of CT. Or I think I could even help out now in some type of mentoring role. I think I would be methodical, arrange time to speak with the student and provide good feedback. I would expect a certain standard in my classroom, and I would set high expectations. The SPTs were usually very helpful, they gave some really good advice and feedback but I'm not sure that everyone had a very consistent experience- I got lucky mostly with mine, I think.

So far, I haven't had a huge amount of experience with the TC but I think it is important to have a professional body, so I am glad it exists. Maybe they could play a bigger role in guiding schools or setting standards. I don't feel that I have engaged with the TC enough at this stage to know what else they could provide.

I'd say SP works fairly well as it is, but it was hugely stressful. It works really well some of the time, decently most of the time and can be a nightmare occasionally. I don't know, maybe it has to be stressful, or maybe more supports could be put in place. But schools are so busy, I am not sure the capacity is there to do that. I think it would have to come from the College.

Chapter Seven: The Academic Faculty

Oisín: Partnership As Flawed

I was considering the theme of partnership in SP and the relationship between universities, providers and schools and you know, it's certainly a partnership in my experience. It's a partnership, in very simplistic terms because it includes working together, working with students and mentoring and being an SPT and entering schools and speaking to principals and CT and so on. But the degree to which that partnership is equally shared, or I suppose the parameters or concept, or understanding is a little unclear or at least from my perspective. And sometimes, it is more one way - from the institution to the school and more of a practical partnership - in that way it is perhaps not living up to what it is supposed to do.

So, I have a concept of what partnership should entail, how it appears to me but I'm sure my idea is different to others. I'm sure it is different perhaps to a CT for example and it's different to a principal and they are different from each other! Teachers and principals have valuable experience, and they are further along in teacher identity formation than the student. And yes, they have that professional knowledge, but they are not the source of all knowledge. So, SP is a partnership, but the definition of partnership is probably unclear and it's not an equal partnership. But that is understandable in terms of the position the ST finds themselves in. They can feel inferior to the 'knowing other.' So, a partnership but a flawed one.

Right now, I think the role the CT plays is minor. It will take a re-imagining of the role, not just changing the name, to change that. So, there is a relationship between the educational provider and the school - they agree they are working together, that the school would take students, help qualify and train them up. It's a pretty basic idea of partnership. There's a relationship, an agreement, an understanding. It might go a little deeper sometimes but generally it doesn't as far as I can see. You know, CTs might give moral support, a kind of pastoral support, but maybe that's not there always. Sometimes a

student doesn't have that to guide them and support them and they're left floundering a little bit.

To my knowledge, there has been very little change in SP in Ireland. I could probably say for 20 years, maybe it goes back even further to the conception of ITE. Resistance to change would lie where it historically lies, so you could compare what happens to the UK, the CT role is far more forefront than it is in our model. The CT plays a minor role here. In the UK, they act as mentors in an explicit way. They can give formative feedback at least which is very useful, because you know, you hear how the student is so receptive to what they have to say on the ground. So, in the UK, they're part of assessment and able to highlight when students are failing or need additional support. In Ireland, the ST is an extra body, the class teacher is freed up.

Whereas in the Irish model, its disjointed, the SPT sees the ST for one or two lessons. I'm not locked into this view, but I believe we need to question - is it a fair way to assess, to get that broader picture - just that snapshot? The SPT assesses in terms of standards, but they have areas they are interested in - there is some bias maybe there. I think there's a more equitable way, but I am rambling. There is the idea too of what the student can do for the school, the research and updated pedagogy they can bring - I'm not sure that potential is fulfilled. I haven't seen brilliant examples of that. Schools could maybe more formally put in place key functions of the Co-operating Teacher.

For a true partnership, a more equitable version needs to be created. That would probably take a seismic shift in the way SP models are provided in Ireland. I suppose for it to function as a meaningful first step in the continuum of professional development, the model would need to function better at a system level. SP is obviously the cornerstone of professional development, so change, if change is going to happen, needs to be systematic. It is the Teaching Council that would ultimately make that change. That is where the responsibility for change comes in if change is to happen. Partnership is a relationship but there are alternative ways to describe SP. It is ultimately not the only way to describe it and possibly not the best or most comprehensive way either. The idea of partnership is actually problematic because the roles and responsibilities need to be defined, re-worded and clarified.

Hannah: All Going in the Same Direction

I understand partnership as being when we are all going in the same direction. Whereas because SP is an assessed period, it's very hard to imagine a partnership where we are all doing that. Tension exists in placement because the student is focusing on an assessment whereas the CT is focusing on their pupils in the class and their welfare. Maybe they are both, in the best of cases also focused on making that student into the best teacher they can be but mostly there are different agendas. So, the agenda for the ST; It is obviously going to be outcomes for the pupils, but primarily it's the outcome for them. It's about their result that they're going to get on SP, it is very high stakes for them and so those agendas can be competing.

CTs don't see mentoring STs as actually part of the role, it is happening but just from anecdotal evidence and my own observations, it would be happening in 50 to 60 percent of situations. There are a significant number of teachers who just see the ST as an opportunity to get on with other things, maybe to pick up and catch up with a small group of pupils, and basically their attitude is that if it is supposed to support the development of the student teacher it is the responsibility of the HEI. They don't want to be involved in assessing or anything like that. But for the really good students who do really well, nine times out of ten, they will have an exceptional CT who demonstrates innovative practice. For these students, there is collaboration, support, that joy of wanting to learn together. They bounce off each other, they feed from one another. I think the impact of the CT and the outcome for the ST is very significant. Teachers can be afraid of maybe being overly dominating in, you know, insisting that the student does things the way they do them and things. But others can have this attitude, "oh, we all had to get through it." So, I do think that we have to be judicious in the manner in which we interpret what schools say.

A lot of the time the ST has very limited agency, and it's very much, "I want you to do this, you must do this." To me, that is a very hierarchical relationship, where the CT is saying to the student, 'Yes, I'm going to have you in my class, I'm delighted to have you, but you're going to play by my rules'. I'd say in at least half of cases, there is a hierarchical relationship with the class teacher as very much seeing themselves in charge. And you know, we (the

Colleges) are always telling students they're a guest in the school. In the less ambitious students, it can lead to robotic repetition of what the class teacher says.

In the Irish system, it's all very ad hoc and it's very much dependent on the culture of the school, nothing is really formal or systematic. So SP is based on what is happening in the school anyway- very little is evidence based. It's different in the UK and Scotland where CTs have lists and tasks and criteria to meet.

I suppose the TC has a very clear vision of SP, but I don't think it's operationalised because that needs system wide change including current teachers who are in schools, and including principals. While the TC has a wider vision than maybe a school or HEI will have, they need to bring school principals and the schools on board initially to say, 'Okay, what are the opportunities for you in terms of school placement? What are the barriers? What are the threats? How can we develop this, so we have a greater partnership between the HEI and the school?'

There was huge resistance to Droichead at its initial stages...change is never popular. I lived through years of trying to introduce Droichead and trying to pull it away from the inspectorate and how very slowly that acceptance happened. I was at an INTO meeting and I saw the change in opinions starting to happen. The positive stories started to be shared. So, I think if changes are going to happen with SP, the TC has to get the unions on board. Many teachers see the TC as very remote but see a connection with the unions.

I think maybe the first people who have to change their mindset is the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council should put the onus on the partners to enact real change. The Teaching Council needs to initiate systematic change, similar to what happened in Scotland.

The pandemic did help innovation with regard to reflection and delving deeply into the planning and getting students to justify what they were doing, but I suppose you didn't actually see the practical implications of it. In the end, we need to do what we can for the students; to empower them and to enable them to be agentic.

Chapter Eight: Summary of the Partnership Triad

Luna describes partnership on a systematic level more than the other Partnership Triad groups. Her narrative embodies a willingness to discuss the concept of partnership, and she uses very positive language focused on the communication and social aspects, such as *'collaborative'* *'supportive'* and *'respectful'* to describe it. Partnership is praised in terms of the value it brings to schools and the potential for networking with another organisation. Luna emphasises a willingness and openness to engaging with STs, but it is notable that the expectation is on students to initiate this engagement and there is an assumption that it will only be required where students are struggling in their placement. The nature of this engagement is not expanded upon. Luna expresses frustration with communication from colleges. Unlike the CTs, she does not question the accuracy or existence of the communication but is frustrated by how formulaic it feels. Although she is willing to engage with other institutions such as HEIs, it is apparent that she will be reciprocal rather than an initiator and that any engagement must be evidently beneficial to the school and easily maintained.

Luna's narrative on the CT is complex. She does not refer to them by the title 'CT' but instead uses the word 'teacher' - despite being given the term CT in the initial question. She expresses caution and concern regarding the allocation of a CT, focusing both on the wellbeing of the CT and the ST. However, despite this, there is a pronounced lack of process or written procedure to guide the decisions as to how to allocate STs to CTs. A desire not to 'rock the boat' with staff is apparent and some of the cautious language used by principals suggests that some teachers might be too set in their ways to be put in a position of authority over a student.

The function of Luna as a school leader is apparent in her language. The language is primarily formal but with a marked focus on communication, relationships and the appreciation of process. The role of the TC in SP is briefly touched upon and a sense of ill-ease around the specific purpose and benefit of the Council is expressed, and an element of mistrust is apparent. However, a cautious acknowledgement is made that the TC could possibly provide systematic support, structure or guidance to SP.

Tadgh offers a balanced discussion of his own experiences of SP as primarily positive but hampered by the wider inconsistencies of the SP experiences, particularly in relation to the CT role, the impact of different types of schools on assessable performance and the level of accessible support. Tadgh also links SP and the experiences of SP directly to his professional development decisions. He cites how it impacted practical decisions such as what schools to interview for but also higher-level decisions such as types of research to engage with. Consequently, the link between SP and professional development, professional decision-making and establishing professional practices is much more evident in Tadgh's vignette than the other groups.

Partnership is discussed by Tadgh in terms of the potential for support and to alleviate stress. The words 'stress', 'stressful' or 'stressed' are used repeatedly; primarily regarding the experience of being assessed by an SPT and secondarily in relation to excessive written work, specifically lesson planning. He does not argue against the need for high assessment standards but rather focuses on what he sees as the unnecessary elements which add to the negative experiences and pressurised environment. The potential of AI going forward to address some of these pressures is cautiously welcomed however there is an evident expressed concern that this may lead to short cuts being taken by STs.

The ability of other groups to impact - either positively or negatively on the experience of SP is expressed strongly by Tadgh, with a particular focus on the CT and SPT role. Although as an NQT Tadgh is very close to the firsthand experience of the pressures of SP, and is clearly still impacted by them, there is an evident sense that schools cannot be tasked with taking on too many additional roles in supporting STs. The language used by Tadgh is generally cautious and slightly formal. A lot of qualifying words are used to express doubt and a reliance on the experience of others. As a character in the story of SP, Tadgh positions himself in a very secondary role, despite the fact that he is at a point in his career where he is making decisions about his continuum of professional development.

In the next section, I use the narrative structure described in the Methodologies Chapter to summarise Oisín and Hannah's vignettes.

Act One

Although Oisín confirms that SP is a form of partnership, he qualifies this by describing it as limited in scope, implementation, and efficacy. He pitches his definition of partnership as something fluid and under consideration. Oisín also expresses low level concerns that he may not represent the views of others across the system, although his definition is very similar to that offered by other AF. The language Hannah uses, asserts her definition of partnership with some confidence, linking partnership very specifically to a shared-agenda and pointing to differing priorities of partners in the current placement model. While Oisín defines partnership as ‘flawed’ with in-built inequality, Hannah goes further by identifying competing agendas. Across the AF participants varying degrees of concern for fairness and equity of a partnership system were expressed - varying from unintentional unfairness due to lack of consistency or clarity or flaws in the model, similar to Oisín’s narrative, to more fundamental problems with partnership as a practicable concept such as assessor bias or opposing priorities, similar to Hannah’s narrative.

Act Two

Oisín makes several qualifying remarks before giving his impressions of the role of the CT. Like other members of the AF, his language may express some professional caution around critiquing peers. However, his assessment of the role in its current format reflects a concern over a lack of consistency in fulfilling obligations. Hannah states with some sense of authority that CTs do not see mentoring as part of their role. She uses (unsubstantiated) statistics to give her words weight although she does qualify that the evidence is anecdotal or based on her own observations. Hannah makes the assertion that a CT, and the relationship with that teacher, can have a significant impact on grade achievement, linking this particularly with the high performing students. All AF expressed concerns regarding a minimum of two of the following: 1) the implementation of aspects of the CT role, 2) inconsistencies in quality of CT, 3) lack of training or required standards for CTs and 4) potential for input into formative assessment, communication skills or collaborative practices. The AF were generally cautious of using language which might imply blame at

the level of individuals and spoke to issues within the system, regulation and supports. When instances of poor individual practice were cited, this was always contextualised by statements regarding how infrequent this negative practice was.

Act Three

Oisín uses a comparison with international practice to critique the practices of CTs in Ireland. This enables him to distance the comments from a personal level and pitch the concerns as system level and historically grounded. Hannah also makes an international comparison with practice abroad in order to emphasise the *ad hoc* nature of placement in Ireland. Although none of the AF were specifically asked to compare practices in Ireland with international practices, all participants chose to do so. Additionally, in all cases, Ireland was seen to have 'less' than others: less formality, less structure, less training, less consistency. Oisín also uses the international comparison to critique the lack of change in SP in Ireland. This sentiment of a system in stagnation was widely expressed across AF participants. Oisín references the CT again, finding their lack of formal assessor role noteworthy. He also brings the potential lack of fairness in assessment by SPTs into consideration.

Hannah makes more specific reference to organisational impacts on SP, notably the TC and the INTO. She positions the former as having a role to play in the functionalising of its vision of SP, particularly through better consultation and the latter as being a means to enabling this collaboration and 'buy in.' AF participants generally expressed themselves with clarity and some degree of confidence that their opinions were grounded in experience and theoretical knowledge however this was less evident with regard to the TC. Hannah is the most outspoken in her assessment of this body, with most AF either expressing some doubts as to its efficacy or mild approval of its sentiments on partnership.

Act Four

Oisín comes full circle in his definition of partnership in SP by concluding that it is ultimately neither comprehensive nor fully accurate. His use of language at this point is less guarded and more direct, suggesting that the course of the conversation may have impacted his opinions. Hannah concludes with a single example of innovation in placement specific to the pandemic context and asserts that agency and empowerment of the student are key aims of placement. Similarly to Oisín, she has returned to an early point of discussion, in her case 'agency.'

Overview

Oisín and Hannah maintain a relatively formal tone throughout their narratives. Their familiarity with the language of School Placement is evident. Hannahs' more 'hands-on' experience of working directly with schools and students is apparent in her tendency to cite specific examples or speak directly to her own experiences whereas Oisín tends more towards broader commentary. The slightly guarded tone of both narratives and propensities towards qualifying statements, is less evident when the participants can remove or distance the personal or peer aspects, for example in comparisons to international practice or historically grounded circumstances. This speaks to the professional vulnerability of participants critiquing their colleagues and organisations which may have some authority over them.

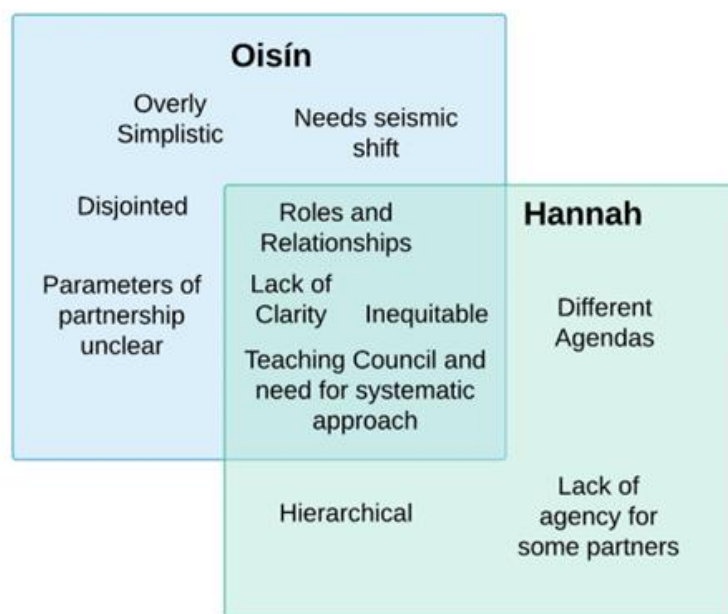


Figure : 6-1 Partnership in SP: The AF

Epilogue and Conclusion

The story of partnership in SP is one whereby the characters expressed varying degrees of vulnerabilities, guardedness and uncertainty in the understanding of their own role and that of other partners. Going forward, there is an almost universal desire to take what is good in SP and build something better and a general consensus that this will involve a level of commitment which needs to be accommodated differently. The primary tension in the story comes from the interplay of the high stakes and pressurised assessment demands placed on the most vulnerable member of the partnership, the ST, and the lack of consensus on the role of the partner who is most immediately part of their experience, the CT. The conceptualisation, actualisation, facilitation and implementation of the role of the CT have emerged as fraught but in urgent need of review.

The Discussion Chapter which follows brings us back to the tripartite framework of partnership, perspectives and professional development in order to discuss the findings in detail. By integrating these components, the chapter underscores both the connections and divergences in participants' professional viewpoints, as well as the role of SP in shaping their evolving identities as educators.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this Discussion Chapter is to interpret the findings through the lens of the 3 Ps: partnership, perspectives and professional development, and to address the research questions. The first part of the chapter focuses on the themes and the 3 Ps, and the latter part emphasises the perceptions of the participants by other partners. This is done within the context of the literature engaged with primarily through the Context Chapter and the Literature Review Chapter. This approach facilitates an exploration of the participants' experiences of partnership through SP, in initiating a career-long continuum of professional development. By interweaving these elements, the chapter aims to highlight the interconnectedness and disconnections of the participants' professional perspectives and the influence of SP on their evolving identities as educators. Furthermore, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how SP contributes to the development of professional competencies, highlighting the unfilled capacity for the fostering of collaborative relationships through partnership in SP. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the potentially pivotal role SP could play in shaping the participants' professional trajectories and identifies key factors to address from the findings in order to facilitate this vision of SP.

7.1 School Placement as Working Integrated Learning

In the context of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) within ITE, the literature highlights that the primary aim of WIL is the professional socialisation of STs, alongside offering preparation for the challenges of a diverse and rapidly changing work environment (Jackson et al., 2023). However, the findings affirm the primarily political nature of SP (Fitzpatrick, 2021) as a complex model based in the specific historical,

political and socio-economic context described in the Context Chapter. As such, the significance attached to SP by the majority of the participants in the findings, with the notable exception of the CTs, confirms the assertions within the literature that SP is seen by many participants in education as the most important aspect of ITE (Grudnoff, 2011) but is limited in its efficacy to act as WIL by the lack of clarity felt by participants in a wide variety of key aspects. The following areas of ambiguity in SP as WIL emerged from the findings:

1) Role Confusion: The confusion expressed by participants regarding the purpose and fulfilment of their own roles, as well as those of other partners.

2) Inconsistency: The lack of consistency in the definition and understanding of partnership within SP.

3) Disconnections: The disconnections between each of the groups at individual and institutional level.

4) Responsibility Ambiguity: The lack of clarity regarding where responsibility for the organisation, facilitation and decision-making for SP sits.

