

**The role of the University Tutor in School-Based Work:
how does the Irish system compare?**

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Abstract

In both the north and south of Ireland, the system for evaluation of student teachers during school-based work is dominated by the university tutor's assessment. This is fundamentally different from the approaches used in many other countries. The purpose of this research was to examine the role of the university tutor and thereby identify strengths and weaknesses in the Irish system. This led to the proposal of a version of the collaborative model that lies between current Irish practice and the systems used in other countries, where evaluation of student teachers is dominated by schools.

Keywords: School-Based Work; Student Teacher; Evaluation.

1. Introduction

In both the north¹ and south² of Ireland, the system for evaluation of the work of student teachers during school-based work is based upon assessment by the university tutor: the school provides the placement context and the role of school is largely confined to facilitating the logistical arrangements for student teacher placements. This is fundamentally different from the approaches used in other countries. Whether initial teacher education (ITE) should be school-based or university-based or a mix of both has generated significant debate over the years in many countries (Booth *et al*, 1990; Shaw, 1997; Bullough *et al*, 1997; Brisard *et al*, 2005; Sachs, 2003). Two radically different paradigms of teacher professional development are evident in this debate. On one side, are the advocates of an apprenticeship model of ITE emphasising teacher competences and practical knowledge best learnt in a school setting (Lawlor, 1990). On the other side of the debate, the pendulum swings towards those who argue that ITE must include an emphasis on theoretical knowledge and reflective dispositions believed to be best learnt in a university setting (Edwards *et al*, 2002). Somewhere in between the school-based and the university-based extremities lie those who view a collaborative mix of school- and university-based work as the ideal model for ITE (McIntyre *et al*, 1993; Furlong *et al*, 2000). How one conceptualises the school-based element has significant implications for roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. Whilst school-based work has long been a feature of ITE (primary) in both the north and south of Ireland, research into roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools has been relatively thin on the ground with a few exceptions (Moran *et al*, 1999; Caul and McWilliams, 2002; Author, 2008). The dearth of research into the specific role of the HEI in school-based work served as a primary catalyst for the North-South research project underpinning this paper. Funding received from the Standing Conference of Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) enabled researchers at Stranmillis University College (A College of Queen's University, Belfast) and St. Patrick's College (A College of Dublin City University) to conduct a cross jurisdictional (North-South) qualitative research study of the role of the university/HEI tutor in school-based work. The specific research context was ITE (primary). Whilst the research focused primarily on exploring the role of the HEI tutor in school-based work, invariably, some attention had to be given to the role of the class teacher

¹ The North of Ireland comprises the six northern counties.

² The South of Ireland (Éire) comprises the 26 remaining counties of Ireland.

given the significance of the latter in mentoring relationships and in the nature of student teacher learning during school-based experiences.

2. The Research Context

Perspectives on the role of the HEI tutor in school-based work (primary) north and south, were sought from a sample of class teachers, student teachers, HEI tutors involved in school-based work, and supervisors (retired principals, teachers contracted for the purpose of assessing students on school-based work). School-based work is more generally known as teaching practice in the south. The research sample involved all teacher education university colleges north and south with a specific focus on ascertaining the views of student teachers, tutors, supervisors, and class teachers directly linked to Stranmillis College and to St. Patrick's College. Whilst some comparative research in the area of teaching practice in the north and south of Ireland has been conducted (McWilliams *et al.*, 2006), a specific focus on the role of the HEI tutor in school-based work, north and south, has not been explored. The research on hand therefore addresses this lacuna and builds on the international research in the field of school-based work and school-university partnerships.

A useful starting point for this paper is to map out in broad brush strokes the current situation vis-à-vis roles and responsibilities of HEIs and schools in teaching practice, north and south.