5) Policy Disinterest: The disinterest in and lack of reference to the policy or guidelines for SP from the DE or TC.

6) Varied Perspectives: The variety of perspectives regarding the efficacy of SP as a first step in the continuum of professional development.

These areas of ambiguity cast doubt on the accuracy of defining SP as a form of WIL. The focus of SP sits with observational learning in addition to the practical, hands-on experiences of the classroom. The re-labelling of SP as such by the TC, forsaking the label of Teaching Practice, emphasises the broader context of SP as professional relationship building within the wider context of the school community. Despite this, the ST participants placed very little emphasis on the whole school aspect of their placement and primarily valued the practical experiences of the classroom alongside the mentoring received from the CT and SPT. Principals emerged as interested in supporting SP but from the periphery as a benevolent facilitator. Consequently, SP has

emerged from the findings as an ill-defined concept and poorly articulated practice with an overabundance of broad aims.

7.3 A Summary of the Key Findings to Inform Discussion and Themes

The findings from the previous two chapters are synthesised below in relation to the research questions and expanded upon across the course of this chapter. The launch pads, themes and sub-categories are summarised in the table in Appendix 15. This Discussion Chapter clearly articulates and foregrounds the research findings by critically engaging with the data in light of the conceptual framework and relevant literature. It draws out nuanced interpretations, highlights patterns and tensions, and situates the voices of participants at the centre of the analysis.

Is School Placement accurately defined as partnership?

The Concept of Partnership

- SP was broadly experienced across the continuum as adequately facilitated within SoPs
- The notion of 'partnership' emerged as fluid and contested across roles
- Participants articulated divergent understandings of partnership, shaped by their roles and positionalities
- AF demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the theoretical underpinning of partnership and the need for criticality in the application of partnership as a model to SP
- They simultaneously expressed the greatest scepticism regarding its practical enactment
- Partnership and roles within partnership were often experienced as imposed or peripheral to key duties and responsibilities
- Partnership was generally not perceived as anchored to policy or a policy context
- This disconnect between conceptual ideals and operational realities signals a need for a more coherent and policy-aligned articulation of partnership in SP

The Language of Partnership

- The rhetoric of a shared vision was not experienced as the current reality which was identified as focused on the individual
- Some confusion emerged over terminology and language in SP and partnership

ST Agency/Power in Partnership

- STs emerged as feeling agentic but expressed this in very immediate, limited and assessment-orientated terms
- STs lacked interest in sustained engagement with SP beyond the immediate role and risk-taking was experienced as discouraged by the current SP model
- A pervasive theme was the imbalance of power, particularly the mistrust expressed by CTs towards STs, which constrained opportunities for innovation and risk-taking

What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?

Key, Secondary and Minor Characters

- Participants' narratives positioned them variably within the SP ecosystem—as key, secondary, or minor characters—based on their perceived authority, responsibility, and investment
- While consensus placed STs at the centre of SP, roles such as principals and NQTs were marginalised, despite their potential to enrich the process.
- Participants agreed across roles that the ST role sits at the heart of SP
- Principals and NQTs emerged as minor characters in the story of SP with an untapped potential for expansion of their input and responsibilities
- The AF expressed a lack of confidence in how their role was perceived by others
- SPTs and STs occupy a fractious space between HEIs and SoPs, constantly negotiating their positionality within each

Division of Labour: Roles and Responsibilities

- The overburdened nature of some roles, unsupported by the necessary structures of professional development came to the fore
- This was particularly evident in relation to the CT
- The value of establishing reciprocal gain within and between roles in a partnership model for SP was evident

Perceptions and Valuing of 'the Other'

- A dichotomy between the value attached to the CT role and the distrust attached to it in relation to how it is fulfilled by some CTs was expressed
- A lack of understanding and valuing of 'the other' across roles came to the fore
- A lack of demonstration of trust, perception of equality or accountability as established practice was expressed

Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

Supporting Developing Professionalism

- The lack of points of progression linked to SP roles in the continuum of professional development hindered the perception of SP support roles as a route to professional progress
- Doubt was expressed across groups as to the existence of a clearly defined and enabled continuum linked to SP

Reflective Practices in SP Guiding Career Decisions

- The concept of reflection informing career decisions was popular amongst principals, NTS and CTs
- NQTs expressed reflection as one of the weakest aspects of SP
- AF differed widely in their perceptions of what good reflective practices in SP entailed

Encouraging and Supporting Creativity and Diversity Through School Placement

- An emergent picture of a lack of trust in ST abilities since the COVID pandemic arose
- Risk-taking in SP was discouraged by the burden of assessment
- Tendency to treat the ST-CT relationship as an apprenticeship, with mirroring by the former of the latter

7.4 An Informal Model of School Placement-Struggling to Meet Changing Needs

The Literature Review highlighted the fact that despite the widely accepted crucial role of SP within ITE, it has suffered from a lack of innovation and creativity (Beck and Kosnik, 2002, Mitchell et al., 2023, OECD, 2021, Doyle et al., 2024). The literature does not probe the reasons for this in great detail, primarily citing the historical context of the primary education system and the protectionist stance towards Irish culture and specifically the Irish language. The literature highlights the risk of the traditional goodwill towards SP within the education system beginning to wane (O'Doherty & Harford, 2016). This concern has been echoed by the participants emphasising intensifying and escalating challenges within the education system serving as competing factors on their time.

All participant groups strongly expressed how time poor they felt and those participants functioning within SoPs were particularly emphatic regarding the wide variety of factors placing demands on their attention in rapidly diversifying classrooms. Although these SoP-based participants primarily placed the burden of action on the HEIs to address the demands they are facing as busy professionals, I would propose that the significant pressures faced by educators in responding to diversifying classrooms confirms the extent of the wider issue of a lack of diversity in the teaching profession noted across this research. ST exposure to diversity within their lived experiences remains very limited. The stark figures presented by Leavy (2005) confirm this point: 59% of STs in his study had little or no exposure to Irish travellers, 65% had never met a refugee or asylum seeker and 20% had never had a conversation with someone who was not Irish. Consequently, for educators to feel empowered to welcome diversity both within the classroom and within the profession, HEIs will need to conduct significant reviews of their programme content and delivery around diversity and consider carefully how they will work with SoPs to provide appropriate opportunities to experience diversity in their teaching. As the literature notes, programmes and programme structures have previously remained structurally unchanged for decades (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016). However, in a rapidly changing society there is a need for a more responsive model of teacher education. To avoid a superficial approach, this will require input from the TC of a

more detailed and research-based nature than has heretofore been evident from this body.

7.5 An Inconsistent Model of School Placement

The majority of the participants in this research spoke positively about the potential for SP in broad terms, at its best, to provide rich learning and professional experiences for STs. However, they also expressed concerns about its susceptibility to inconsistencies in practice. As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, Hall et al. (2018) noted that SP continues to struggle to meet diversifying needs. The report outlined key implications for enhancing effectiveness and consistency in SP as including reducing variability and promoting joint inquiries and reflective practices across HEIs and schools to support continuous teacher learning. The report also points to the need to integrate SP with other teacher education processes like Droichead and Cosán. In the 7 years since the publication of this report, there has been little progress on these points, as is confirmed by the participants in this research repeating concerns regarding inconsistency, lack of collaboration and surface level reflective practices. The traditional mode of operation pursued by the TC of issuing broad guidelines and leaving the enactment and details to the HEIs and SoPs has been ineffective, and this clearly indicates a need for a better structured and clearly articulated model of collaboration and partnership within SP going forward.

7.5.1 Collaborative Practices Across Groups

Comparing the responses of different participant groups, the inconsistency in SP appears to be at least partially due to a lack of opportunities for different partner groups to learn from and with each other. Most participant groups expressed a willingness to engage more frequently and deeply with others, but this was countered by an undercurrent of reluctance to take on any additional workload. Sitting alongside this lack of formal or informal interaction points between participants was the disinterest displayed by some groups-most notably the CTs-in the contributions of other groups. To date, there has been limited research on how the different partners in SP perceive and value each other's roles. This inertia in understanding the practices

of other groups regarding SP acts as an initial barrier to true and sustained partnership. Although there is potential for policies, procedures and guidelines to address this barrier, the literature emphasises the continued cultural barriers which prevent partners from seeking out sustained engagement (King, 2019). The findings indicate additional barriers that contribute to apathy in collaborative engagement for SP:

1. **Resource Limitations:** Insufficient funding, staff, or material resources, leading to frustration and disengagement among partners.
2. **Lack of Training:** Without proper training and professional development, partners feel unprepared or overwhelmed.
3. **Resistance to Change:** Human nature often resists change, especially if the current system seems to work well enough.
4. **Inconsistent Leadership Support:** The lack of expressed support in educational leadership for any form of engagement which might draw attention away from already busy workloads.

7.6 The Role of Policy in School Placement

As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter and the Context Chapter, policy in ITE has often been based in either the promotion of the status of the profession or economic-based decisions related to the government of the day (Herron, 2020). For policies to be effective, particularly where there are multiple voices, they need a clearly articulated common grounding (Zeichner, 2010). The possibility for the TC to create a more structured framework for SP was not highlighted by any participant group as a solution to the current informality or apathy to change. The review of the TC policies and guidelines in the Literature Review Chapter indicates a strong rationale for a lack of trust in the abilities of the TC to be impactful through policy. The TC documentation lacks precise definitions of roles and responsibilities, specific criteria for the enactment of those roles or any detailed requirements for engaging with professional development to support partners in their roles. The TC documentation also fails to provide details on how STs (as opposed to qualified teachers) should be assessed for FtP and what procedures should be followed where concerns are raised. In point of fact, the TC has continued to follow the informal and goodwill-based approach, by frequently pushing the decisions around the details of

SP supports back onto the HEIs and SoPs. The comparison of the revised School Placement Guidelines (2021) with the previous version showcased the failed opportunity to provide partners with a detailed framework within which to function. Many of the participants expressed a disinterest, bordering on distrust in the TC which is unsurprising given the fact that the professional body has not produced a single document which provides all partners with a clear set of steps to complete in the fulfilment of their roles or supports on what to do when they encounter issues with SP. The fact that the SPWG (2019) has not resulted in the formation of a single network of SPTs, despite some initial progress, is indicative of an inertia and reluctance in the system to make widespread changes or to give autonomy to a centralised system. The pragmatic stance of many educators within SoPs (Sexton, 2017), which emphasises the immediate concerns of the class and school environment, has also contributed towards apathy around the efficacy of policies and guidelines. Therefore, for policies to have impact, they will need to be consultative, detailed and inclusive of implementation plans. There will also be a need for an institutionalisation of policies, where HEIs and SoPs dedicate time and resources towards the interpretation and implementation of said policies (O’Grady, 2017). In addition, the aims of those policies need to be mutually agreed, cohesively achievable and co-created by all partner groups (Kruger et al., 2009).

7.7 The COVID Pandemic: A Missed Opportunity

The changes made during the COVID pandemic and lauded as innovative by the DE (Innovation Report, 2021), were short-lived despite some clear financial, time-saving and reflective-practices linked advantages. The potential for the pandemic to create a ‘transformative shift’ (O’Ceallaigh & Connolly, 2024) has not been evident in these findings. This was particularly notable from the lack of value attached to post-pandemic learning by many participants. While the TC SP Innovation Report (2021) not only notes but assumes a level of innovation in SP post COVID pandemic, the findings confirm the vulnerability of SP in the face of the requirement for immediate change as noted by Young et al. (2022). They also affirm that the potential for technology to create radical changes in SP highlighted by some of the literature (O’Grádaigh et al., 2021) has not been realised. The potential for the COVID pandemic

to act as an instigator for disorientating dilemmas (Meirow, 1981) and radical change, was not referenced by any of the participants.

These findings have emphasised that the plethora of moving parts involved in SP and the wide range of perspectives on how best to conduct SP, have contributed towards an inertia in orchestrating impactful change. The literature points towards a complex historically based system of placement, built upon networks of informal relationships and a protectionist stance towards the Irish language (Heinz & Fleming, 2019). The experiences of partners have confirmed that this goodwill-based approach continues to be the predominant experience. However, they also reveal a level of dissatisfaction with this approach, linked primarily with concerns regarding the lack of transparency of assessment practices and supports and the lack of consistency of the ST experience, particularly the SoP-based aspects. Although the concept of coming together to support the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards within the teaching profession through a good functioning placement model is something which was universally accepted by all groups as important, the assumption of agreement as to what 'good functioning' looks like, how it is experienced and how it is assessed as such, was hindered by a lack of clarity or consensus on roles and responsibilities, particularly that of the CT. The inconsistencies in SP practices noted by the Hall report (Hall et al., 2018) have been borne out by the diversity of experiences and perspectives of SP and the abundance of interpretations of how partnership can facilitate SP. These indicate a need for a more embedded and systematic partnership framework (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016).

7.8 The Research Questions: Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development

7.8.1 Partnership

The complexity of the plethora of partnership models discussed most notably by Smith (2016), O'Grady (2017) and Farrell (2021b) and the lack of formalised structures around partnership emphasised by Hall et al. (2018) was born out in the confusion expressed by participants in how to 'be' a partner or recognise 'good' partnership. There was broad consensus in the findings across participants that SP could be defined as a partnership and that partnership was an adequate model to facilitate SP. Nonetheless,

the value of this broad consensus was undermined by the lack of clarity as to what partnership means in SP, which model of SP is most appropriate and how its efficacy could be improved. Rather than proving the accuracy or efficacy of the concept of partnership in SP, the consensus may point to a lack of critical engagement. This lack of criticality aligns with Smith's assertion that partnership needs to include an ongoing aspect-with partners coming together, keeping together and working together (Smith, 2016). Without a structure to facilitate this 'coming together' the partners found themselves isolated from other groups.

In comparing Halvorsen's criteria for 'true' partnership (Halvorsen, 2014) discussed previously in the Literature Review Chapter with the findings-it becomes evident that there are significant gaps in the current understanding of partnership within SP:

Intentionality	No group of participants expressed a strong intention of pursuing a shared goal. This has led to the expression of some tensions and concerns between groups with differing expectations.
(Un)Predictability	The allocation of blame due to the unpredictability of collaboration in partnership was evident in the findings, most particularly with regard to CTs. This has the potential to lead to relationship break downs and hinder formalisation of partnership.
Flexibility	The majority of participants did not express either the ability or willingness to go beyond a comfort zone and face and embrace unfamiliar contexts. This was evident in the fact that for many participants, their role for SP was a secondary role and not a priority.
Vitality	This concerns how one positions oneself in a partnership and self-understanding in terms of efficacy and agency.

Table : 7-1 True Partnership Criteria (Halvorsen, K. 2014)

An analysis of the findings has led to the development of additional criteria for 'true' partnership in the context of SP, adapting Halvorsen's model to the specific context of partnership in SP in Ireland and taking into account the findings of this research:

Transparency	Open and honest communication is essential. Sharing relevant information, decision-making processes, and intentions builds trust and fosters a collaborative environment. Transparency requires clarity of the enactment of policy and the requirements specific to roles and responsibilities.
Mutual Respect	Mutual respect across and within groups in SP is necessary to prevent an 'othering' of roles. Recognising and valuing each partner's contributions and perspectives is crucial for partnership in SP. Acknowledging differences and working towards a common goal strengthens the partnership. A forum for this mutual respect to be recognised within is required.
Accountability	Each partner should take responsibility for their actions and commitments and be required by well-articulated and collaboratively produced policies and implementation plans to do so. This includes meeting deadlines, fulfilling obligations, and being answerable for any setbacks.
Adaptability	The ability to adjust to changing circumstances, whether they be specific to the immediate environment, broader ITE conditions, or unforeseen challenges, ensures that the partnership remains resilient and effective. Further to 'flexibility', adaptability implies not only being able to respond appropriately to changes but to also plan deliberately, actively and agentically and put measures in place to enable adaptability within the partnership model. Educators require specific training to enhance adaptability in the face of increasing diversity.

Table : 7-2 New Criteria for True Partnership

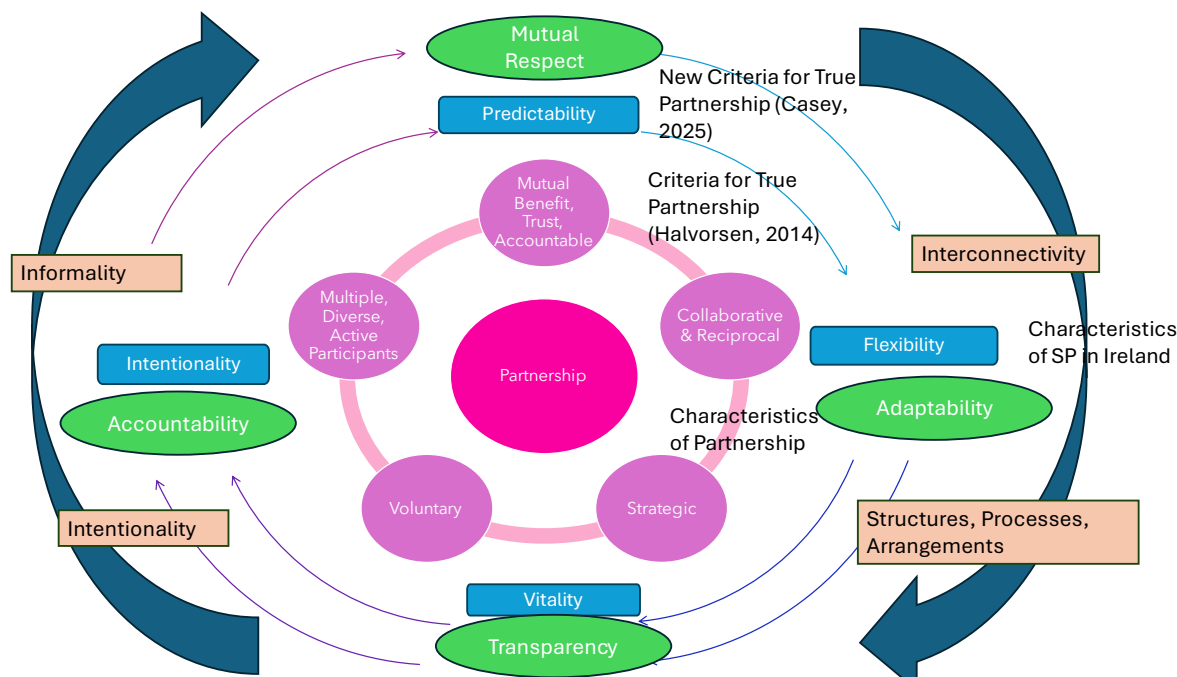


Figure : 7-1 Partnership in School Placement-Adaption of Halvorsen Model to Include New Criteria

SPTs emerged as placing the highest value on the ideology of partnership but also used the widest array of terms to define it. Fitzpatrick’s findings that the part-time nature of the SPT role contributes towards a complex sense of self-identity (Fitzpatrick, 2021), may partially explain this variety of perspectives. The Literature Review also pointed towards the self-identity of the SPT being primarily based in their experiences as a teacher and their established teacher identity (Sloan, 2023; Murray et al., 2011). However, the SPTs in this research demonstrated a strong sense of self-identity as educators of teachers and this was more notable than their classroom experience, thus diverting from what much of the literature currently asserts about this role (Sloan, 2023, Murray et al., 2011). Several SPTs noted the length of time since they had been teachers themselves. Therefore, my findings suggest that despite the complexity of the sense of self-identity of the SPT, it is specifically separate to that of a teacher. SPTs placed significant value on the mentoring aspect of their role and expressed a deep sense of responsibility regarding their contributions to the future of education. This ‘big picture’ view of their role was in stark contrast to the more immediate and context specific concerns on the CTs. SPTs came to the fore in the findings as occupying an important relational role between SoPs and HEIs. They were particularly concerned with power

imbalances within the partnership structure due to their dual mentorship and assessment roles.

CTs materialised as the only group who did not express a particular recognition or valuing of partnership in SP. Divergences between the levels of formality and the systematic approach to partnership across the groups arose - with principals valuing the formality and the potential for networking at a systematic but local level and AF, NQTs and STs seeing partnership as fluid, inconsistent and informal. There were a number of models of partnership presented in the Literature Review (Smith, 2016) but the only group to demonstrate a relatively clear understanding of these models and familiarity with the language used to describe them was the AF group. The AF group work directly in the space of SP and therefore some level of understanding would be expected. An undercurrent of insecurity was evident among the AF participants when asserting their opinions, especially regarding the roles of the CT and TC. This aligns with the lack of confidence in these roles as documented in the literature (Ritter, 2007) and reflects the nascent stage of AF identity (Murray & Male, 2005). From analysis of the findings, it is credible to conclude that partnership is accepted as the model for SP because it is harder to argue against it than for it. The integrity and depth of the partnership is disputable due to the lack of evidence of substantial critique of it on the part of the partners.

The current reality of an individual and informal partnership model, presented in the Literature Review (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016) as the most accurate version of partnership in Ireland, was not generally recognised by participants as the ideal model in a rapidly changing and diversifying society. This is revealing in terms of the efficacy of partnership in practice. Participants across the groups described partnership in SP in terms of collaboration for a mutual purpose and this concurred with the literature which finds that all models share a fundamental valuing of some mutual benefit (Gorman & Furlong, 2023). Participants were broadly in agreement on that purpose in terms of enabling the ST to have a fit for purpose experience of teaching and learning whereby they could be prepared for their entry into the profession. However, there was a lack of consensus on the dimensions around that partnership including 1) the specifics of roles and responsibilities at individual and institutional level, 2) the extent of collaboration required to facilitate partnership and 3) the types of supports and resources required. Properties of partnership agreed by participants included trust, maintenance of standards and the valuing of the assessment aspect. There were more divergences

regarding the extent of flexibility within a partnership model, the promotion of inclusivity and diversity within the model and the opportunities for professional development through partnership. Therefore, SP is partially accurately defined as partnership, but not universally so, and its efficacy is hindered by this lack of clarity on what partnership means within the context of SP. Although the literature on the subject of partnership in SP emphasised the plethora of models (Smith, 2016) and the inefficacy of partnership at policy level (Gorman & Furlong, 2023), these findings add another layer to the complexity of partnership: the lack of consensus on what constitutes a sustainable model of partnership. The establishment of a detailed lexicon of language for SP, as part of a Code of Partners could go some way towards addressing this issue. However, the experience of partnership should be capable of changing in order to reflect a rapidly evolving society, evident in diverse classrooms and new challenges expressed across the partner groups in SoPs.

7.8.2 Perspectives

One of the major challenges in SP is the wide array of partners involved, each with their own perspective on partnership and the continuum of professional development. Capturing the array of experiences and perspectives was a complex task, made even more so by the fact that many participants saw their role as ‘partners’ as peripheral to their main duties. There is very little research on the peripheral nature of the roles in the literature although Fitzpatrick does emphasise the part-time nature of the SPT role as impactful on their efficacy (Fitzpatrick, 2021). In addition, the Sahberg Report (2012) emphasises the casualisation of staffing provision through the heavy dependency on part-time staff as not being conducive to high quality outcomes. This current research draws attention to the dual roles many partners undertake, and the resulting lack of centrality placed on the SP specific role. Perspectives were deeply informed by the contexts within which the participants functioned, including the historical, SoP and stage of continuum context. The pervading informality around SP arrangements between SoPs and HEIs and the reliance on goodwill-based relationships ensured that personalities, individual preferences and opinions have had a disproportionate influence on the ability of SP to function well. The perceived lack of transparency and consistency in SP, particularly linked to assessment, were highly evident in the findings and impacted most directly on the ST. The assessment pressures

STs experienced during and in preparation for SP were expressed as hindering their ability to engage with the enhancement of SP beyond their own immediate experiences. They expressed opinions on SP specific to their own immediate context or that of their peers but could not see beyond the immediacy of their current situation. This prevented them from considering how they could improve the experience of SP for future cohorts of students. Interestingly, STs tended to speak positively to their own direct experiences but quoted examples of fellow students having poor experiences. As a possible solution to the unavailability of STs to engage in SP enhancement, NQTs presented as ready and willing to contribute to improvements.

The Agency of the Student Teacher

The vulnerable position of the ST, emphasised by Johnston (2010), is affirmed by the findings however it is notable that STs considered themselves to be highly agentic. STs, as the largest group of agents in teacher education, hold the potential to act as a significant voice in policy and decision-making. Considering the emphasis they place on success in SP, their lack of collaborative engagement in shaping the SP experience is notable. They are often underrepresented in these processes (Smith, 2016) and no ST participant expressed any particular interest in helping to shape SP going forward. Despite STs generally appreciating their SP experiences, (Hall et al, 2018), the struggles they experienced with self-doubt, professional identity and the pressures of adapting to varied teaching environments were evident in the findings and supported by the literature (O’Grady & McNamara, 2011, Kyriacou & Stephens, 2010, Kilroy, 2016). Although research points to ST contributions to educational reform as improving student outcomes (Yonezawa & Jones, 2007) and the notion of a pedagogy of voice (Ranson, 2000) gaining traction, the authentic nature of the engagement with that voice is debatable. Efforts to include ‘the voice’ of any group can quickly deteriorate into tokenism (Gillet Swan & Baroutsis, 2023). A partnership model in SP, where the SP experience is co-developed with STs, based on their SP experiences, could enhance their professional growth and reduce anxiety. This model holds the potential to align theoretical knowledge with practical experience, fostering a more authentic and agentic professional identity (Smith, 2016).

A lack of focus on understanding the perspectives of partners about the profession of teaching and intended career paths of prospective students has resulted in uncertainty as to why STs opt to stay within programmes, engage well with them and ultimately perform well on SP (Watt, Richardson, & Wilkins 2014, Lavrenteva & Orland - Barak, 2019). Screening and selection tools for HEIs can only hope to be effective in the context of transparent understandings of the qualities and dispositions required such as intellectual competencies, personal qualities, values and skills. Even within this definition, the interpretation of what those personal qualities might be is open to scrutiny. The research of Darmody and Smyth (2016) states that empirical research on the links between the screening of applicants to ITE and their learning outcomes has been sparse. They note that this reflects the complexities in disentangling selection effects (who becomes a teacher) from institutional and social effects. The dichotomy in perspectives between SoPs and HEIs may reflect a lack of clarity regarding the day -to-day content of the job as opposed to the requirements necessary to be a professional educator. This poses a threat to professionalism -exposing a rift between intellectualism and practical experience. The findings confirm the assertions in the literature that the teacher as a pragmatic practitioner (Sexton, 2007) can find themselves in ideological opposition to teacher educators: a rift between the practical and intellectualism (Beineke, 1989). This reflects the arguments highlighted by Tatto (2021) regarding the lack of agreement in the methods of preparation of teachers as professionals-and whether the emphasis lies more with academic abilities or practice.

The Irish language requirement and the impact on diversity within the profession has been discussed previously in the Context and Literature Review Chapters. However, it was not something which was given significant focus across the participant groups. NQTs and STs demonstrated some limited concerns regarding the workload associated with planning for teaching Irish but did not make specific links with access or fairness. The other groups were even less vocal on the subject. I was aware of my own potential bias around this area, having experienced the pressures to incorporate the language into elements of my professional practice where I do not feel it is necessary or helpful-for example making CPD presentations-and therefore did not emphasise the role of the language in the data generation process. Nonetheless, the perceived social power teachers in Ireland enjoy (Keltner et al., 2003), points towards a need to remove barriers to access to the profession in order to open up access to all levels of society. This is crucial

for altruistic and practical reasons including 1) fostering equality in society, 2) ensuring diverse representation in teacher profiles and 3) enhancing the pool of potential teachers at a time of supply crisis.

Agreeing a Model of Partnership Going Forward

A significant disparity emerged between what participants perceived as the 'reality' of partnership in SP and their vision for an 'ideal' model. There was broad agreement that policy was not perceived as a route to a shared-vision for SP, but less agreement on how SP could start to progress towards an improved and sustainable model. A combination of disinterest, distrust or disillusionment in the role of the TC in SP was evident across all groups. A tepid impression of the efficacy or relevance of policies and procedures on SP was presented, with very few participants displaying any knowledge of or interest in their content. Policy emerged as something 'imposed' rather than a facilitator. Experiences of partnership varied across the groups with the highest levels of consistency within a group experienced by STs and NQTs and the lowest levels of consistency across the AF and SPTs. Across groups, STs, to a lesser degree NQTs, and principals experienced SP and partnership therein on a very personal and SoP specific level. The AF and SPTs tended to speak to more widescale systematic level problems and solutions.

A strong argument can be made that the ideal model for partnership in SP would see SP sitting in its own dedicated space, whereby partners would have the time, impetus and autonomy to dedicate towards the construction and maintenance of a shared-vision of SP. This tallies with the expressed ideal of a shared-vision or idealistic/conceptual partnership model noted as preferable in the findings (Smith, 2016). The development of centres of innovation to facilitate such a deeply intentional approach (Beck & Kosnik, 2002) would require a very significant shift in attitudes and perceptions towards SP. Times of disruption can herald opportunities for change (Farrell, 2021c) however the findings confirm that the COVID pandemic did not result in a widescale re-thinking of SP. Therefore, incremental steps towards change will be necessary and a consensus building approach pursued.

7.8.3 Professional Development

The key themes emerging from the findings in relation to professional development were all linked to the potential for SP to have impact in the long term. The findings revealed that the pressures of assessment have impacted on the efficacy of SP to go beyond timebound quality assurance and the HEI setting. In other words, if a ST feels the need to deliver immediate proof of not only meeting specific learning outcomes but excelling in those areas at a very early point in their continuum of professional development, this has a negative impact on the potential for creativity and risk-taking. Practices, positive and negative, are at risk of becoming embedded at an early point. This is indicative of an advantage to pass/fail systems in SP and removing assessment from some SP experiences, particularly early, formative placements.

STs universally believed that SP acts as a first step in the continuum of professional development due to the immersive nature, the opportunity to apply theory to practice and the chance to engage with children within the structured environment. However, all STs interpreted 'continuum of professional development' within the confines of their own initial experiences and displayed only a surface level understanding of how SP could impact future professional decisions. This surface-level comprehension might suggest that they view SP as a standalone experience rather than part of a broader, ongoing developmental journey. Their feelings of assessment burden could be a significant factor here. The pressure to perform well in assessments might overshadow the longer-term benefits of SP, causing STs to focus more on immediate outcomes rather than future professional growth. The stress associated with assessments can potentially lead to a narrow perspective, where the primary goal is to succeed in the current environment rather than considering how these experiences will shape their future teaching careers (Hall et al., 2018).

The AF expressed a lack of evidence of a continuum and a need for 1) clearer stakeholder involvement, 2) measurable deliverables (such as Professional Development Planning) and 3) linking with Droichead. SPTs described the continuum in terms of a 'professional journey' but put the onus firmly on the ST to be proactive. CTs were positive about the potential to engage with school life but expressed a disconnect between SP and 'reality' and thus its efficacy. Principals expressed no particularly strong opinions on the potential of SP withing the continuum of professional development but were broadly in favour and saw opportunities to spot talent and leadership potential. It was unclear

exactly how or what the ‘talent’ amounted to but it seemed to be linked to a willingness to take on extracurricular activities. NQTs made explicit reference to research, and the link to Droichead, also pointing to a potential formalised, NQT in mentor role. Unlike the other partners, they felt underutilised as a resource within SP. This points to a poor division of labour within partnership in SP.

7.9 Characters in a Story

The findings presented the participants as characters in a story, as well as the narrators of that story. This approach highlighted their agency in shaping the narrative they chose to put forward, including the bias, intentional or otherwise, and inaccuracies. By positioning the participants as characters, I was facilitated in emphasising that characters and their efficacy are shaped by how they interpret their positionality regarding partnership, SP and the continuum of professional development as well as the interpretations of others. How characters chose to present their stories was heavily indebted to their level of professional experience and point on the continuum of professional development. Those on either end on the continuum, STs and principals, took the most pragmatic stance regarding the potential of partnership in SP and linked it directly to how it currently facilitates them within the fulfilment of their role and how it might be improved. The AF and SPTs lifted themselves as individuals out of the story with more frequency and spoke to systematic issues and opportunities. The NQTs, due to their own experiences of Droichead, were the most aware of the potential for SP to link more directly and formally with Droichead, and thus have a structured place in the continuum of professional development as a first step. The CTs expressed the least interest in SP as part of a wider system or in the concept of partnership. They were also the most dismissive of the potential for partnership to have meaningful impact on the education system.

7.9.1 Perceptions of Roles and Responsibilities of Characters

The characters did not all perceive roles and responsibilities in SP in the same way. Some characters, including STs, SPTs and the AF, saw their own roles as key to SP,

with the latter two groups expressing some doubts as to how to balance the different elements of the role. Consistent with the literature (Fitzpatrick, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2023), all characters saw the ST as central to SP but not all characters saw SP as key to the continuum of professional development or wider education system. This is indicative of confusion over the place and stature of SP within the continuum and beyond ITE. The assumption, asserted by the TC, that SP sits at the fulcrum of teacher education (TC, 2021a) was confirmed by all participants groups-demonstrating a lack of criticality of this assumption. It could be argued that, as the most complex and potentially least well facilitated and articulated aspect of ITE, its place should be of no more significance than that of professional development or pedagogy content. Sometimes characters positioned their role in SP as central to their professional status, at other times as marginal and undertaken on an altruistic basis. This division in perceptions around the centrality of the SP role broadly followed the pattern of partners based in HEIs perceiving the role in SP as central and partners based in SoPs perceiving it as less so, with NQTs acting as a bridge between the groups. This suggests that the perceived impact and significance of SP decreases outside of the HEI. It also speaks to the need for a system to enhance and facilitate ongoing and bilateral communication between HEIs and SoPs as equal partners in SP. I outline a proposal for this communication structure in the Conclusion Chapter.

The informality and goodwill-based nature of engagements between HEIs and SoPs, which emerged in the Literature Review as the historical context of SP in Ireland (Harford & O'Doherty, 2016) and the subsequent difficulties experienced by HEIs due to the voluntary nature of participation and collaboration (Heinz & Fleming, 2019), were confirmed by HEI based participants as barriers to effective partnership in SP. Mitchell et al., (2023) drew further attention to the lack of formal and structured supports and processes for SP as barriers to partnership and while this was confirmed by HEI based participants as their lived experience, SoP based participants expressed more reluctance to engage with formalising of processes around SP which might lead to heavier workloads. Unfortunately, STs and SPTs find themselves in the unenviable and tenuous position of having to cross back and forth across the HEI-SoP barrier. Much of the unfairness, lack of transparency and inconsistency which STs and SPTs were particularly occupied by could be mitigated against by removing the barrier and creating a system within which partners have a distinct and clearly articulated SP role, functioning within

a space specifically built for facilitating SP (Doyle et al., 2024). The framework outlined over the course of this chapter is my vision of how progress can be made towards this.

7.9.2 The Groups Paradox

I have treated the characters as ‘groups’ as well as individuals in full awareness of the risk of reducing individuals to systems or structures and have countered this risk through the narrative process, which preserves the voices of individuals while striving to extract the essence of the group. This approach has exposed where similarities in perspectives exist within groups and where these are less prevalent. The least consistent group in terms of the variety of perspectives offered was also the group who exhibited the deepest understanding of the purpose, breathe and potential of SP: the AF. The second least consistent group was the SPTs, again a group who exhibited a strong grasp of the challenges and complexities of SP, as well as the potential. This paradox between deeper knowledge and more variance in opinions is worthy of further exploration. Both of these groups sit primarily within the HEI structure, are employed for the specific purpose of facilitating SP and work directly with STs. However, they have limited and timebound engagements with SoPs, CTs, NQTs and principals. Their knowledge is therefore based in their professional role, the training for that role and the supports they receive within that role, as well as their experiences of fulfilling the role and receiving formative feedback. The depth of knowledge therefore comes from both professional development and comprehensive individual experiences. The lack of consistency may be due to the degree of variance experienced in the role. While consistency is not necessarily positive or negative, a lack of agreement within a group might point towards a lack of adequately facilitated peer engagements, formalised and structured sharing of knowledge and learning and a structure within which to frame professional considerations.

7.9.3 The Intriguing Case of the Co -operating Teacher

The most intriguing character to emerge from the findings was that of the CT. Within the literature, the role of the CT has been described as ‘*untapped*’ and under-researched by Farrell (2021a). However, the body of research on CTs has increased

significantly in recent years with consensus across the research that the role is complex and ill-defined (Farrell, 2021a; O'Sullivan & Ó'Conaill, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2023). The issues of inadequate selection processes and policies have been noted by several authors (Hall et al, 2018; Harford, 2010). The findings confirm the complex nature of that role and the multiple understandings by CTs themselves and other participant groups of the best version of that role. Within this research, CTs as individuals were highly respected by all other groups, almost to the point of reverence by STs. However, as a group they were perceived by SPTs and AF in particular as troublesome agitators, agency blockers and cogs in the system of SP. STs perceived them as helpful on an individual basis but lacking in consistency. Even principals expressed doubts as to the abilities of all teachers on their staff to take on the role appropriately. This presented another paradox between the individual as exceptionally 'good' but the group as particularly 'difficult.' The CTs expressed the least interest in partnership, in the system of SP and in engaging with HEIs. A sense of distrust was pervading. Within the group an interesting co-dependency was also apparent - with less experienced CTs echoing the opinions of more experienced colleagues or holding back on responding until they had heard the response of their colleagues. Consequently, the vignette presents quite a stringent set of opinions regarding SP and is quite negative in tone, reflecting the dominant voices of the more experienced CTs. A dichotomy arose in the findings between the CT group and the other groups - in how they interpreted their own role within a partnership model of SP and how others saw it. CTs were largely experienced by others as understanding their role as partners but CTs did not value partnership as significant within SP. As key facilitators of SP, the divergence of opinion of the CT group has the potential for significant impact on the efficacy of SP. At present, there are very few specific requirements for teachers to meet in order to take on the role. Principals expressed caution around how they selected CTs, indicating that some teachers were more suited to the role than others due to their level of empathy, patience and experience. Some principals attempted to combat the lack of clarity around the CT role by creating their own set of policies regarding assigning CTs to STs while others relied heavily on their own professional assessment of the CTs suitability. CTs were generally unwilling or unable to dedicate more time to the role or to commit to specific training. There was also a clear sense that CTs felt HEIs were not necessarily best placed to deliver that training.