2.1 Teaching Practice: Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has an integrated competency-based framework for teacher education straddling the three key phases in a teacher's professional career – ITE, induction, and early professional development. The framework is firmly located within a partnership approach to teacher education with specific roles and responsibilities for the various teacher education partners in Northern Ireland outlined in the Partnership Handbook (NITEC, 1998). The partners are schools, HEIs, education and library boards (ELBs) and curriculum advisory and support services (CASS). Schools and HEIs have complementary roles in initial teacher education (NITEC, 1998, p.25). The basis of the partnership between HEIs and schools is founded on the understanding that some professional competences are best developed and extended during the school-based aspect of the ITE course (NITEC, 1998, p.22). HEI tutors in Northern Ireland are expected to liaise closely with their partnership schools and to maintain regular and supportive contact with principal teachers and with teacher tutors who have overall general responsibility for placement experiences in their respective schools. HEI tutors are required to deal with any problems which may arise in the context of placements on teaching practice. They also assess and report to their HEI on student teacher competences and progress. In the process, they are expected to consult with the class teacher and the teacher tutor in respect of the quality of students' teaching and progress over the course of teaching practice. They also provide feedback to students on lessons observed and on levels of professional competence attained.

Whilst schools and HEIs are expected to play complementary roles in teaching practice, it is interesting to note that schools in Northern Ireland rejected moves in the late 1990s to place their involvement in teaching practice on a statutory footing (McMahon, 2000). Fears around a failed

English model of teacher education being foisted upon schools including statutory obligations vis-à-vis mentoring and assessment of student teachers were among the reasons for rejection by schools of statutory partnership arrangements (Moran, 1998). A spirit of goodwill and volunteerism is therefore the prevailing ethos in the context of schools' involvement in teaching practice in Northern Ireland. Schools are, in effect, free to opt in or out of 'partnership' arrangements for teaching practice. This has placed considerable pressures on HEI tutors to make partnership 'work' and a visible inequity in the accountability of the partners involved (Loughrey, 2007; Caul and McWilliams, 2002). A similar situation in terms of inequitable accountability prevails in Scotland and in England alongside an ethos of volunteerism whereby schools choose to be involved in ITE or not (Brisard *et al*, 2006; Furlong, 2000). Ultimately, it is the HEIs that are inspected and held to account for standards in ITE, and not schools.

2.2 Teaching Practice: The South of Ireland

In the south of Ireland, schools' involvement in teaching practice has also a non-statutory basis. Whilst schools are acknowledged and encouraged as partners with HEIs in ITE (DES, 2006; Government of Ireland, 2002), roles and responsibilities of schools and HEIs have never been clearly articulated in any official directive from central government. Given that the Inspectorate are no longer (since December 2009) involved in quality assurance in teaching practice, the task of delineation of roles and concomitant responsibilities of schools and colleges will now fall to the relatively new Teaching Council. As matters stand, schools in the south have no formal role in mentoring or in the assessment of student teachers. Similar to the north, ITE in the south continues to be reliant on a spirit of volunteerism in schools to provide teaching practice placements (Cannon, 2004). Unlike their counterparts in the north and in other parts of the UK, most schools in the south do not have a designated staff member (a teacher tutor) with overall responsibility for student teachers and for communicating with HEIs in relation to teaching practice. From a structural perspective, therefore, school-based work in the south lacks an important HEI-school link structure to facilitate communication between the HEI and the school and *vice versa*. Furthermore, in the absence of an agreed national framework of competences for teaching education in the south, HEI colleges in the south provide their own teaching practice information to schools including requirements of students and quality assurance protocols and practices. One of the smaller HEI colleges in the south requires class teachers to submit an end-of-placement report which HEI tutors use to inform the award of teaching practice grades. There is no requirement, however, on any teacher in the south to undertake mentoring or assessment of students on teaching practice. Most schools however do, albeit on an informal way, and exhibit extraordinarily high levels of commitment to supporting students on teaching practice (Egan, 2006; Coolahan, 2003, 2007). In recent years, schools in the south are also seeking to be more systematically involved in teaching practice and specifically in structured mentoring and in consultative conversations with university tutors in relation to student teacher progress (Author, 2008).

As matters stand, the role of the school in teaching practice in the south is very much along the lines of a gracious host in facilitating the logistical requirements of HEIs for school-based work (Edwards, 1997). Conway *et al* (2009, p.119) in their report to the Teaching Council examined

ITE models and practices in nine countries and concluded that the nature of schools-HEI partnerships in the south is typically that of a workplace/host model:

‘...the school is the location where the student teacher undertakes a placement. The tertiary institution provides all coursework. This model typically involves some coaching by supervising teachers.’

In the south, the absence of any competency-based framework and statutory agencies such as CASS and ELBs in Northern Ireland, has led to the situation whereby efforts to involve schools more systematically in school-based work has been largely HEI-led and HEI-driven. One such initiative, the *Partnership with Schools in Teacher Professional Development* (INTO, 2009, pp. 16-17) has provided important insights into the partnership experiences of principals, class teachers, HEI tutors and student teachers and their respective roles and responsibilities in teaching practice. In the latter project, whilst schools were willing to be involved in the mentoring and informal assessment of students, they did not wish to play a role in the award of teaching grades to students i.e. they did not want a formal assessment role in school-based work. Principals and class teachers believed that HEI tutors were best placed to conduct the formal assessment of students on teaching practice by virtue of the depth and range of their professional expertise and experience. Class teachers did, however, play a key role in how HEI tutors framed their summative assessments of students in providing valuable observations (oral and written) of students’ progress to students and university tutors over the course of teaching practice. During the course of each visit to a student, university tutors consulted with class teachers on student teacher progress. Elsewhere, criticisms have been made of HEI-led models of partnership which serve instrumentalist tendencies such as an assessment role for schools in school-based work and do little to promote collaborative partnerships in which HEIs and schools share joint responsibility for assessment and quality assurance in school-based work (Chapman *et al*, 2003). A look at the Scottish context and beyond might be helpful at this point.

2.3 Teaching Practice: Scotland and Beyond

Brisard *et al* (2005) in their Scottish review study found considerable tensions and conflicting views among school-based ITE personnel, HEI tutors, and policy makers in relation to roles and responsibilities in school-based work. Schools perceived the assessment of student teachers on teaching practice to be the role of HEI tutors and the primary purpose of HEI visits to schools. HEI tutors and students on the other hand ranked formative feedback and advice to students ahead of assessment as the key role of HEI tutors on visits to schools. Tensions existed, however, for HEI tutors (North and South) in the study who commented on the high status afforded to colleagues who were engaged in research in comparison to the acknowledgement given to HEI tutors who were involved in school-based work. Whilst considerable emphasis has been placed on strengthening the role of LEAs (Local Education Authorities) in school-university partnerships in Scotland, there has been much less exploration of the roles and responsibilities of the various partners and especially those pertaining to schools involved in teaching practice (Smith *et al*, 2006). In other studies in the UK, and for varied reasons including the transfer of financial resources to partnership schools, there has been resistance by HEIs to engaging schools more collaboratively in school-based work (Furlong *et al*, 2000). HEI-schools partnerships tend to fall within the ‘separatist’ or ‘HEI-led’ model of ITE with schools and HEIs fulfilling separate

but different roles in teaching practice. The latter model falls considerably short of the ‘collaborative’ model evident in the Oxford Internship Scheme (McIntyre, 1991; Benton, 1990) in which HEI tutors and schools had shared understandings of the fusion of theory and practice and therefore shared joint responsibility for all aspects of student progress including assessment and the development of students’ reflective dispositions. The latter model therefore envisages a key role for HEI tutors in working with teachers in the lead-up to and during school-based experiences for students.

Given the proliferation of employment-based routes into teaching in England, the role of the university tutor has been significantly redefined and reshaped in a manner which has shaken the core philosophical base of teacher education (Gilroy, 1992). There are others who argue that HEI tutors have retained a key responsibility in the area of relationship-building with class teachers, principal teachers, school-based mentors and ITE co-ordinators and student teachers (Furlong and Maynard, 1995). HEI tutors are also required to ensure that teachers are upskilled in educative models of mentoring, updated in theoretical knowledge and encouraged in the discharge of their professional responsibilities to trainees (McIntyre and Hagger, 1994). Hopper (2001) astutely draws the reader’s attention to the need for the HEI tutor to have finely-tuned skills in time management and in the affective interpersonal domain. Furthermore, she argues that the role of the HEI tutor in developing school-based reflective practices is becoming even more important during teaching practice and not less important. In support of Hopper’s (2001) reflective practice emphasis, there is significant research available which points to variable practices in school-based mentoring with miseducative outcomes for trainees in some cases (Edwards and Collison, 1996; Feiman Nemser, 2001). The role of the HEI tutor in ensuring student teachers develop reflective pedagogic dispositions is therefore a key role for HEIs into the future. An emphasis on developing students’ reflective practice during school-based work also serves to offset an apprenticeship model of ITE and thereby bridge the theory-practice divide in a meaningful school-based context. Upskilling school staff in reflective practices requires HEI tutors to have high levels of communication and interpersonal skills and an understanding of school contexts and policies (Tomlinson, 1995).