How to solve the problem of the CT? In the first place, it is important to recognise that there is a problem but that CTs previously occupied the roles of STs and NQTs and

may take on the other roles in the continuum in the future. Therefore, the problem is not with the individuals who are in effect the same profiles as the other groups but at a different point in their continuum. The problem is with the role. A good starting point is to search for areas of agreement between the two groups most immediately impacted by the efficacy of the role; namely the CTs and the STs. In analysing the findings, there were a number of areas where opinions converged between the groups. Firstly, both groups primarily valued the CT in terms of their depth of practical experience and classroom-based skills. Secondly, both groups valued the feedback CTs could provide to STs on their performance but expressed concerns regarding how this was best facilitated. The CT concerns primarily centred around time constraints and understanding the extent of the feedback role. The ST concerns focused on inconsistency in the type, quantity and quality of that feedback. Both CTs and STs expressed less certainty around the benefits the ST brought to the partnership, with both groups noting the practical benefits of an additional pair of hands in the classroom and the possible opportunity for sharing new theory and pedagogy from the HEI. What emerges is a requirement for a structure for selecting, training and supporting CTs which is consistent across HEIs and open and accessible to all partners. However, this system cannot feel like it is being imposed by the HEI or the TC on the CT and should therefore include the SoP voice. It also cannot be perceived as putting additional workload on the CT and consequently should be highly accessible, easy to engage with and available as and when it is of use. This speaks to the development of a universal online resource, with input from HEIs and SoPs and a CT Co-ordinator role, outlined in the Conclusion Chapter.

7.9.4 The Unexplored Potential of the NQT

Although the role of the CT emerged as intriguing but problematic, the potential of the NQT role developed as unexplored and exhibited great capacity for development. In contrast to the CTs, NQTs expressed a strong interest in supporting SP and considered the potential for SP to play a greater and more integrated role in the continuum of professional development. Their recent SP experiences and positioning in the SoP put them in the unique position of having valuable experience of both settings and empathy with the challenges of both. They were also very willing to take on a role in SP support, recognising the benefits of expanding their own professional development in doing so. However, it is important to recognise that the NQT is in a potentially vulnerable position

as a novice to the profession, undergoing Droihead. Therefore, a cautious approach to integrating this role into SP supports is advisable.

7.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the intricacies of partnership, perspectives, and professional development in SP. By delving into the themes and by examining the perceptions of participants from the viewpoints of the different partners, I have illuminated the multifaceted nature of the continuum of professional development in the context of SP. This analysis underscores the significant impact of participant identity-in-role on SP and the establishment of the relevant professional competencies. The findings highlight the potential for SP to improve through the fostering of collaborative relationships, and they reveal areas where capacity remains untapped. The interconnectedness and disconnections among the participants' professional perspectives offer valuable insights into how SP can be re-framed. Ultimately, this chapter identifies key factors that need to be addressed to fully realise the vision of SP in promoting a career-long continuum of professional development. Through this comprehensive understanding, the pivotal role SP could play in the ongoing evolution of professional identities and competencies emerges.

The final chapter brings this research to a conclusion, outlining a framework for partnership in School Placement going forward. Further possible research directions are also presented.

Chapter 8: The Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

I began my doctoral studies with a very broad question in mind; ‘How can educators come together to make SP better for anyone who has a part to play in it?’ This question arose from my own frustrations in a leadership role in SP, attempting to navigate an informal network of goodwill-based arrangements to provide STs with authentic learning and assessment experiences. I had experienced the same problems arising repeatedly and primarily linked to the traditional SP triad: 1) STs feeling overwhelmed by assessment pressures, 2) CTs providing extremely varied levels of support and 3) SPTs struggling with the dual nature of their role as mentors and assessors. These specific issues sat within broader concerns I felt regarding the very tradition-anchored and change-averse attitudes which surrounded SP. I was particularly uncomfortable with the barriers to access to ITE for aspiring teachers from diverse backgrounds, exacerbated by the Irish language requirement and centrality of the Irish language in ITE entry requirements, SP practice and the day-to-day activities and supports surrounding SP. However, my research was also inspired by a longer trajectory of my own experiences as a student of SP, which often felt solitary and overwhelming. While good mentorship and support were invaluable, they were inconsistent. Initially, my inquiry focused on the administrative challenges of adopting a relational approach to SP—where connections and relationships seemed to matter more than knowledge itself. That initial broad problem was distilled into the research questions, to focus on the aspects of partnership, perspectives and professionalism within SP as an initial step in the continuum of professional development.

My analysis of the findings indicates a need for a more embedded and systematic partnership framework, where those expected to undertake a partnership role experience agency and mutual reciprocity within that role, possess clarity on the expectations around their undertaking of the role and acquire confidence in determining what a good outcome within the role looks like. There is an assumption within ITE and the broader educational context that partnership is always appreciated, understood and engaged with on equal terms. However, this research reveals a need to re-visit the

multiple understandings of partnership and provide a forum for co-created clarity on what it is specifically within SP, where responsibilities lie and how roles can be fulfilled appropriately. For partnership to succeed, participants must place value on their own role and that of others and to do so they must understand how those roles interact with each other. The findings indicate a troublesome history of 'othering' in SP; allocating blame, sometimes praise, often responsibility, to a poorly understood and sporadically engaged with group of 'others.' This is linked to the peripheral nature of the role, emphasised by many participants. If SP is accepted as sitting at the heart of ITE, then a lens needs to be focused on its enhancement and enactment, without apology and without other agendas or competing responsibilities.

In the Conclusion Chapter I outline my proposal for a 4-step framework including a Community of Practice, a Code of Partners in School Placement, the establishment of a Partnership Network and the development of a Mentor and Professional Development Programme and Implementation Plan. By segmenting my proposal into these four distinct but interconnected steps, I intend to create a clear roadmap that addresses different facets of the problems in SP and more fundamentally, do so with the acceptance that there are problems which need to be addressed. Each step builds on the previous one, creating a comprehensive and cohesive plan. Prior to presenting this vision for a structured partnership framework, I offer an overview of my experiences of this research process and the impact it has had on me as a professional working in this area. I also summarise the key implications of the research for School Placement. The chapter concludes with an overview of the possible limitations of the research and outlines potential future directions.

8.1 My Research Journey: Implications for the Researcher

"Why do you write like you're running out of time?" During the last few weeks of reviewing and editing my research, through a series of unplanned events, I ended up with tickets to see the famous musical Hamilton twice over the course of one week. Hamilton, whether you like it or not as a musical, has become synonymous with our times; a political statement about ethnicity, race, the accuracy of the historical record and questions regarding who owns the 'accepted' version of history. As such, it probes the idea that perspectives shape the story. This research also centres around the

interplay of perspectives and how those perspectives shape the narrative of SP and the efficacy of characters in their roles. Unsurprisingly, the songs from Hamilton stayed with me but only after the second hearing. After the first visit to the theatre, I commented that the songs were not particularly 'catchy' and did not get under the skin the way they usually do after a musical. However, after the second rendition, I found they stayed with me, arriving into my head at different points of the day as I went about the business of writing. It struck me that this reflected the data analysis and coding process. Many of the themes which emerged from the transcripts did so organically over a number of engagements. This was particularly true for the analysis of the CT and the NQT transcripts. As groups, they had a message which needed to be heard; the former expressing the excessive and unstructured burden placed on them and the latter identifying their willingness to engage more directly in supporting SP. However, these messages only became clear once the background noise was either removed or accounted for.

One line from Hamilton particularly resonated with me, *'Why do you write like you're running out of time?'* The doctoral experience is uniquely challenging due to the constant dual pressures of working full time in a demanding role and searching for the time and impetus to research and write on either side of busy days. It is often described as a journey however I would say it is one where the buses are often running late and then arrive three at a time, the end destination is unclear and there is a constant risk of running out of petrol. To force that journey analogy a little further, I have found that the journey is made more enjoyable by taking a few side trips and is possibly better considered as a road trip-with the real value emerging from the layers of learning and experiences along the way. I set out to examine perspectives of the participants on their experiences of partnership in SP and the efficacy of SP in preparing STs for the continuum of professional development. The journey I took brought me into an exploration of the impact of perspectives on shaping, enabling and inhibiting the roles of partners and towards a questioning of the basic assumptions of partnership and a continuum within education. The research process has therefore had an immediate impact on my own perceptions and the actions I intend to take in a professional context.

8.2 Implications for Informality of School Placement

There is tremendous goodwill within ITE and the wider education system towards the encouragement and support of new teachers coming into the teaching profession. It is a system populated by individuals with passion, integrity and enthusiasm for education in all its forms, including the education of peers and new members of the profession. Furthermore, the 3Is of Innovation, Integration and Improvement are generally recognised as worthy ambitions for all educators to be guided by. There are individuals who will go to incredible lengths to support STs and they are sometimes motivated by the purest of altruistic reasons. Many participants spoke of encountering this calibre of individuals and other participants manifested the traits of empathy, compassion and support in their narratives. However, a good functioning system does not rely upon the 'exceptional.' As educators, we are often also drawn towards ideals; the ideal of having positive impact on the life of a child, the ambition to provide agentic learning opportunities and the passion to have impact on society. We are consequently willing consumers of ideals around partnership, lacking a criticality in our initial acceptance of the concept and our role within it. Criticality does not imply rejection of a theory or concept but it does force us to question the terms of engagement within partnership. A sustainable model of partnership cannot be based on exceptional practices in order to succeed: it should function satisfactorily when all participants undertake their role on a 'good enough' basis. From the findings it is clear that the informal reliance on networks of pre-existing relationships and exceptional individuals is not sustainable. A partnership model which relies heavily on the individual and the informal rather than the collective and the process will not be sustainable in a rapidly diversifying educational context.

8.3 The Alternative 3 Ps: The Implications for Process, Policy and Practice

Process. Policy. Practice. These are not the 3 Ps I constructed my research around, but they have emerged over the course of this research as sitting behind the difficulties participants experienced across SP. Process and policy are not universally valued, adhered to or in many cases recognised by participants in SP as supportive of the daily business of teaching, learning and assessment. However, without a detailed, national process to facilitate and guide SP, inconsistencies abound and will continue to do so. Procedures are not glamorous and when poorly constructed, they can act as a

hindrance to good, localised and informal practices. To date, policies have not been institutionalised. However, well-constructed procedures, based on collaborative agreement, have the potential to assure, reassure and affirm good practices and deter poor, irregular and ill-defined ones. Policies are only beneficial when accompanied by actionable procedures. The TC has developed policies and guidelines around partnership and the continuum of professional development, but the lack of detailed, distributed and actionable procedures has rendered them ineffective or at the very least the perception is that they are ineffective. The lack of sustained engagement with TC policies around SP and the continuum was highly evident in the findings. The framework I propose is an effort to embed collaborative process leading to effective documentation to support, review and embed best practice in SP partnership. A priority I have identified is the need to embed enactment of policy into SP planning.

8.4 Implications for Roles with School Placement

SP is often mistakenly seen as a quintessentially practical and straightforward aspect of ITE. Challenging for STs but with a clear purpose; STs are required to provide the HEI with evidence of good and professional practice through their engagements with the SoP. Unfortunately, this interpretation of SP ignores the exceedingly complex range of factors at play across settings. This assumption of simplicity and the notion that all participants in SP share the same agendas and interpretations, is also a fundamental flaw of applying a broadly defined partnership model. The lack of clarity around roles within SP was very evident from the findings. The partnership model of SP is an attempt to bring together relevant parties in the facilitation of SP but, as this research has revealed, it lacks consensus in its conceptualisation, enactment, support and critique. Furthermore, it lacks a structure within which that consensus can be achieved in the first place and then recorded, critiqued and reviewed. SP aims to achieve a huge amount, including supporting authentic work integrated learning experiences, protecting and maintaining the standards of the profession and embedding collaborative practices across a variety of partners. Add to this the assumption of SP acting as a first step in the continuum of professional development and a picture emerges of top-heavy requirements sitting on very fragile foundations. Viewed within the unique historical and cultural context of Ireland, SP has a role to play within the reform agenda of ITE but, apart from

modifications due to necessity during the pandemic, it remains resolutely unchanged in most fundamental aspects. Assumptions of efficacy hinder change; *'if it ain't broke then don't fix it.'* However, the findings indicate that partnership in SP is not fully formed or conceptualised; it is not broken because it does not exist in an impactful way for most participants beyond an agreeable concept. Perceptions of change leading to a lowering of standards in the profession have also contributed towards preventing embedded and deep reform of SP from taking place. The current SP model is in danger of reaching a critical mass as expectations placed on SoPs and educators rise, resourcing continues to prove challenging and the ST and pupil profiles change.

8.5 Implications for the Partnership Triad

This research has extended the scope of partnership to the NQT, the AF and school principals. This wider network of partners acknowledges the place of SoPs as more than just practical facilitators of SP and invites greater active participation in decision-making and crafting the vision of SP. Key to the partnership framework proposal outlined in this chapter is the concept of reciprocal gain from partnership. Although the findings clearly indicate that all partners in SP require clarity on what their roles are and how to best fulfil them, of equal importance is establishing 'buy in.' The NQT group expressed willingness and interest in undertaking a more specific role in supporting STs on SP. However, the pressures of time constraints, heavy workloads and increasingly diverse classrooms have been referenced repeatedly in the findings and therefore partnership can only succeed where it does not feel onerous or imposed. This research consequently points to the potential to adapt the NQT role in order to include a mentoring aspect however this would need to be achieved in the context of Droichead requirements. Going forward, it is my recommendation that the role of the NQT as an active partner in SP should be more clearly articulated and expanded. There is an opportunity to use this role as the bridge between SoPs and HEIs and to link the Droichead requirements more directly with the final extended placement. In order to facilitate 'buy in' I suggest the inclusion of all partner groups, including the Partnership Triad, in a Community of Practice structure with a coherent improvement agenda based on the ideal of a shared agenda.

8.6 The Four-Step Partnership Framework

The framework represents an attempt to draw together the findings into a proposal which can scaffold the sustainable development of the partnership model going forward. It emphasises the significance of collaborative planning and practices, building processes based on consensus across participants and the need for precision in the use of language around SP and partnership. Additionally, it takes account of the need for enactment and implementation planning as part of the SP partnership framework. This amounts to the establishment of collective efficacy, with the various groups sharing belief that through their collective planning and actions they can positively influence outcomes. The TC as a professional body has an important role to play in the continued professional development of educators and the professionalising of teaching. However, dissemination and precision are two areas which need to be addressed in order to give the TC documentation the power to have impact on lived practice. The findings have repeatedly drawn attention to achieving the balance between participants feeling empowered, consulted with and engaged with and not experiencing a heavy burden of workload. The framework structure aims to provide opportunities for input across participants and to lean into the potential of the NQT; an untapped and willing resource in SP. It also emphasises the significance of evident reciprocal gain to sustain collaboration. The inclusion of networking is an acknowledgement of the emphasis placed on this by principals in particular. The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) already makes effective use of local support groups to enable debriefing with colleagues, collegial planning and reflective practices. Therefore, there is a pre-existing recognition of the benefits of networking in localised groups and established familiarity with the practice. The next step is to integrate a role for HEIs and partnership within SP into local networking.

The findings indicate a need for a more embedded and systematic partnership framework. I propose a 4 -step framework including 1) a Community of Practice, 2) a Code of Partners in School Placement, 3) the establishment of a Partnership Network and 4) the development of a Mentor and Professional Development Programme and Implementation Plan. In this section I present my vision for this structured partnership framework, specific to the findings. Key to this framework is the concept of reciprocal gain from partnership. Although both the findings and the research (Sloan, 2023;

Fitzpatrick, 2021) clearly indicate that all partners in SP require clarity on what their roles are and how to best fulfil them, of equal importance is establishing 'buy in.' The pressures of time constraints, heavy workloads and increasingly diverse classrooms have been referenced repeatedly and therefore partnership can only succeed where it does not feel onerous or imposed. In order to facilitate 'buy in' I suggest the inclusion of all partner groups in a Community of Practice structure with a coherent improvement agenda based on the ideal of a shared agenda. A starting point in this framework is the establishment of a scheme of accountability, addressing how to 'be' partners and establishing a common lexicon of language - thus removing barriers to fulfilling partnership. I suggest doing this in the first place through the development of a Code of Partners in School Placement. The use of the word 'code' rather than 'guide' is intentional. Advantages to using a code include: 1) **Conciseness**: Codes are generally more compact and easier to reference quickly thus supporting engagement with them, 2) **Clarity**: A well-defined code is clear and unambiguous, reducing the risk of mis-interpretation, 3) **Consistency**: Codes can ensure uniformity in application and 4) **Authority**: Codes can offer more weight and be seen as more formal than guidelines which might be seen as optional and advisory. While the argument could be made that a code does not sit well within the need for some fluidity in the framework, I would counter that the fluidity is provided by the collaborative structures, but that clarity and consistency is afforded through precise, co-produced documentation.

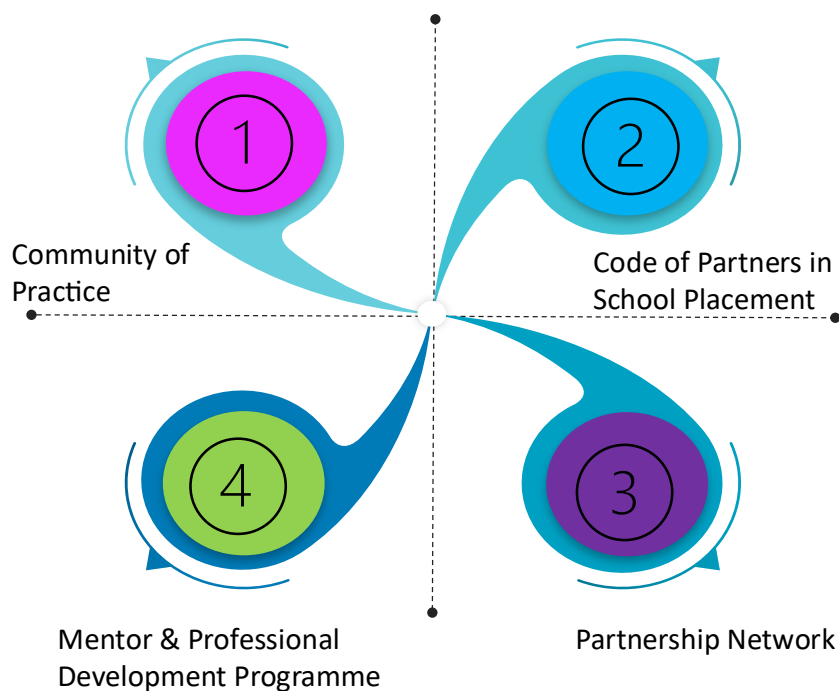


Figure : 8-1 The Four Step Partnership Framework

8.6.1 Step One: The Community of Practice

The framework for partnership should include some flexibility and agency to respond to evolving circumstances in order to reflect a rapidly evolving society, evident in diverse classrooms and new challenges expressed across the partner groups in SoPs. Consequently, a formula of rigour and fluidity comes into play again. The fluidity can be provided by the establishment of a Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in SP. This would act as the first step in the framework.

CoPs, as introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), provide opportunities for situated learning through participation in a community. They can facilitate opportunities to discuss best practice, nurture professional growth and provide a safe space to discuss challenges (Eaton et al., 2021). However, they are not without their challenges, including maintaining momentum, preventing their devolving into talking exercises and sustaining interest. The findings have emphasised that all groups feel the pressures of workload and consequently anything which might be seen as either excessive or ineffective is unlikely to experience success. Motivation beyond altruistic reasons may be required for some

groups, such as time in lieu or free CPD. Facilitating sessions online would also help attendance and participation.