The critical role of the HEI tutor in building relationships with schools has been highlighted by Moran (1998) in Northern Ireland, and by others committed to school-based mentoring approaches (McIntyre *et al*, 1993). Relationship-building is an onerous, time-consuming and politically-sensitive work. To do it well, there are serious resource implications involved for HEIs, and most specifically, time implications. It is worth noting also that school-based work is not premised on only student teachers learning and developing. HEI tutors also stand to gain from relationships with schools and from involvement in school-based work (Tickle, 2000). When Sachs (2003) argues for an activist teaching profession, she envisages the development of school-university partnerships as a symbiotic means of renewing the knowledge base of HEI tutors and school-based educators. Her preferred model of partnership in school-based work therefore assumes that ‘each party has something to contribute to the professional learning of the other’ (Sachs, 2003, p.66). This may ultimately lead to a redefinition of the role of the HEI tutor with an increased emphasis on the HEI tutor, school staff and student teachers working as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Stoll and Seashore Louis, 2007; Darling Hammond and Bransford, 2005). Rather than the traditional model of university-based lectures followed by a block period of teaching practice, ITE might therefore be reconceptualised within a

constructivist, problem-based framework in which HEI tutors, teachers and students learn collaboratively in developing professional competence and knowledge as a community of learners. An example of the latter is evident in the Knowledge-Building-Community project at the University of Wollongong, Australia (Kiggins, 2002). In the latter model, HEI tutors are well-placed, it would seem, to bring theoretical and pedagogical experience to bear on dialogue and professional action. This point is summarised well by Edwards *et al*, 2002, p.123:

‘...they [HEI tutors] can make their contribution to initial training by supporting schools as learning communities and fit places for the professional development of beginning teachers. And they can enrich the continuing professional development of teachers by supporting and informing teachers’ engagement with knowledge as users and producers of knowledge of teaching’.

A desirable role for the HEI tutor is therefore contributing to the development of critical reflective practices in classrooms and schools in which students are placed for school-based work. Nurturing the development of reflective dispositions in students would also help to offset the de-professionalising impact of the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1970) on how and what students learn during school-based work. It is interesting to note that school-based mentors believe they benefit significantly from the key role of HEI tutors in sharing reflective practice approaches with mentors during school-based work (Jones *et al*, 1997).

Ultimately, effective discharge of roles and responsibilities in school-university partnerships is tied up with the foundations of collaborative endeavour – the quality of trust and mutual respect displayed by the partners involved. As Sachs (2003, p.75) astutely asserts: ‘Without trust and respect, partnerships are on very shaky ground’.

The literature review relevant to the research on hand served to illuminate the findings and inform the discussion of findings in a meaningful way. It was also helpful in selecting an appropriate methodology for the research, mindful of the research aims:

- (i) To explore similarities and differences in the role of the college supervisor (HEI Tutor), north and south, from the perspective of student teachers, class teachers and HEI tutors
- (ii) To provide a structured research opportunity for student teachers, teachers, college supervisors and researchers north and south to engage in dialogue around school-based work and to share understandings and perspectives
- (iii) To contribute to the research base in school-based work in teacher education (primary).

3. The Research Methodology

A mixed methods approach (Creswell, 1994) involving both quantitative and qualitative methods was used in the research. The dominant methods lay within the qualitative domain. The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was selected as the

most appropriate mode of analysis given the dominance of qualitative data collected alongside the need to interrogate the various data sets on an iterative basis.