The primary purpose of the CoP would be strategic decision-making and establishing collective agreement on partnership in SP. Initial challenges for the CoP would be the establishment of a lexicon of language for SP, with a particular emphasis on seeking consensus on the definition of partnership, roles and responsibilities. The key aim of the CoP would then be to establish the Code of Partners in School Placement. Once these initial tasks had been completed, the role of the CoP would move to supporting ongoing collaboration, reviewing practices and cataloguing best practices and peer sharing. The curating of Case Studies for the Code of Partners (as outlined below) would be a cyclical task and a means of ensuring ongoing focus and outputs.

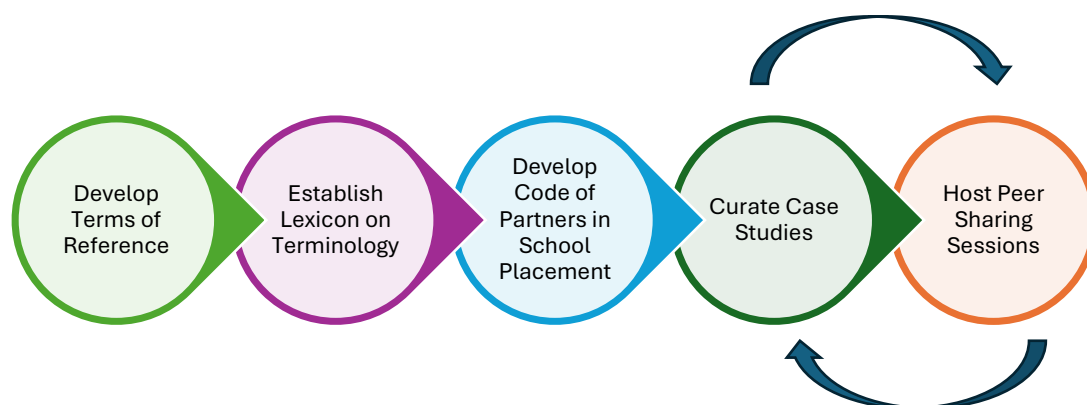


Figure : 8-2 Step One: The Community of Practice

For ‘buy in’ to be effective, membership of the CoP needs to be inclusive of all participant groups, with additional input from the TC and DE. Membership at both organisational and individual level would facilitate a focus on the systematic and individual challenges. A possible membership structure is outlined below. I arrived at this structure having reviewed the composition of other bodies such as the TC and the SPWG. I have experience of assembling CoPs within HC and have found that it is important to establish a balance of voices from different backgrounds while preventing the overall composition from becoming unwieldy. It is important to establish a balance between having enough members to bring diverse perspectives and maintaining a sense of active

participation. It should be noted that the context of this research is specific to the primary sector however it might be appropriate to apply this framework to both the primary and post-primary sectors, in which case membership would be extended to include organisations such as the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) and Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI).

Organisation or Individual	Quantity
HEI: Director of School Placement or Equivalent Role Nominees	One per HEI
Nominees by The Teaching Council	3
INTO Nominees	3
Nominees by Minister of Education	3
Nominees by IPPN	3
Elected School Teachers who have undertaken Co - operating Teacher Role	3
Elected NQTs	3
Elected Student Teachers	One per HEI
Nominees by HEIs of School Placement Tutors	One per HEI

Table : 8-1 Membership of the Community of Practice

8.6.2 Step 2: Establishing a Code of Partners in School Placement

The story of partnership in SP is a story built around complex and ill-defined relationships. In order to bring about a ‘happily ever after,’ the characters need to agree and understand their roles and responsibilities, how to fulfil those roles to an appropriate standard and where to seek guidance and support in doing so. The characters need to understand who they are when they are at their best and how to recognise this in other groups. If we start with the understanding that all the characters share the basic attributes of being professionals (or aspiring professionals) and educators, then a clear starting point is the establishment of a Professional Code of Partners in School Placement (hereafter referred to as The Partners Code) akin to the Code of Professional Conduct (TC, 2016). The establishment of this code would be Step Two in the Four-Step

Framework for Partnership in School Placement. This Partners Code should set out the shared values, standards, ethics and goals of the partners, clearly articulate how partnership functions within SP and provide a guide for SoPs, HEIs and the partners functioning within those spaces as to how to adequately fulfil their roles. The Partners Code could be established around the ethical values in the Code of Conduct (TC, 2016) of respect, care, trust and integrity, ascertaining how each of these values is met within the SP partnership context.

For the Partners Code to have any efficacy it will need to be created, reviewed and agreed by the partners. It will also need both rigour and fluidity. Rigour can be provided by the establishment of a lexicon of SP, clarity on the conceptual framing of partnership and specific requirements and definitions of the roles and responsibilities of partners. Fluidity comes from the inclusion of real case studies, provided by partners. These could be reviewed and updated on a cyclical basis and provide examples of SP scenarios within different SoP settings (exp. a struggling student within a DEIS school, a conflict between a CT and ST). While the TC is the obvious facilitator of this process, the findings have exposed a degree of mistrust or weariness regarding the professional body which may hinder its efficacy. The table below provides a sample of a proposed structure for this code.

Section One	Introduction, Explanation of Purpose, Process for Developing the Code Outlined
Section Two	Definitions/Glossary of Key Terms: Lexicon of School Placement
Section Three	Partnership: Presentation of the Conceptual Framework for Partnership in School Placement, Presentation of Ethical Values for Partnership in SP
Section Four	Roles and Responsibilities: Clear articulation of all partner roles at individual and institutional level, Guidelines on fulfilment of role
Section Five	Case Studies: 5 - 8 Case Studies which are updated on cyclical basis

Section Six	Procedures for disputes, ethical, pedagogical, skills or knowledge-based concerns
Section Seven	Conclusion and Summary

Table : 8-2 Proposed Structure for Code

8.6.3 Step 3: Partnership Network

Principals expressed a strong interest in the potential for partnership to support networking. However, they did not see the primary purpose of partnership as sitting within SP. Probing their use of the term ‘networking’, they tended to use it to refer to semi-formal communication structures to facilitate co-planning and collaborative practices where doing so facilitated the SoP directly. In other words, the networking needed to encapsulate a clear return to the SoP on an identified area of priority. Principals saw these networks as primarily operating at a local level but with opportunities for local networks to collaborate when appropriate. Networks hold the potential to build relationships, share knowledge, practices and learning within the confines of a common goal. The primary difference between the CoP and the network is that the former focuses on innovation and/or social learning (Wenger, 1991; Engel, 1993) within a less regulated and informal exchange mechanism while the latter describes more institutionalised partnership based on a common vision, objectives and rules. Networks can facilitate joint learning and advocacy. It is my proposal that space for SP partnership be facilitated within a broader partnership network structure.

In practice, what would this look like? The changes which occurred during the pandemic might point to a possible structure. Although the long-term benefits and suitability of the developments which occurred in SP during the pandemic were debated by all the groups, the use of technology to facilitate access and communication was broadly welcomed. HEIs developed innovative skills in online communication, lecturing and assessment. The use of online sessions between STs and SPTs to support formative feedback or provide additional communication prior to commencing assessment were identified as positive steps in improving collaborative practices. A similar approach could also have potential to provide a pathway to support networking amongst principals, with a focus on partnership.

Principals and CTs expressed some frustrations as to the demands placed on them by HEIs and the lack of tangible benefits to the SoPs. It is my proposal that HEIs could volunteer to initially facilitate online networking sessions between principals at a local level, with a focus on partnership in SP. Rather than push back on the broader interpretation by principals of partnership, HEIs could acknowledge their role as a cog within a broader but localised partnership network. The HEIs would communicate their willingness and availability to facilitate online partnership sessions and request local schools to complete expressions of interest, indicating learning outcomes they would like to prioritise. The HEI could then create local network groups based on these shared interests and facilitate 2 -3 sessions on partnership in SP per group. Ideally, HEIs might work collaboratively on this with each other. The SoPs would then have the opportunity to continue the network and broaden the focus to other areas of partnership.

8.6.4 Step 4: Mentor and Professional Development Programme

The findings have indicated repeatedly a lack of clarity on how best to fulfil the roles and responsibilities across SP. The TC has not improved this situation by using vague labels in the Irish language to describe steps in the continuum. Currently, CTs undertake the role on an independent basis. There is no peer support structure in place to share learning from more experienced CTs, to share both positive and negative experiences or to collaborate. As the findings have highlighted, the CT role is highly complex, central to SP but based on complex relationship networks, against the backdrop of competing workloads and a self-identification of the SP role as peripheral to other tasks. Conversely, HEIs provide regular training to SPTs on delivering formative feedback, supporting struggling students and fulfilling the mentor role. The findings indicate that SPTs have considered this training to be of a high standard and beneficial to their sustained practice and professional development. It follows that it would be useful to provide CTs with similar training specific to their SP role and to mentorship within that role. Although this does currently happen in some HEIs, there is no requirement for HEIs to provide it, no guidance around how it should be facilitated and no consistency across HEIs on how it should be delivered. This lack of consistency was born out by CTs who reported finding variances in the standards of STs but also in the requirements from HEIs.

Some CTs also demonstrated a clear reluctance to engage in training delivered by HEIs, citing their own level of experience and expertise against the need for such training. This suggests that the training needs to be incentivised, regulated and required. Returning to the concept of the continuum of professional development, there is an opportunity to firmly place the role of CT on that continuum as a progression point from class teacher. It is my recommendation that schools be facilitated in developing a post of responsibility for a CT Coordinator. Rather than operating separately to the Droichead process, this role could be integrated into the Professional Support Team (PST) and the training for the PST extended to include CT training. This would have two key advantages: firstly providing some integration of the Droichead process with SP and secondly providing an opportunity for NQTs, as the most willing contributors to SP partnership, to be drawn into the CT role. The CT Coordinator would be provided with training on the Code of Partnership, the concept of partnership in SP and accessing the available resources. They would then disseminate this to their schools. Furthermore, NQTs interested in pursuing the CT role in the future could be supported by the CT Coordinator in how to prepare for this role.

8.6.5 Implementation of the Framework in ITE Contexts

The proposed framework seeks to address the problem of sustainable engagement and enactment of policies in education, with opportunities for mutual reciprocity. Within the sphere of ITE, it holds the potential to be adapted to a variety of different contexts. On a small scale, the model is being piloted by the Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education through the development of a local network of CTs, principals, STs, AF and SPTs. This pilot serves as a microcosm for testing the framework's principles in action, particularly its emphasis on collaborative planning, shared language, and reciprocal professional development.

Another particularly pertinent context is the enactment of the Primary Curriculum Framework (DoE, NCCA, 2023). In the Leading Out series of seminars and collaborative events focused on the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020), the NCCA has moved the focus from curriculum development to enactment, highlighting the space for professional agency and contextual responsiveness. The preliminary roadmap for enactment includes a multi-phase approach:

- Introductory Year-Starting September 2025: to deepen understanding and explore implications for teaching, learning and assessment
- One curriculum areas introduced each year
- Two years to enact each specification
- Schools can choose the order of introduction
- Partnerships with NCCA, Oide and NCSE
- Primary Steering Group and Communications Group

However, despite its collaborative intent, this approach faces several implementation risks:

- Moving beyond communication and goal setting to supported enactment. This represents a potential disconnect between policy communication and practical support, where schools are informed but not adequately scaffolded in enactment process
- Burden of enactment sitting with the least consulted roles in the development phase#
- Complex SP models where STs are placed in schools at different phases in enactment

- Lack of perceived value/inconsistent value attached to enactment of changes

The proposed partnership framework could serve as a strategic mechanism to mitigate against these risks. By embedding curriculum enactment within a Community of Practice model, the framework could foster shared responsibility and continuous dialogue. The Code of Partners in School Placement could be adapted to include curriculum enactment roles and expectations, ensuring clarity and consistency across contexts. The Partnership Network would provide a platform for schools and HEIs to co-design enactment strategies, share resources, and reflect on practice in real time. Finally, the Mentor and Professional Development Programme could be aligned to the phased rollout, offering targeted support to CTs, principals, and STs as they navigate new curricular demands. In this way, the framework approach could act as a vehicle for systemic reform, enabling curriculum enactment to be experienced not as an external imposition, but as a collaborative, agentic, and professionally enriching process.

8.7 Limitations of the Research and Cultural Barriers

Culturally, there remain hierarchical perceptions of expertise, roles and responsibilities within SP, where HEIs continue to be seen as the primary knowledge holders and schools as the sites of learning and assessment. This undermines the principle of reciprocal gain and can discourage genuine collaboration. A shift in the cultural narrative from compliance to co-construction, where all voices are valued and heard, will be one of the challenges of implementing change. The specific cultural, political and historical context of ITE in Ireland has resulted in an embedding of practices and an asserting of positioning (around issues such as the place of the Irish language or the Catholic Church) being aligned with the more fundamental purposes of SP. Moreover, professional identity and autonomy play a critical role. CTs and principals will resist frameworks if they feel their professional judgement is being constrained or experience them as imposed. The tensions between standardisation and contextual responsiveness will need to be carefully managed to avoid alienating participants. Finally, trust and relational capital are essential but, as has emerged across this research, cannot be assumed and are often underdeveloped in SP partnerships in Ireland. Building

trust takes time and consistent interaction, which the proposed framework aim to support.

There were a number of limitations to this research, which I have attempted to confront and mitigate against. The most significant of these being the confines of the research within the HC context. This had potential to limit the wider application of findings across the ITE system. This decision to confine the context to SP within HC was justified as it enabled me to enhance the depth of engagement with participants, particularly the AF, STs and SPTs. It was also practically motivated as I had good access to the participants and willing engagement. Additionally, it enabled me to research within a system I had in-depth and direct knowledge and experience of. SP is very similar across different ITE settings and where differences lie tends to be in the specifics of assessment models (pass/fail or graded or requirements around plannings) which did not have a significant impact on this research.

Another potential limitation of the research was the narrative analysis and vignettes structure of the findings. I chose this structure as it facilitated the presentation of the authentic voices of participants and thus enabled me to directly address the nuances of perspectives, at individual and group level. However, there is an interpretative element to the vignettes and while I have attempted to counter any bias or inaccuracies through the process of developing the vignettes, there is a potential challenge to the robustness and rigour of the presentation of the findings in these interpretative aspects. While the advantage of using vignettes outweighs the disadvantages, I acknowledge that in preserving the authentic voice, the findings are inherently subject to the interpretative nature of narrative analysis.

My roles and the potential for bias or influence have been addressed across the course of this research. I have acknowledged the relationship I hold with the participants repeatedly and directly and offered participants every form of assurance through 1) consent forms, 2) Participant Information Sheets, 3) oral review of the purpose of the research, 4) the opportunity to withdraw, 5) the opportunity to have initial findings presented to them and 6) the option to review their transcript for accuracy. However, many of the limitations of working within the system under study can be countered by the level of insider knowledge, access to participants and understanding of the wider research context which the researcher can bring with them. In addition, I have the

opportunity to enact change and bring my research findings directly into the practices in SP.

8.8 Future Research Direction

There is significant scope for further research on the basis of the findings in this research. The use of vignettes will hopefully make the findings accessible to a wide audience: they are simple to engage with due to their narrative structure and the fact that they tell the story from the perspective of the characters. The vignette crafting process was a complex and extended one however its value is linked to the accessibility of this format to a wider audience, inclusive of practicing educators in SoPs and those who are not generally perceived as engaging with academic writing. My ambition is that this research can act as an initiator of further engagement across the partner groups on the nature, purpose and sustainability of partnership in SP, particularly in relation to the continuum of professional development. Future research in the field of SP, partnership and the continuum of professional development can take several promising directions. Firstly, expanding the sample size and diversity across different demographics could enhance the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, longitudinal studies would be beneficial to understand long - term impacts and trends associated with partnership in SP. This approach could provide insights into how variables interact over extended periods. It would also be highly beneficial to examine the practical implications of the research findings and the implementation of the proposed framework through focus groups with partners and a small-scale piloting of the steps.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to conduct some research specific to the post primary sector and analyse for convergences or divergences. It would also be interesting to conduct research specifically with the CT and NQT groups on achieving a balance between their roles in SP and how they could be adapted going forward. I have identified significant scope for including the NQT in the SP review and implementation process, however further research is required to ensure that this is achieved without placing additional burden on the NQTs. Other potential areas of future research might include the embedding of Communities of Practice amongst educators and the development of localised partnership networks. This research has focused on the national context. An evident direction for further research is to conduct similar data generation with the

participants in SP within the wider European context and potentially further afield. This research has raised questions regarding the place of the Irish language in ITE. The complexities of supporting diversity while also respecting cultural traditions is an area where further research would be highly beneficial.

8.9 Conclusion

Words hold power. They have impact on how we conceptualise ideas, where we position ourselves in processes and how we interpret the experiences of ourselves and others. Partnership has found its way into the rhetoric of SP, encouraged by the TC documentation which assumes its place. It is a word that is widely perceived as holding positive connotations and as such it is difficult to argue against, particularly for educators who are drawn towards the potential for positive impact. If partnership is accepted as the model of SP, then it follows that the participants in SP are partners. Unfortunately, without adequate guidance as to how to be a partner, how to judge success in that role and what to do if in doubt, the whole concept of partnership in SP is based on very tenuous foundations. It is my recommendation that we take a step back and re-evaluate our shared understanding of partnership specific to SP. The primary purpose of the Four-Step Partnership Framework is to embed collaborative practices, peer engagement and cyclical review into a flexible but clearly articulated structure, thus facilitating partnership to grow beyond words into a lived experience.

Consider the following:

- SP is at the fulcrum of teacher education.
- Partnership supports collaboration.
- Mentorship is an integral part of the SP experience for all STs.
- The school and classroom are welcoming and supportive sites of learning for STs.
- Innovation, Integration and Improvement are at the core of the profession of teaching.
- Professional development is key to the enhancement of the profession.