The research sample was a random sample of participants, north and south, as follows:

- 60 class teachers (30 in the north, 30 in the south)
- 60 HEI tutors (30 in the north, 30 in the south) across all 7 teacher education colleges on the island of Ireland
- 100 student teachers (50 from St. Patrick's College, 50 from Stranmillis College)

The research sample included a mix of participants in terms of gender and age range. Class teachers had various levels of experience of having students on teaching practice and were in schools of varying sizes and types. HEI tutors reflected a good mix of age, gender, specialist expertise and years of experience in school-based work. Student teachers were final year B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) students randomly selected from the database of the respective HEI. The research instruments used were as follows:

An initial questionnaire was sent to all participants, north and south, to ascertain some broad baseline perspectives on roles and responsibilities of schools and HEI tutors from the perspective of student teachers, HEI tutors and class teachers. The initial questionnaire focused on key structural and attitudinal dimensions around school-based work drawing on the work of Alexander (1990) and Edwards *et al* (2002).

The outcomes of the questionnaire provided prompts for the semi-structured interview schedules which were used with the focus groups of student teachers, teachers and HEI tutors. HEI tutors included retired teachers and principals contracted by the HEI to supervise students on teaching practice and had considerable experience of doing so. Focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. One-to-one Interviews were conducted separately with the Director of Teaching Practice in Stranmillis College and in St. Patrick's College.

The conduct of all elements of the research was in line with the ethical protocols and research requirements of both Stranmillis College and St. Patrick's College and approved accordingly by the research committee of both colleges.

4. Results and Discussion

The survey sample was relatively small at 150, but of sufficient size and range across relevant factors to produce the indications expected from such a pilot study; these indications have been variously reinforced or modified by consideration of feedback from the range of focus group interviews. The results may be categorized within three main areas of discussion: the challenge of the tutor's role; the relationship between the roles of tutor and classroom teacher; and, structures for communication.

4.1 The Challenge of the Tutor's Role

There was general agreement that the tutor's role was to observe, report, assess, advise the student, encourage and support the student, and to engage in dialogue with the class teacher in relation to the student's progress. However, tutors communicated a very high level of dissatisfaction with the current system of assessment of students on teaching practice and stressed the need for much more consideration of a variety of issues pertaining to this, such as recognition by senior management within HEIs of the importance of the tutor's role during school-based work, together with acknowledgement of the professional and administrative demands, and compromised research activity; the need for self-evaluation, external evaluation and definition of the criteria by which evaluation would be made. Less than half of tutors in the north had received additional training.

From the teachers' perspective, there was also agreement that tutors should talk more with pupils, examine pupils' work and discuss extra-curricular activities in which the student may be involved. Teachers agreed that engaging in dialogue with the class teacher should be regarded as essential, and that assigning the same tutor to a particular school over a period of years would encourage the development of improved communications and relationships. Students agreed that tutors should have to teach in a school for a certain number of hours or weeks every few years, that the inconsistencies displayed by university tutors or teaching practice supervisors were a significant cause for concern, and that each student would have one tutor continuing as his or her main assessor over the duration of the degree. They proposed that evaluation of tutors should include length of time out of the classroom, number of years in the classroom, a clear set standard, quality and nature of feedback to students, knowledge of curriculum and evaluation from the student. All groups indicated that they were not sure that a set of teacher competences presents an accurate analysis of what constitutes a "good teacher".

4.2 The Relationship Between the Roles of Tutor and Classroom Teacher

There was a lack of agreement regarding whether or not the teacher's assessment of the student's performance should form part of the student's grade for teaching practice, but there was general agreement in favour of a more structured role for schools in teaching practice, and that primary schools should have a statutory duty to provide placements for student teachers to undertake teaching practice (with an opt-out clause available to cover exceptional circumstances). It was held that the teacher education institutions should be responsible for the mentor training of teachers; it was also considered that there could be a system for recognizing "Teaching Schools" in a similar way to "Teaching Hospitals" (i.e. where selected schools were recognized as specializing in facilitating teacher training), and that specialist teaching staff who were responsible for mentoring students could be recognized by awarding professional credit.