Now consider whether these are statements of fact or aspirations. The findings suggest the latter to be the experience of many participants, across all groups. If we accept these statements as aspirations rather than established facts, then we must also acknowledge that deliberate, planned actions are not only preferable but required in

order to meet the challenges of classrooms today and into the future. With a renewed focus on collaborative planning, action and deliberate intervention in the conceptualisation and enactment of roles and responsibilities, SP holds enormous potential to act as a strong foundation to the profession and to set STs on the path to continuous improvement and professional growth.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Policies, Guidelines and Acts

Title	Type of Grey Literature/Policy/Report	Rationale for Inclusion
Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement: Reflecting on a Decade of Change and Creating a Vision for the Future. (2023)	Policy Statement, DE	Initial Teacher Education context, planning for the future of ITE, Continuum of Professional Development
DEEPEN: Droichead - Exploring and Eliciting Perspectives, Experiences and Narratives. (2021) Dr Uí Choistealbha (Marino Institute of Education) and Dr Melanie Ní Dhuinn (TCD) Teaching Council commissioned	Final Report, Commissioned by TC	Teacher Induction, Newly Qualified Teachers, Mentoring, Continuum of Professional Development, Professional/Teacher Identity, Perceptions
Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education, In accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001 - 2015 (2020)	Standards, TC	Teacher Induction, ITE context and standards, Continuum of Professional Development, Partnership
The Structure of Teacher Education in Ireland: Review of Progress in Implementing Reform	Progress Report, HEA Authority	Initial Teacher Education context, Recent developments

(known as Sahlberg 2) (2019)		
School Placement in Initial Teacher Education (2018) Hall et al., UCC, DCU	Final Report, Commissioned by TC	School Placement context, Perspectives, Stakeholders, Partnership
Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018	Act, GOI	Regulates Admission Process
The Droichead Policy Framework (2017)	Integrated Professional Induction Framework, TC	Induction, Continuum of Professional Development, Improvement, Partnership
Children First Act (2015)	GOI, Act	Protection and Welfare of Children
Guidelines on School Placement (2013, revised 2021a)	Guidelines, TC	School Placement context, Roles and Responsibilities
Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (2016)	Framework for Teacher's Learning, TC	Continuum of Professional Development, Improvement
Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education (2012) (known as Sahlberg 1)	Report, On behalf of DE	Initial Teacher Education context
Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (2011, revised 2017)	Criteria and Guidelines, TC	Initial Teacher Education, Partnership
Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011)	Policy Document, TC	Initial Teacher Education Continuum of Professional Development, Partnership

Learning to Teach: A nine country cross national study (2009) Dr Conway et al., UCC	Cross National Study, Commissioned by TC	Initial Teacher Education, Stakeholders, Perspectives, Professional/Teacher Identity, Partnership
Review Paper on Thinking and Policies Related to Teacher Education in Ireland (2007)	Position/Review Paper Coolahan, NUI Maynooth, Teaching Council commissioned	Context, Stakeholders, Perspectives, Teacher Identity, Partnership
The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2002	Act, GOI	Inclusive Education
The Teaching Council Act (2001)	Act, TC	Continuum of Professional Development, Professionalism, Professional/Teacher Identity
The Education (Welfare) Act (2000)	Act, GOI	Ensure minimum level of education entitlement
The Education Act (1998)		Framework of education system
Charting Our Education Future (1995)	Whitepaper, DES	Context, Partnership, Initial Teacher Education
White paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future (1995)	Whitepaper, DES	Initial Teacher Education
Green paper on Education for a Changing World (1992)	Greenpaper, DES	Initial Teacher Education

Appendix 2: List of Common Terminology

Common Terminology	Synonyms
School Placement	Teaching Practice School Experience Placement Apprenticeship Work Integrated Learning
Induction	Inauguration, Preparation Initial Professional Development Droichead
Professional Development	Professional Training Career Development Continuum of (professional) Development, Cosán
Student Teacher	Intern Teacher Practice Teacher Teacher - Student Trainee Teacher
Newly Qualified Teacher	New teacher, early stage teacher, pre - induction teacher
Co - operating Teacher	Teacher - coach, host teacher, mentor teacher, guide, Treoraí, teacher - facilitator
Initial Teacher Education	Pre - service Teacher Education Professional Master of Education Teacher Training

Appendix 3: Semi -Structured Interview Guide

Semi - Structured Interview Guide: Faculty and School Placement Tutors

Interview Structure/Steps

Step	Action
Pre - Formal Start	Informal Conversation, Introduction, Opportunity to ask questions: Friendly tone and 'ice breakers'
Establishing Confidence	Review Research Purpose, Reminder of Right to Withdraw, Establish the SSI as a designated 'Safe Space', Start Recording
Formal Start of Interview	Build confidence with simple questions
Mid - Interview	Actively Listen, Seek Clarification as Required, Given ample opportunity for involvement. Follow the Guide but have flexibility
Closing Interview	Summarise and Recap. Reminder of contact details. Express Thanks

Research Questions:

1) **Partnership and Innovation:** Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?

Concept of Partnership	What does the word mean to you in ITE context?
	What does the word mean to you in SP context? Explore different models (individual, institutional, ST focused, policy)
	Do you find it a helpful concept? Why/Why not?

	By whom is it defined? Role of TC
Roles and Responsibilities	How does the idea of partnership impact your experience of your role?
	How do you ensure you are a partners (or do you)?
	Alternative vision of role outside a partnership model?
Reform Agenda	What would you change about partnership in SP?
	The historical context of partnership in SP - positive/negative?
	What would you 'protect' from change?

2) **Perspectives and Integration:** What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?

Roles and Responsibilities	Interpretations of the roles of others
	Interpretations of your own role
Power Imbalances	Challenges and Opportunities of multiple voices

3) **Professional Development and Improvement:** Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

Professional Development	<i>Is there a link between SP and professional development? If so what?</i>
Reform Agenda	<i>How can the link be enhanced? What changes need to take place and at what levels?</i>
	<i>What are the challenges? Role of Taisce</i>
Power Imbalance	<i>How can SP function for CPD/professional development if there is an assessment focus? Possibility of power imbalance and how to address this</i>

Checklist

Consent	
Process to Withdraw	
Opportunities for Clarification Given	

Partnership - What, Where, When, Why	
Perspectives - Individual and 'Group: On partnership	
Perspectives - Individual and 'Group: On own role'	
Professional Development: Specific to SP and more broadly	
Reference to Gaeilge/Diversity	

Appendix 4: Focus Group Guide

Structure/Steps

Step	Action
Pre - Formal Start	Informal Conversation, Introduction, Opportunity to ask questions: Friendly tone and 'ice breakers'
Establishing Confidence	Review Research Purpose, Reminder of Right to Withdraw, Establish the SSI as a designated 'Safe Space', Start Recording <i>Establish ground rules for interactions</i>
Formal Start of Focus Group	Build confidence with simple questions <i>Initially invite each participant to answer every question-turn-taking, Move on to open format</i>
Mid – Focus Group	Actively Listen, Seek Clarification as Required, Given ample opportunity for involvement. Follow the Guide but have flexibility Give opportunities to re-visit themes in light of the conversation
Closing Focus Group	Summarise and Recap. Reminder of contact details. Express Thanks

Research Questions:

1) **Partnership and Innovation:** Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?

Concept of Partnership	What does the word mean to you in ITE context?
	What does the word mean to you in SP context? Explore different models (individual, institutional, ST focused, policy)

	Do you find it a helpful concept? Why/Why not?
	By whom is it defined? Role of TC
Roles and Responsibilities	How does the idea of partnership impact your experience of your role?
	How do you ensure you are a partners (or do you)?
	Alternative vision of role outside a partnership model?
Reform Agenda	What would you change about partnership in SP?
	The historical context of partnership in SP - positive/negative?
	What would you 'protect' from change?

2) **Perspectives and Integration:** What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?

Roles and Responsibilities	Interpretations of the roles of others
	Interpretations of your own role
Power Imbalances	Challenges and Opportunities of multiple voices

3) **Professional Development and Improvement:** Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

Professional Development	<i>Is there a link between SP and professional development? If so what?</i>
Reform Agenda	<i>How can the link be enhanced? What changes need to take place and at what levels?</i>
	<i>What are the challenges? Role of Taisce</i>
Power Imbalance	<i>How can SP function for CPD/professional development if there is an assessment focus? Possibility of power imbalance and how to address this</i>

Checklist

Consent	
Process to Withdraw	

Opportunities for Clarification Given	
Partnership - What, Where, When, Why	
Perspectives - Individual and 'Group: On partnership	
Perspectives - Individual and 'Group: On own role'	
Professional Development: Specific to SP and more broadly	
Reference to Gaeilge/Diversity	

Appendix 5: Memo Template

Date:

Number:

General Thoughts/Reflective Diary Summary (since last entry)

2 Minute Brainstorm

Track Progression of Themes Through ITI

Question	Launch Pad	Themes	Adaptions/New Thinking	Sub - Categories
Partnership and Innovation:	The Concept of Partnership in SP			
	Roles and Responsibilities			
	Reform Agenda and Historical Context			

Perspectives and Integration	Systematic Challenges and Opportunities			
	Power Imbalances Agency			
Professional Development and Improvement	Professional Development and SP			
	Diversity in the Profession			
	CPD: Innovation, Integration and Improvement			

Connection to Last Memo:

Next Steps:

Appendix 6: Sample Completed Memo Template

Date: 28 July 2023

Number: 9

General Thoughts/Reflective Diary Summary (since last entry)

My reflective diary has emphasised the sense of progression now that Data Generation has commenced. It also notes how reassured I felt by the pilot sessions. The feedback was useful-I need to make sure that I don't stray into overly technical or complex knowledge-remember that participants will be engaging with this research on a variety of different levels and adapt accordingly. The online format of the SSI has worked well-it is something I am very familiar with and that has given me confidence in the process. The guides are also helpful but original format too detailed-I adapted accordingly and used tables instead of word text-and included a checklist.

2 Minute Brainstorm-Immediate Thoughts-Jot Down

Perspectives: A challenge is separating asking for a participant's perspective on specific content, context or role and then drilling behind the data. What the participants are leaving out: AF are difficult to draw into any detailed critique of other roles-a dichotomy emerging between specific role of CT and examples of particular individuals in the role-**Need to explore this further**. The CT is emerging as quite controversial role.

Question	Launch Pad	Themes	Sub - Categories
Partnership and Innovation: Is SP	The Concept of Partnership in SP	Partnership Models in SP Multiple Modes of Partnership	AF emerging as having some familiarity with Partnership Models-although quite surface level/ Participants are also using some terms interchangeably (ie policy level and systematic and institutional).

accurately defined as partnership?		Collaborative Practices Requirements for Partnership Implementation of Partnership Facilitation of Partnership	Ideal V Reality of Partnership Models: The ideal does not seem to be the same as the current experience of the reality. The place of policy in a partnership model is not clear- there are concerns regarding a power imbalance and change being forced on participants My Thoughts: AF work in the SP space all the time. If there is a level of confusion and mistrust around partnership-will this be greater with other participant groups? Quite different responses from AF-their own research interests are coming through in their answers-is this a form of bias in the answers (I need to be careful around the prior knowledge I have of these participants and their interests and how that impacts on my reading of the data)
	Roles and Responsibilities	Definition of Roles Understanding of Responsibilities Centrality or Periphery of SP in Role	The Role of the Teaching Council: Cautious approach so far, participants do not seem to want to be drawn on discussing the TC The Role of the 'Other: The CT is being discussed in detail and participants are pulling the conversation back to this role. AF see SP as core to ITE and a key aspect of their role-not something they do 'on top of' the day job My Thoughts: Do participants not want to be drawn on TC discussion because they are not particularly familiar with the work of the TC (does this seem unlikely?) or is there

			another reason? (Possible reasons: lack of value associated with TC, experience of lack of efficacy, belief that the TC does not have a central role in SP)
<i>Perspectives and Integration</i>	Reform Agenda and Historical Context	Informality and Goodwill in SP Traditional ST/Educator Profile Professionalising Teaching	AF generally bringing up the fact that HC is a private college and this impacts on their role-the complexities of adjunct faculty model referred to. Possible negative connotations to having 'sold out' to privatisation. Some concerns regarding the consistency of practices across different ITE providers but balanced with positive slant on expanding and opening the profession History of Lack of Diversity-worries that this is not being addressed meaningfully-surface level. The Irish language-does it prevent or hinder diversity? Very large range of views on this. My Thoughts: there is a lack of comfort around the role of HC within ITE, how consistency is ensured and the lack of diversity. Is there a sense that AF feel a lack of empowerment to effect change?
	Systematic Challenges and Opportunities	System V Individual	Idea of a Community of Practice: reference to this working well internally for 'tricky' topics. General valuing of systematic but no clarity as to how

	Power Imbalances Agency	Empowerment and Influence	Sense of AF functioning within wider constraints (institutional and system level). No great sense of empowerment to make change. Some comparisons to international best practice but sense that these would not work within informal structure of Ireland ITE.
Professional Development and Improvement: Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?	Professional Development and SP	Supporting and Developing Professionalism Through SP	Lack of Sequential Continuum or Cohesion. Very different views emerging and some inaccuracies.
	Diversity in the Profession	SP Supporting Creativity and Diversity	ST Profiles Gender Balance Ethnicity Socio - Economic Diversity
	CPD: Innovation, Integration and Improvement	Teacher Identity Values and Status	Interpretations of CPD Reflection on CPD

Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheets

Participant Information Sheet: School Placement Tutors

Research Title:

Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development: A comparative exploration of School Placement Policy and Practice within a Shared-Vision of School Placement

What is the study about?

This research aims to give a voice to the participants in School Placement (SP) and provides an opportunity to investigate the policies and guidelines of the Teaching Council (TC) and Department of Education (DE) against the lived experiences and perspectives of participants.

Aims:

In conducting a comparative exploration, the researcher aims to develop a recommendations for the improvement of a partnership model of SP which effectively contributes towards the continuum of professional development.

Who are the participants?

Participants are therefore drawn from across SP but all have one trait in common; they are educators at varying points in their own continuum of professional development with a role to play in SP.

Research Questions:

- 1) Partnership and Innovation: Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?
- 2) Perspectives and Integration: What are the experiences of participants in School Placement of partnership?
- 3) Professional Development and Improvement: Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

Why am I being approached?

You are being asked to participate in this research due to your role within a host school as either principal or co-operating teacher/your role as a School Placement Tutor.

What will I have to do?

This section was only shared with those completing the questionnaire (AF, SPTs, STs)

You are asked to complete the following steps:

1. Complete the consent form here by
2. *Complete the short online questionnaire prior to attending the focus group-this should take no more than 30 minutes to complete*
3. Accept the invitation to attend an online focus group/interview which will take no more than 40-45 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience

Information on the online questionnaire:

An online questionnaire will be used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from participant groups.

Some key facts: •

- Delivered on MSForms •*
- 20 questions: Open and Closed •*
- Your name will be requested in order to facilitate linking your responses with questions for the focus group but the forms will be anonymised post focus group/interview*
- Opportunity to give feedback*

Information on the Focus Group/Interviews:

- 30-40 minutes
- Zoom
- Recorded

Areas Covered:

- The Continuum of Professional Development: A continuum wide lens on School Placement
- The Role of the Host School: Partners, Participants or Facilitators?

- The Role of the Teaching Council: Value Systems and Professionalism
- The Role of the College: Partners, Owners or Agenda-Setters?
- Student Teacher Agency: Meaning, Enactment and Opportunities

What are the benefits?

The research will add to the insights on School Placement practices, the partnership model and the link between performance on placement and the continuum of professional development. There is an emphasis on the professional lives and development of teachers, specifically Newly Qualified Teachers.

What are the risks?

There is no obvious risk associated with participation. The researcher and research supervisors will be the only individuals with access to the data. Data will only be stored on a HC approved OneDrive platform.

What if I do not want to take part?

Participants are reminded that they can withdraw from the research up to the point where the data is anonymised (2 weeks after collection). In this case, their data will be destroyed. Participants may also indicate that they would like to cease to take part during the Focus Group/Interview.

What happens to the information?

The information will be recorded, transcribed and analysed to inform the thesis. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of individuals.

Who else is taking part?

Student Teachers
School Placement Tutors
Hibernia College Faculty
Newly Qualified Teachers
School Principals
Co-operating Teachers

What if something goes wrong?

The Focus Group/Interview will stop immediately and will not resume until participants and researcher are comfortable to do so. If necessary, the session will not resume.

What happens at the end of the study?

Data will be stored on the HC approved OneDrive platform. Data will be destroyed 7 years from completion of the thesis.

What happens if I have questions or do not understand something? Please contact Elva Casey

(ecasey@hiberniacollege.net).

What happens if I change my mind about participating?

If you would like to withdraw from the research at any point you are free to do so.

Appendix 8: Letter of Introduction (Pilot)

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to you regarding my doctoral studies at Trinity College and to request that you kindly participate in my research study.

The focus of the study is Partnerships, Perspectives and Professional Development: A comparative exploration of School Placement Policy and Practice within a Shared-vision of School Placement.

You are being asked to participate in two phases of a **pilot**: an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The terms of this participation are set out in the consent form and the details of participation are included in the attached Participant Information Sheet.

Step One:

Please read the attached Participant Information Sheet

Step Two:

Please complete the Consent Form:
Consent Form:

<https://forms.office.com/e>

Step Three:

Please complete the online questionnaire:
<https://forms.office.com/e>

Step Four:

Once you have completed the questionnaire, I will contact you directly to arrange the semi-structured interview (online or in person-whichever you prefer and at a time of your convenience).

If you have any questions regarding your participation please feel free to contact me at the contact details provided on the consent form or by return email.

Kind regards,



Elva Casey

Appendix 9: Consent From

A. 1: Participant Consent Form: suitable for all participants (final section adapted for questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups)

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the thesis entitled

Partnership, Perspectives and Professional Development: A Comparative Exploration of Policy and Practice Within a Shared-Vision of School Placement

This research seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) **Partnership and Innovation:** Is School Placement accurately defined as a partnership?
- 2) **Perspectives and Integration:** What are the experiences of partners in School Placement of partnership?
- 3) **Professional Development and Improvement:** Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?

Researcher's Name: Elva Casey

Researcher Contact Details: ecasey@hiberniacollege.net

Supervisor Name: Dr Melanie NíDhuinn (changed at later point)

Supervisor Contact Details: Melanie.NiDhuinn@mie.ie

Please place an x in each box to signify your agreement. Please leave the box empty to signify that you do not agree.

I declare that I have read the Participation Information Sheet in full and understand the purpose and nature of the research ☐

I understand the nature of my involvement in the research and agree to take part in this research ☐

I fully understand how the information collected will be used ☐

I fully understand that there is no obligation for me to take part in the research ☐

I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any point up to 2 weeks after the data is collected and that this does not impact on my status now or at any time in the future ☐

I know that I have been requested to not discuss the contents of the focus group discussion or identity participants ☐

For Focus Groups only: I acknowledge that the researcher has asked participants in the focus group to maintain confidentiality however the researcher cannot guarantee that individual participants will adhere to this request ☐

I acknowledge that the researcher does guarantee that they will not use my name or any identifying information in any outputs or publishing of the research ☐

I understand that research results may be published but that my anonymity is protected and that I will not be identified ☐

I understand that results from the study will be stored digitally on a password protected computer will be only accessible to the researcher ☐

I understand that I may contact the researcher or research supervisor directly if I have any queries regarding the research ☐

I understand that I may contact the Trinity College and/or Hibernia College Ethics Committee if I have any concerns as to how my data is being used or stored or if I wish to make a complaint ☐

Please Note: Final Section Adapted for Different Groups:

Questionnaires:

I agree to participate in this questionnaire for the purposed outlined above. ☐

I am happy to be contacted regarding participating in a follow-up semi-structured interview which will be conducted online ☐

Semi-Structured Interviews:

I agree to participate in this semi-structured interview for the purposed outlined above. ☐

Focus Group:

I agree to participate in this focus group for the purposed outlined above. ☐

Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Contact Details:

Appendix 10: Online Questionnaires

Pilot Questionnaire

This form will record your name here:

1. In your opinion, are the majority of students on School Placement adequately supported by host schools? Yes / No
2. In your opinion, do the majority of co-operating teachers have an adequate understanding of their role and responsibilities? Yes / No
3. In your opinion, does the 'buy in' of the host school environment to a partnership approach to School Placement impact on student performance? Yes / No
4. In your opinion, is the impact of the COVID Pandemic on School Placement still evident today? Yes/No
5. School Placement is a better indicator of future excellence in professional practice than all other modules on the PME programme. Agree / Disagree
6. Student Teachers can have an impact on the grade they attain during School Placement due to factors other than their own abilities (exp. choosing a host school, timetabling of lessons, establishing relationships with host school). Agree/Disagree
7. School Principals can have an impact on the experience and learning attained from School Placement. Agree/Disagree
8. The concept of the partnership model and the enactment of that model of School Placement is communicated effectively to stakeholders by the Teaching Council. Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree
9. The majority of Host Schools recognise, understand and fully implement their role in a partnership model. Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree
10. The student establishing a good working relationship with the co-operating teacher is at the core of a successful School Placement Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree

11. Students can manipulate the current assessment model to give themselves a better chance of a good grade on School Placement.
Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree

12. Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate:
When choosing a host school for School Placement, the most important factor for the majority of students is: Location/School/Status/ Schools Ethos

13. Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: Which word best describes the relationship of the majority of students with their School Placement Tutor?
Supportive/Formative/Irrelevant/Challenging/Other

14. Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: Which word best describes the relationship of the majority of students with their co-operating teachers?
Supportive/Formal/Irrelevant/Informal/Challenging

15. Please respond to the following statement in no more than 50 words: School Placement is the first step in the continuum of professional development.

16. Please respond to the following statements in no more than 50 words:
The impact of School Placement on professional development decisions made by Newly Qualified Teachers is significant.

17. Rank these from most relevant to least relevant: Impact in supporting the attainment of a high grade on School Placement

Student Teacher Agency
Host School Environment
Mentoring Provided by SPT
Relationship with Co-operating Teacher
Student Ability

18. Rank these from most accurate to least accurate description of the role of the co-operating teacher

Mentor
Gate-Keeper
Colleague
Confidante

19. If there was one aspect of School Placement you could change tomorrow what would it be and why? (150 words or less)

20. Describe 'partnership' in School Placement in a perfect world. (150 words or less)

- a. Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please state how long it took
- b. Please rate the questionnaire according to ease of engagement and clarity

Student Questionnaire

* This form will record your name here:

1. In your experience, did your host school adequately facilitate you for the purposes of School Placement?

Yes/N

☐

2. In your experience, did the co-operating teacher demonstrate a strong understanding of their role and responsibilities as partners in placement?

Yes/N

☐

3. In your experience, is it accurate to describe School Placement as a form of partnership?

Yes/No

4. Rank these definitions of partnership in School Placement according to accuracy from your point of view:

Partnership based on a Shared-vision

Policy Focused Partnership-at the level of Teaching Council and Department of Education

Partnership between School and College

Something Else

Partnership between Student and Co-operating Teacher

5. Now rank the definitions according to what you see at the best version of partnership to the worst version

Policy Focused Partnership

Something Else

Partnership based on a Shared-vision

Partnership between School and College

Partnership between Student and Co-operating Teacher

6. Did you experience the impact of COVID during your experience of School Placement?

Yes/No

7. Did you have real opportunities to exercise your own agency during School Placement

Yes/No

8. Was the School Principal actively involved in your experience of School Placement?

Yes/No

9. The host school environment you experienced could be best described as Highly Supportive, Supportive, Somewhat Supportive, Neutral

10. Your relationship with the co-operating teacher was central to your experience of School Placement

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

11. Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: When choosing a host school for School Placement, the most important factor was:

Location, School Status, School Ethos, Other

12. Which word best describes the relationship you had with your School Placement Tutor?

Supportive, Formal, Informal, Challenging, Collaborative, Other

13. Which word best describes the relationship you had with the co-operating teacher?

Supportive, Hierarchical, Irrelevant, Informal, Confrontational. Other

14. Please respond to this statement in no more than 50 words: I see School Placement as the first step in the continuum of my professional development

15. Please finish this statement in no more than 50 words: Partnership in School Placement is something I experience by

16. Rank these from most relevant to least relevant: Professionalism in School Placement is best exemplified by:

The way I dress

The way I communicate

Standard of Planning

Peer collaboration

Standard of Teaching and Learning

17. Rank the significance (positive or negative) of the impact of each of these players in your School Placement

Principal

School Placement Team

Co-operating Teacher

School Placement Tutor

18. Rank these from most accurate to least accurate description of the role of the co-operating teacher

Confidante

Gatekeeper

Mentor

Facilitator

Colleague

19. Perfect Partnership: What does it look like in School Placement? 150 words or less

20. You can fix one problem in School Placement-What is it, how and why? 150 words or less

21. Thank you! Please rate the questionnaire



22. Please confirm your full name

Academic Faculty Questionnaire

This form will record your name here:

1. SAFSSP: In your opinion, do the majority of host schools facilitate students adequately for the purpose of School Placement?

Yes/No

2. CTURRPP: In your opinion, do the majority of co-operating teachers have a comprehensive understanding of their role and responsibilities as partners in placement?

Yes/No

3. RPESP: In your opinion, does real partnership exist in relation to School Placement?

Yes/No

4. RDPA: Rank these definitions of partnership in School Placement according to accuracy -as SP is currently

Institutional Partnership (between school and ITE)

Individual Partnership (between student and co-operating teacher)

Idealistic/Conceptual Partnership (based on shared-vision)

Policy Focused Partnership (based on Teaching Council and Department of Education requirements)

Participatory Third Space (based on communication, collaboration and negotiation of spaces)

5. RDPBW: Now rank the definitions according to what you see as the best version of partnership to the worst version

Institutional Partnership (between school and ITE)

Individual Partnership (between student and co-operating teacher)

Idealistic/Conceptual Partnership (based on shared-vision)

Policy Focused Partnership (based on Teaching Council and Department of Education requirements)

Participatory Third Space (based on communication, collaboration and negotiation of spaces)

6. CISE: In your opinion, is the impact of the COVID Pandemic on School Placement still evident today?

Yes/No

7. STASSP: Student Teacher agency is well supported across their experiences of School Placement

Agree/Disagree

8. SPAPSP: School Principals are usually active partners in School Placement and this have a significant impact on the experience and learning of student teachers

Agree/Disagree

9. CPAPSPTC: The concept of partnership and the appropriate enactment of partnership in School Placement is effectively communicated by the Teaching Council

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree

10. SRUVIR: The majority of host schools recognise, understand, value and implement their role in a partnership model

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree

11. CTSTICPSP: Co-operating Teacher and student teacher interactions and communication is core to the experience of partnership in School Placement

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree

12. HSCF: Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: When choosing a host school for School Placement, the most important factor for the majority of students is:
Location/ School Status/School Ethos/Other

13. STSPTR: Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: Which word best describes the relationship of the majority of students with their School Placement Tutor?

Supportive/Formal/Informal/Challenging/

Collaborative/ Other

14. STCTR: Please choose the word from the list which you believe is most accurate: Which word best describes the relationship of the majority of students with the co-operating teacher?

Supportive/Hierarchical/Irrelevant/Informal/Confrontation

al Other

15. Please respond to the following statement in no more than 50 words:
A continuum wide lens which views School Placement alongside Droichead and Cosán exists

16. Please respond to the following statement in no more than 50 words:
Genuine ownership of partnership exists and sits with the ITE. *

17. ROTL: Rank these from most relevant to least relevant:
Opportunities for ITEs and host schools to liaise can be best facilitated by:

Student Teacher Agency

The Teaching Council

At ITE level-individually by each ITE

Collaboration between ITEs

Requirements placed on host schools at national level

Informally

18. RDRCT: Rank these from most accurate to least accurate description of the role of the co- operating teacher

Mentor

GateKeeper

Colleague

Confidante

Facilitator

19. Perfect Partnership: What does it look like in School Placement? (150 words or less)

20. You can 'fix' one problem in School Placement-What is it, how and why? (150 words or less)

21. Thank you! Please rate this questionnaire



22. Please confirm your full name

School Placement Tutor Questionnaire

* This form will record your name here:

1. In your opinion, do the majority of host schools facilitate students adequately for the purpose of School Placement?

Yes/No

2. In your opinion, do the majority of co-operating teachers have a comprehensive understanding of their role and responsibilities as partners in placement?

Yes/No

3. Do you self-identify in your role as a 'School Placement Tutor' as a 'partner' in school placement?

Yes/No/Maybe

4. In your opinion, who or what are the main partners in School Placement?

5. In your opinion, is it accurate to describe School Placement in terms of a partnership model?

Yes/No

6. In your opinion, is the impact of the COVID Pandemic still evident in School Placement today?

Yes/No/Not Sure

7. School Principals are usually active partners in School Placement and they have a significant impact on the experience and learning of student teachers.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

8. The concept of partnership and the appropriate enactment of partnership in School Placement is effectively communicated by the Teaching Council.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

9. The majority of host schools recognise, understand, value and implement their role in a partnership model.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

10. Co-operating teacher and student teacher interactions are core to the experience of partnership in School Placement.

11. As a School Placement Tutor I would describe the key aspects of my role as

12. The most challenging aspects of my role are...

13. How would you describe the relationship of a School Placement Tutor with a student teacher (the reality-not the ideal)?

Supportive/Formal/Informal/

Challenging/Collaborative/

Assessment Focused

14. In your opinion, do the experiences student teachers have on School Placement have an impact on their continuum of professional development. Please explain your answer briefly

15. Please rank these from most accurate description of the role of co-operating teacher to the least accurate

Mentor

Gate-Keeper

Colleague

Confidante

Facilitator

16. If you could fix one problem in School Placement what would it be and how would you do it?

17. How could School Placement better support student teachers in considering their own professional development when they enter

the profession as a newly qualified teacher?

18. Higher Education Institutions (like Hibernia College) should provide training for co-operating teachers and principals on their role in a partnership model.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

19. The Teaching Council provides appropriate guidance and support on the role of co-operating teachers and principals.

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

20. As a School Placement Tutor, I would like to see more opportunities for me to...

21. Thank you. Please include your name and email below

Appendix 11: Sample of Coding Process and Key

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Questions	Questions	Launch Pads	Launch Pads	W's+H	AXIAL	AXIAL	SELECTIVE	SELECTIVE	Participant	Participants		
Question 1	PAR	Concept of Partnership	CON-P	WHO	Causes	CA	ABSTRACTION	ABS	CT	Co-operating Teacher		
Question 2	PER	Roles & Responsibilities	R+R	WHAT	Context	CON	ELABORATION	ELA	ST	Student Teacher		
Question 3	PROF	Reform Agenda & History	REF+H	WHERE	Contingencies	CONT	ALIGNMENT	ALI	P	Principal		
		Power Imbalances	P.I.	WHEN	Consequences	CONS			SPT	School Placement Tutor		
		Diversity	DIV	WHY	Conditions	COND			AF	Academic Faculty		
		Continued Professional Dev.	CPD	HOW					NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher		
		Professional Development	Prof. Dev									
		Systematic Challenges	Sys.									

1	Individual Roles Confusing	PARCON-P	Ill-Defined Concept	
2	Confusing	PARCON-P	Ill-Defined Concept	
3	Lacks Clarity	PARCON-P	Ill-Defined Concept	
4	Very Broad	PARCON-P	Ill-Defined Concept	
5	Like the Idea	PARCON-P	Goodwill Towards Partnership	
6	Potential for Collaboration	PARCON-P	Goodwill Towards Partnership	
7	Built Around Relationships	PARCON-P	Goodwill Towards Partnership	
8	Lacks Support	PARCON-P	Informal Structure	
9	Very ad hoc	PARCON-P	Informal Structure	
0	Isolating if not part of establishment	PARCON-P	Informal Structure	
1	Informal relationships	PARCON-P	Informal Structure	
2	Anxious over assessor role and lack	PARCON-P	Fairness/Transparency	
3	How others are treated, observe an	PARCON-P	Fairness/Transparency	
4	Very different practices across inst	PARCON-P	Fairness/Transparency	
5	Individual personalities play a big ro	PARCON-P	Fairness/Transparency	
6	Can be unfair-based on relationship	PARCON-P	Fairness/Transparency	
7	Solution Focused	PARCON-P	Shared-Agenda	
8	Solution Focused approach across	PARCON-P	Shared-Agenda	
9	Community at different levels-scho	PARCON-P	Shared-Agenda	
0	Opportunities for Change	PARCON-P	Shared-Agenda	
1	Stagnant and Historical	PARCON-P	History /Reform	
2	Professional Responsibility to expe	PARCON-P	History /Reform	
3	Protection of Gaelge	PARCON-P	History /Reform	
4	Catholic Church Influence	PARCON-P	History /Reform	

0			
1	Not sure of the boundaries	PER-R+R	Ill-Defined Concept
2	Dual Roles	PER-R+R	Ill-Defined Concept
3	Poorly Definitions by TC	PER-R+R	Ill-Defined Concept
4	Changing labels	PER-R+R	Ill-Defined Concept
5	Want to support the ST	PER-R+R	Goodwill Towards Partnership
6	Want to be a support to the school	PER-R+R	Goodwill Towards Partnership
7	Contribute to the system/sense of	PER-R+R	Goodwill Towards Partnership
8	No pay for CT role	PER-R+R	Informal Structure
9	No training for CT role	PER-R+R	Informal Structure
0	NQT has no defined role	PER-R+R	Informal Structure
1	How do you related with other roles	PER-R+R	Informal Structure
2	Learn from others-no chance to	PER-R+R	Fairness/Transparency
3	Some CTS do more than others	PER-R+R	Fairness/Transparency
4	SPTs vary signifincantly	PER-R+R	Fairness/Transparency
5	School Environment impact	PER-R+R	Fairness/Transparency
6	Relationship based assessment	PER-R+R	Fairness/Transparency
7	Same key priority: ST and Education	PER-R+R	Shared-Agenda
8	Confusion over policy in an agenda	PER-R+R	Shared-Agenda
9	Overlapping Roles	PER-R+R	Shared-Agenda
0	Place to share formally and informal	PER-R+R	Shared-Agenda
1	Reluctance to collaborate across in	PER-R+R	History /Reform
2	Who can have a role? Gaeilge	PER-R+R	History /Reform
3	Lack of Diversity in roles	PER-R+R	History /Reform

	Ill-Defined Concept	Goodwill Towards Partnership	Informal Structure	Fairness/Transparency
WHO	By Teaching Council. Policy, Institutions, Individual Partners, SoPs, DE	Most partners-exception of CTs. Very evident in NQTs-altruistic? Motivations more immediate for STs	Traditionally informal relationships between HEIs and SoPs	Mostly focused around assessment and the role of SPT and CT
WHAT	Partnership: The overall concept, model and practical facilitation	Assessment, Experience of the ST, Overall contribution to education system. A balance of supporting the individual and supporting the system	Allocations of STs to schools, SPTs to students, CTs to STs, Mentoring and Supports	Assessment Practices, Supports for STs within SoPs, Relationship with Mentor role. The CT function
WHERE	Within Professional Body, Government, HEIs, SoPs	Mostly within SoP	HEI and SoP	HEI and SoP
WHEN	All stages of SP	Mostly during active placement	Prior to placement (in allocations), during placement (in SoP) and post placement (assessment feedback)	During placement (in SoP) and post placement (assessment feedback)
HOW (address)	Clear Definitions of roles and responsibilities at institutional and individual level. Community and Collaborative Approach	Mentoring role seen as a highlight (with challenges) of partnership. Also potential for partnership to be seen in broader terms outside of SP-with SP functioning as a part of the partnership-Networks?	Need for system wide process for allocations and systemwide more specific assessment practices	Need for system wide process for allocations and systemwide more specific assessment practices. Training and Supports of partners

	Ill-Defined Concept
CA	TC through policies. Tradition: Catholic Church, Gailge, Lack of Diversity.WHY:
CON	Vagueness/lack of accountability in system HEIs, SoPs
CONT	TC, policy-makers, HEIs, partners. Success depends on clear communication, collaboration, mutual understanding and flexibility to changing needs and diversity
CONS	Ambiguity in roles, lack of trust in others, misunderstandings leading to poor practice, inefficiencies in the model
COND	Involvement across partners in all stages. Establishment of mutual understandings

Appendix 12: Storying a Vignette: Robyn

I put myself in the position to experience it [SP] as partnership. I had to be open to that - not everyone is. A real example of partnership is the relationship with SPTs, sharing email and mobile details and being trusted and supported by someone with all that expertise. Not all SPTs are brilliant at that- but I've been lucky. You hear horror stories! I'd say I experienced partnership in SP when the school and CT were aware of their role and responsibilities and the college set clear expectations. I completely agree that SP helps you put theory into practice and encounter real life challenges. That is where you get the most value from it. Actively collaborating with the CT and the principal too sometimes, but maybe not that often with the principal in reality. Although I had some good principals who were very kind. By fostering open communication and shared goals (providing the best education for children), this partnership can create the best educational landscape for the students while promoting a strong sense of belonging and facilitating a comprehensive professional development journey for the ST.

Planning on SP is where things can come undone. It is so stressful! Lessons plans are excessive and not always conducive to a real teaching career. CTs tell us they are pointless. Exhaustion can be the killer and success is from grit and pure determination more than talent or ability. The strongest will survive! But SP, when it works, is an immersive experience and a first opportunity to actually be the teacher. If teachers tell us they don't plan the way the College tells us, or value the things the College does, it puts us in a really complicated place- you feel torn.