4.3 Structures for Communication

It was generally agreed that a formal partnership agreement between a university college and primary schools would yield benefits, such as improved communication and support, but also that the school's role is critical and currently not defined; teachers wished to be told in advance of a student's needs and experiences, or abilities such as music or drama; tutors wished to be made

aware if a particular event was happening in the school. Frequent tutor and teacher comments included: “visits should be unannounced!” and, “visits should be announced!”, but many advocates of both alternatives acknowledged that a mixture of announced and unannounced visits would be an acceptable compromise.

4.4 Discussion

The central question emerging from these results is this: should the Irish system for evaluation of student teachers during teaching practice be ditched in favour of one of the systems used in other countries, and should schools be paid to take student teachers? This could also mean that teachers were expected to be responsible for assessment of the students during their teaching practice and that tutors would then focus upon delivery of the theory and research. It would make good sense in many respects: the teachers see the student teaching on a day-to-day basis, where the tutor can see only a snapshot or a slice of the experience and may perceive an unrepresentative impression of the student’s performance in the classroom (which could be argued as another reason why visits should be unannounced: the slice becomes even thinner if its random dimension is removed); the teacher is able to observe the student’s professionalism on a much wider basis through the student’s interaction with colleagues in the staffroom and perhaps through involvement in staff meetings and extra-curricular activities, where the tutor does not have access to this evidence.

Furthermore, it might have been many years since the tutors were themselves teaching in primary classrooms and it follows that they cannot be as familiar with delivery of the curriculum as practising teachers. Certainly, from survey responses and focus groups, the perception of the students was that a tutor who had been away from the classroom for a significant number of years would, rather quickly, forget how to teach. However, the students’ assertions were not based on any apparent evidence or reasoning, but rather upon a belief that some tutors in particular would not be able to practise what they preached. The tutors were evidently aware of such perceptions, but they were also aware that their analysis of the situation and their response to it required much more consideration. For the tutors, it could be argued that not only would many of the skills and principles of teaching not be easily forgotten, but that they must also continue to practise many of the same or similar skills as tutors; in fact, in this respect, their position is not unlike that of a school principal. It could also be argued that their role is now fundamentally different from that of a teacher: it is based upon their experience and success as a teacher, but their focus is now upon research and the very practice of teaching, itself. And on this basis, there is no need for them to return to the classroom to receive some form of “top-up”, because to make such a suggestion is to presume that they will have forgotten how to teach.

On the other hand, to take the analogy of workplace-based learning for medical doctors, leading surgeons practising within a Teaching Hospital will not only conduct lectures for student doctors, they will also ‘teach by doing’, while students watch and, later, work along with the ‘teacher’. In the same way, it could be argued that within any professional training institution, students cannot be most effectively taught by their tutors, unless their tutors remain in touch with the realities and cutting edge of practice within their profession.

If schools were to be paid to take student teachers, the HEI management might have something to say about the diversion of some of their resources to schools, although they may save the cost of delivering that module. But then, there was a clear majority in favour of the university colleges providing the training for teachers to be mentors and assessors of students, if that role were also to be transferred to schools. HEI management would reasonably expect some financial acknowledgement for provision of such training, but might still predict an overall loss of income. On the other hand, if such mentor training and practice were to be recognized as credit points contributing to a Masters degree, then the university college might well recoup the predicted loss through larger enrolment numbers for higher degrees; obviously, teachers and their professional development programme would also be beneficiaries. Another advantage of a credit point recognition would be that it might address an understandable reluctance on the part of teachers to undertake additional duties, in this case, of mentoring and assessing students.

When a similarly collaborative model of training school status was proposed for Northern Ireland in 1993, school principals rejected the initiative, largely because of the additional expectations that would have been placed on them. Some of their general concerns might have been well-founded: in regions of England, for instance, where the school is paid (typically £800 per student placement), the reaction of the teacher to the increased workload involved in mentoring might depend on whether or not the school's policy is to channel the extra money directly to the teacher's department; in order to moderate differences in circumstances and expectations between schools and ensure consistent standards, tutors might be regarded as a form of 'moderation police', where before, there was a co-operative relationship; the tutors might feel that a vital link with the students is lost. Remuneration potentially alters the nature of relationships.