SP is a first step to professional development and lays the foundation to future growth but only when everything falls into place. It equipped me with invaluable experiences and skills, shaping my trajectory towards a fulfilling career, but I know plenty of people who were ground down by it. When it works, it provides us with safety nets to rely on, like the CT, teachers, colleagues, SPTs. And the feedback can be valuable. Lots of small conversations with the CT, lots of questions asked and experiences shared. This partnership can create the best educational landscape for the students while promoting a strong sense of belonging and facilitating a comprehensive professional development journey for the student teacher

Key: Underlined: Directly from Transcripts

Millie

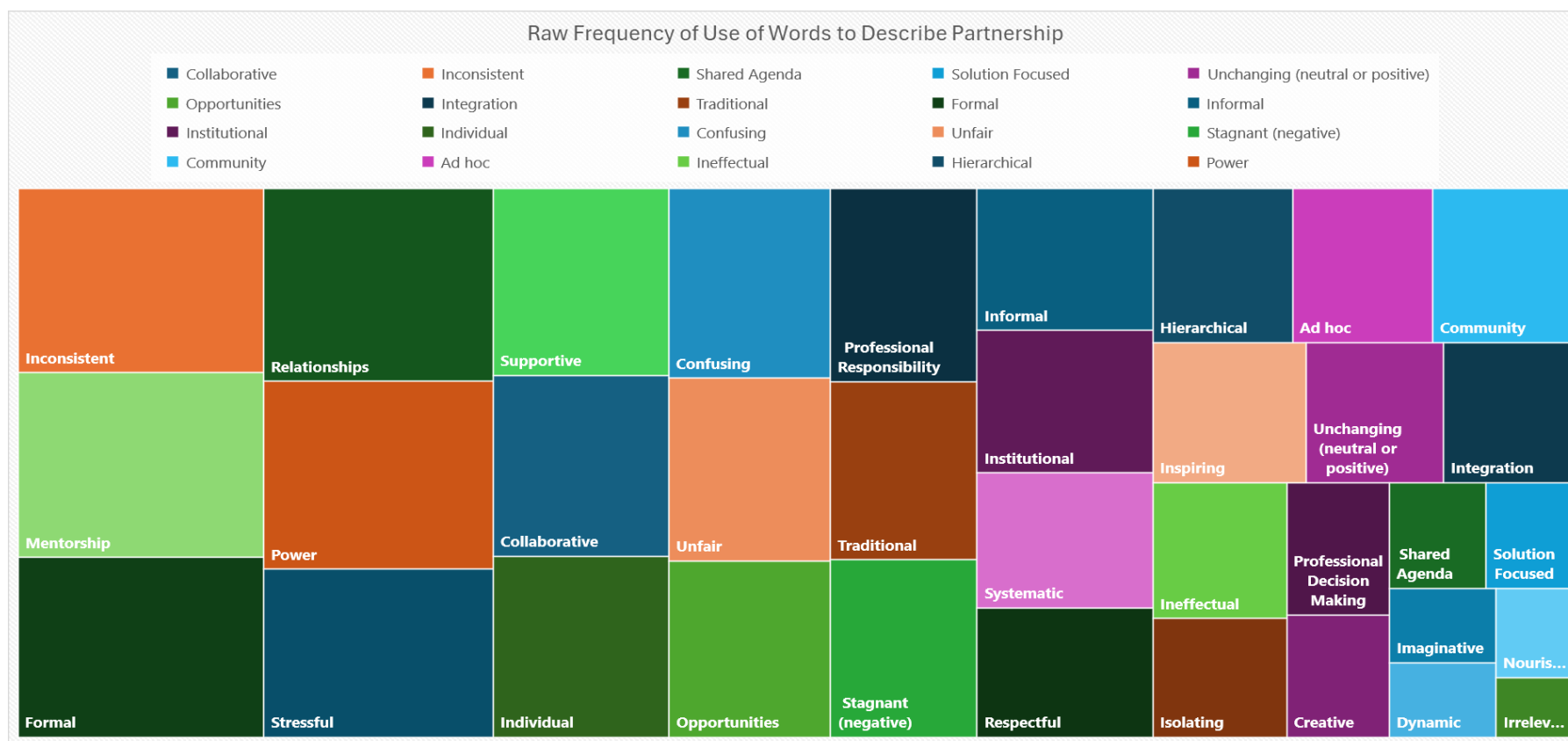
Chloe

Text adapted/combined

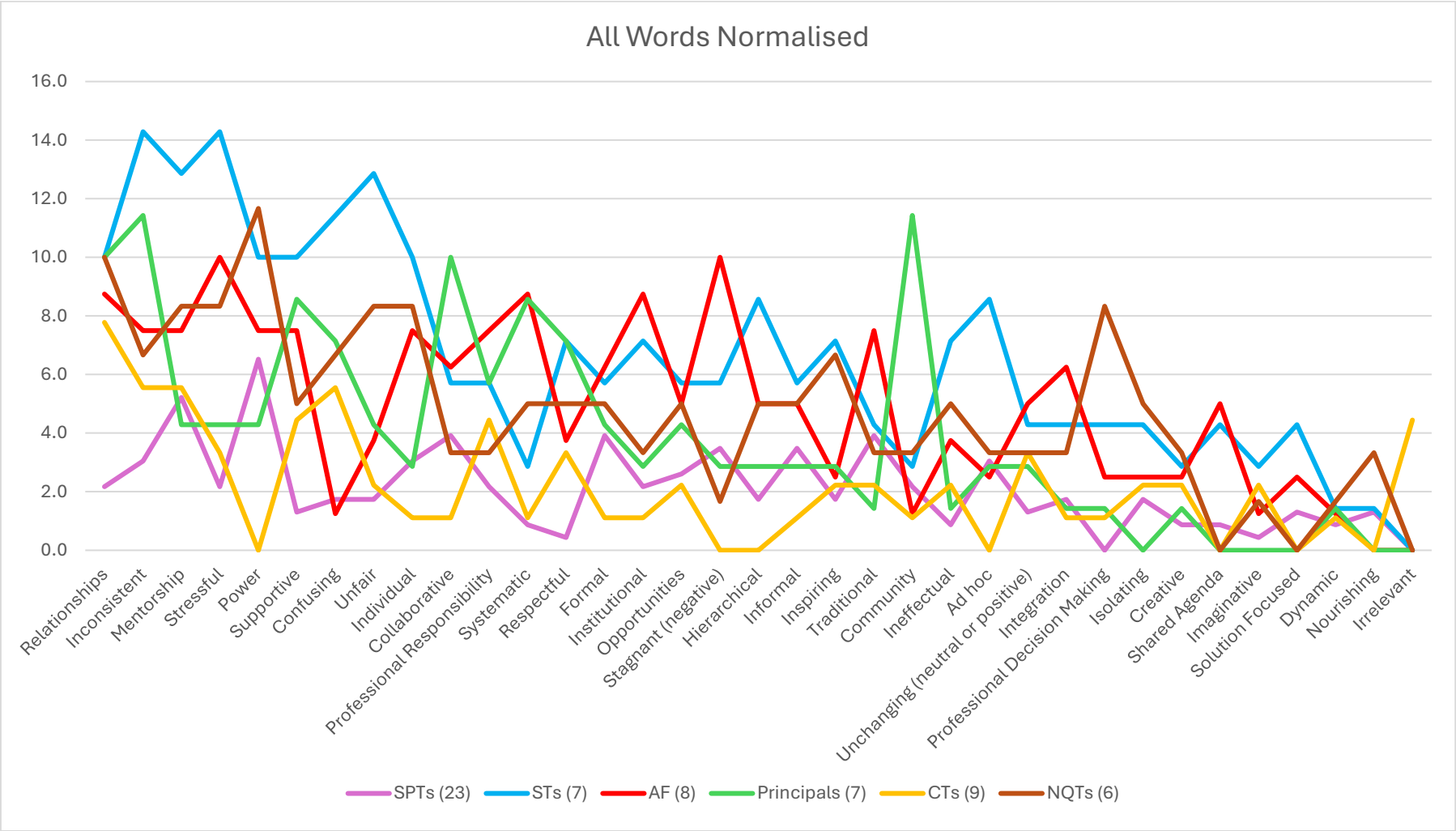
Molly

From Questionnaire

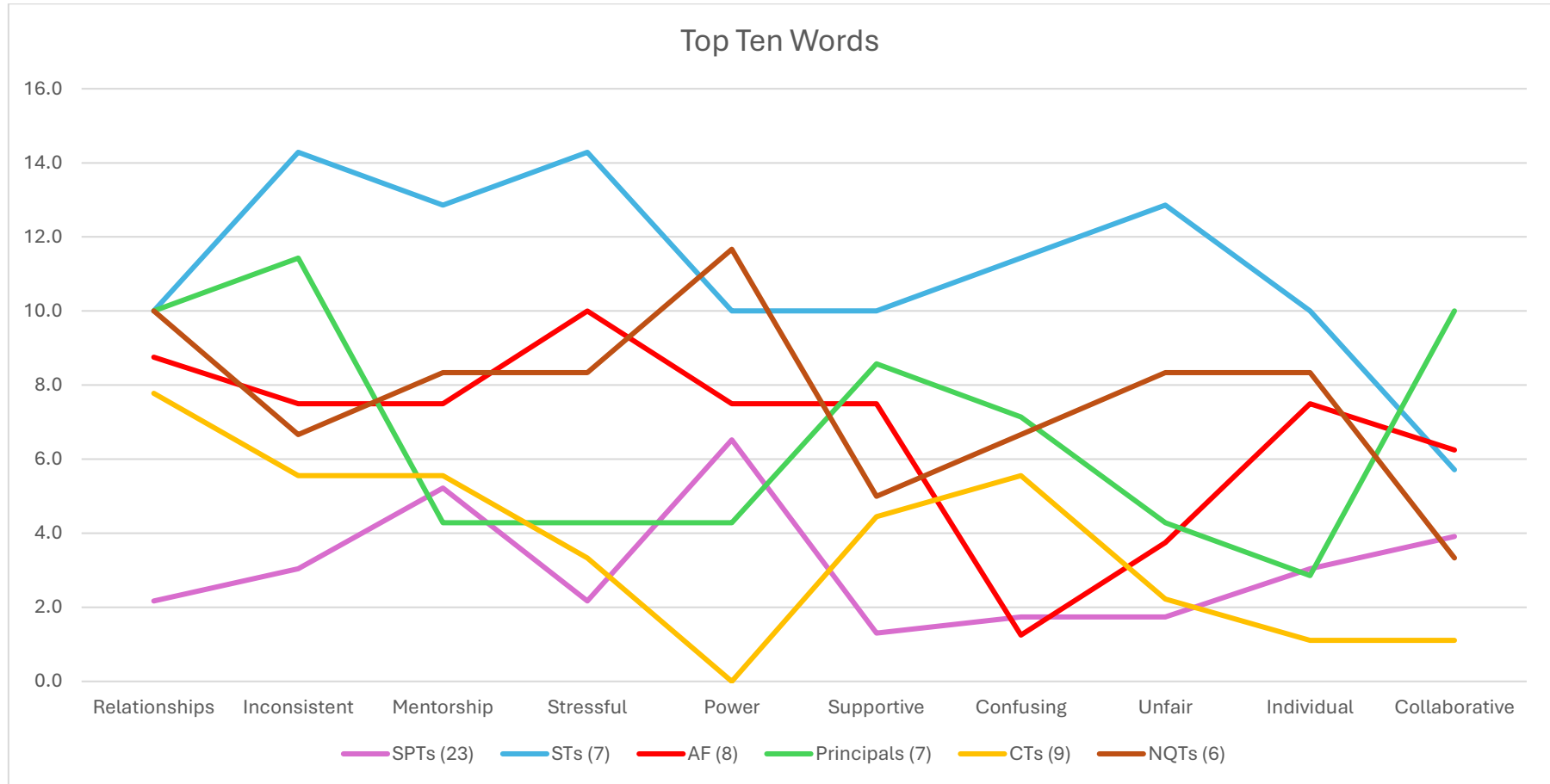
Appendix 13: Frequency of Use of Words to Describe Partnership



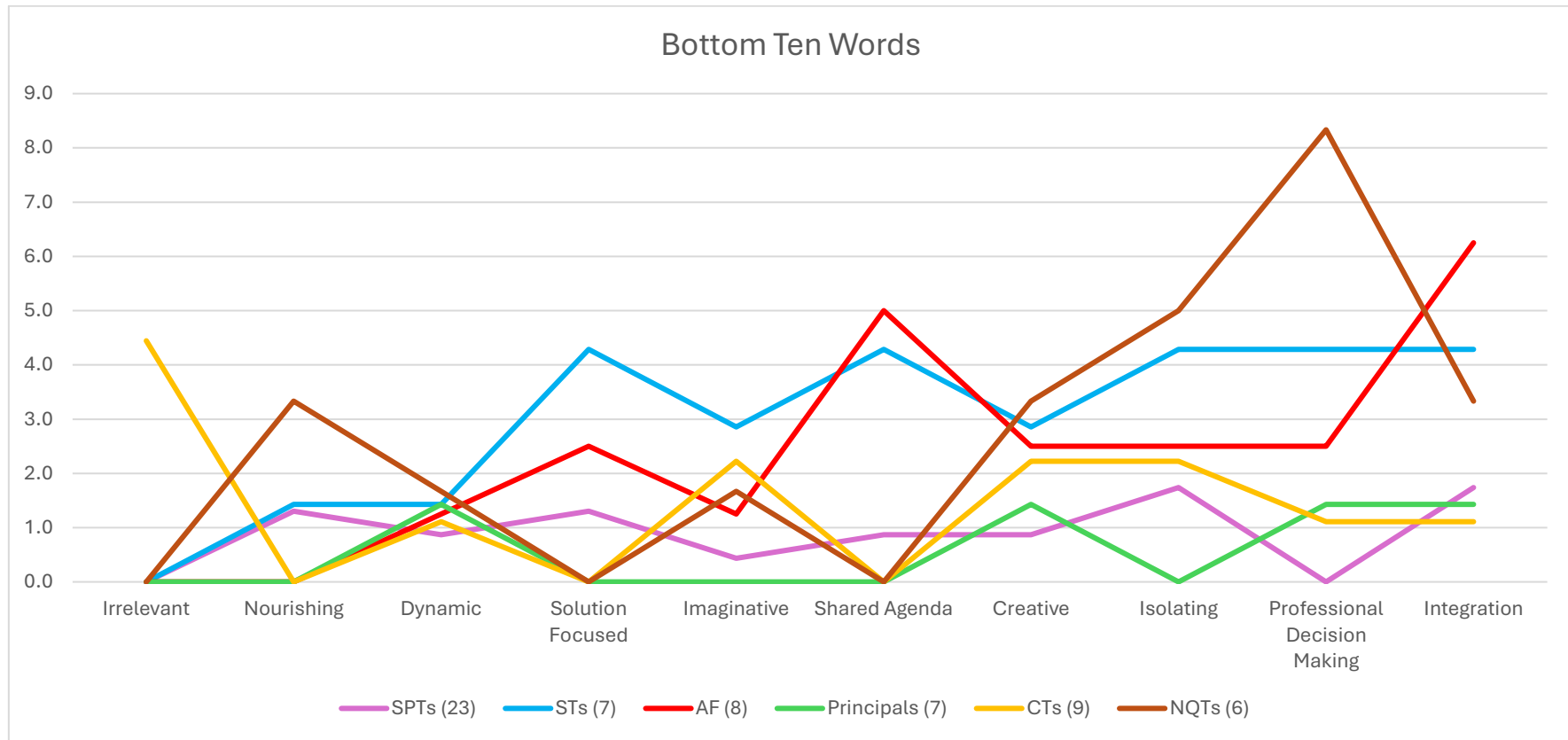
Appendix 14: Normalised Words to Describe Partnership



Top Ten Words - Partnership



Bottom Ten Words – Partnership



Appendix 15: Emerging Themes, Launch Pads and Sub-Categories

Question 1	Launch Pad	Themes	Sub - Categories
Partnership and Innovation: Is SP accurately defined as partnership?	The Concept of Partnership in SP	• Partnership Models in SP • Ill-Defined Concept • Goodwill Towards Partnership • Opposition to Partnership • The Space for Partnership • Innovation in Partnership • Individual V Institutional Partnership • Historical Context of Partnership • Resourcing and Training for Partnership in SP • Ideal V Reality of Partnership • Fairness/Transparency • Multiple Modes of Partnership • Collaborative Practices	• Familiarity with Partnership Models • Trust: Creating, Developing and Maintaining • The Language and Interpretations of Partnership • Individual V System Level Partnership Language • Partnership Outside of SP • The Third Space • Resources and Training • Challenges of and to Partnership • Lack of Detailed Definition of Roles/Responsibilities • Measuring Success in Partnership • Impact of Partnership on Student Outcomes • Community Engagement • Impact on Teacher Retention

		• Policy and Procedure in School Placement specific to Partnership • Requirements for Partnership • Implementation of Partnership • Facilitation of Partnership • Historical Context • Confusion over the Place of the 'Other'	• Data-Driven Decisions • Reflective Practices • Alignment with Educational Goals • Strategic Planning for Partnership
	Roles and Responsibilities	• Definition of Roles • Understanding of Responsibilities • Centrality or Periphery of SP in Role • Homogenous Groups • Power and Strong Voices in SP • Communication Facilitation • Professionalism in Roles/Professionalisation • Interpretation of Roles • Place on the Continuum	• Communication • Professionalisation • The Role of the Teaching Council • The Role of the 'Other' • Trust and Transparency • Knowledge and Variance • The Role of the CT: Challenge • The Role of the NQT: Opportunity • Groups V Characters/Individuals • Dichotomies in Roles • Professional Advancement

		• Group V Individual Interpretations • Knowledge and Variance	• Lifelong Learning • Professional Development Workshops • Skills and Competencies for Roles • Mentorship Opportunities

Question 2	Launch Pads	Themes	Sub-Categories
<i>Perspectives and Integration</i>	Reform Agenda and Historical Context	• History of SP • Informality and Goodwill in SP • Traditional ST/Educator Profile • Professionalising Teaching • The Place of the Irish Language • The Place of the Catholic Church • The European Context • Knowledge Society • Educational Equity and Access	• Systematic V Informal • HEI V SoP Divide • History of Partnership • Protectionism • The New Classroom: Pupil Diversity • The New School: School Diversity • Standardisation and Learning Outcomes • European and International Context • Privatisation: HC Context

		• Teacher Preparation and Support • Curriculum Development and Reform • Partner Engagement and Collaboration • Educational Policy and Legislation	• Expanding and Opening the Profession • History of Lack of Diversity • Challenges of GenAI • Policy Implementation Challenges • Bridging Educational Gaps • Inclusion Strategies • Teacher Wellbeing and Burnout Prevention
	Systematic Challenges and Opportunities	• System V Individual • Role of the TC • Role of INTO • Policy V Practice • Sustainability • Systematic Approach to SP • Inhibitors to Change • Attitudes to Policy • Efficacy of Organisations • Future Focus • Facilitating Organisation Collaboration	• Inhibitors to Change (structural barriers, cultural barriers, overcoming resistance, strategies for Change Management) • Attitudes to Policy • Efficacy of Organisations • Future Focus • Facilitating Organisational Collaboration (collaborative cultures, collaborative leadership, benefits and challenges) • Communities of Practice (definition, building, sustaining, role in professional development, case studies)

		• Communities of Practice • Networking Opportunities • Decision-Making Power	• Networking Opportunities (benefits, platforms, challenges) • Fear of Losing Decision-Making
	Power Imbalances Agency	• Empowerment and Influence • Pedagogy of Voice • Dynamics of Power in Education • Distribution of Power • Ethical Use of Power • Power and Authority • Professional Decision Making • Power and Potential: Harnessing NQT Potential, ST Centrality • Assessment Anxiety • Inspirational Practice	• Professional Decision Making • Professional Responsibility • Dual Roles • Mentorship • Reciprocal Gain • Balance of Responsibility and Requirements • Assessment Anxiety • Inspirational Practice • Decision-Making Processes • Collaborative Decision-Making • Fostering Creativity

Question 3	Launch Pads	Themes	Sub-Categories

Professional Development: Can School Placement function as an early step in a continuum of professional development?	Professional Development and SP	• Supporting and Developing Professionalism through SP • Impact and Efficacy of SP as First Step • SP as a Journey • Impact and Efficacy of Systematic Planning for CPD • Reflexive Practices • Mentorship and Peer Support Networks • Integration of SP with CPD • Collaboration and Networking	• Lack of Sequential Continuum • Cohesive Vision of a Continuum • Linking SP with Droichead • Measurable Deliverables for SP as a Journey • Growth and Development • Roles and Responsibilities within the Journey • Systematic Enhancements
	Diversity in the Profession	• Homogenous Profession • Values and Status of the Profession • SP Supporting Creativity and Diversity • Assessment and Risk Taking • Irish Language Requirement	• ST Profiles • Barriers to Entry for Diverse Candidates • Gender Balance • Ethnicity • Socio - Economic Diversity • The 'new' classroom: Teacher Reflecting Pupils

			• Admissions Processes Societal Changes and Challenges • Inhibitors to Creativity • Risk-Taking • Agency and Self -Expression
	CPD: Innovation, Integration and Improvement	• Reflective Practices in SP Guiding Career Decisions • Reflection and Self - Conceptualisation • Teacher Identity • Values and Status • Innovation in CPD • Technology-Enhanced CPD • Fostering a Culture of Innovation	• Reflective V Reflexive Practices • Ineffective Reflection • Interpretations of CPD • Reflection informing CPD