Considering, then, the pros and cons of the student teachers in Ireland being assessed by either tutors or teachers, the teachers undoubtedly have a bigger picture of the student's performance, but the tutors have more experience in assessing teaching. A compromise position might capture the best of both worlds: university colleges could provide the training for those teachers who wish to become mentors and contribute to the assessment of the student by providing one of the, typically, four graded reports that make up the student's profile and upon which the student is finally graded; these teachers could receive credit points towards a Masters degree. On a practical note, however, such a system could not operate unless enough teachers were prepared to grade students to ensure that all students could be assessed by the same system. In fact, the system would fail if, in any year, an insufficient number of teachers took up the option to provide a grade. One solution would be to seek statutory requirement, but a simpler solution already exists: teachers already provide feedback and evaluation reports for students; if the final grade for a student on teaching practice were determined by the tutors on the basis of, say, two tutor grades and with consideration of the teachers' reports, then implementation is readily achievable. Some tutors may argue that teachers' reports are already considered, but it is not the case that they must constitute a percentage of the final grade.

Schools would benefit because this relieves some of their professional development workload; university colleges would benefit from more Masters students and a reduction of the number of tutor visits required; student teachers would benefit from the assessment of both teachers and tutors; teachers would benefit from an additional option for structured professional development; tutors benefit from a reduced visiting workload and a more clearly defined role in relation to that

of the teachers; tutors and teachers would both benefit from a more co-ordinated and co-operative approach which would inherently address the identified communication difficulties. This then constitutes a version of the collaborative model that lies in-between the current HEI-dominated Irish system and those more teacher-dominated systems used in other countries

Another critical area for consideration relates to the use of teacher competences as a basis for evaluation of classroom teaching. The teacher competences proposed by the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI) in 2005 constituted a significant step forward in efforts to articulate the practice of teaching. GTCNI stated within their proposals that, “*The revised teacher competences must, therefore, be viewed as a structure which acts as a starting point to professional life for teachers and which is developed through.... career-long professional development.*”. However, although the competences are presented here merely as a starting point, following the practice of continual evaluation, the competences should be challenged: popular and anecdotal opinion would contend that teaching is an art, but it is possible to ‘paint by numbers’; similarly, ‘good’ teachers are born, not made, and the rest have to be trained to ‘teach by numbers’. Such opinions may be blunt and unsubstantiated, but they do persist and may thereby be worthy of examination. Can we train those who may not be particularly gifted as teachers to teach by a formula? Certainly, during assessment of school-based work, there is much repetition of general principles. And if it were possible to define anything approaching a formula, would that leave room for study and development of more specialist knowledge for teachers, knowledge that is much needed (Purdy, 2008)?

5. Conclusions

In contrast to many other countries, the Irish system for evaluation of students during school-based work is dominated by assessment by the university tutor. Examination of the role of the university tutor in both the north and south of Ireland has facilitated identification of a range of issues relating to this system, along with a proposal for a new version of the collaborative model that could be applied to the Irish system.

The identified issues fall within three critical areas:

1. Recognition by senior management within HEI’s of the importance of the tutor’s role during SBW, together with acknowledgement of the professional and administrative demands, compromised research activity, the need for self-evaluation, external evaluation and definition of the criteria by which evaluation would be made;
2. Professional duties and expectations of classroom teachers, with respect to the mentoring and assessment of student teachers and with consideration of training and recognition;
3. Definition of the structures and expectations for communication between the schools, students and HEIs.

The proposal for a new collaborative model is that since teachers have a bigger picture of a student teacher’s performance, but the university tutors have more experience in assessing teaching, a compromise position might capture the best of both worlds: the final grade for a student on teaching practice could be determined by the tutors on the basis of, say, two tutor

grades and with consideration of the reports that teachers already voluntarily provide, such that the reports must constitute a percentage of the final grade; university colleges could provide further training for those teachers who wish to ‘cash-in’ their mentoring experience and contributions to the assessment of the student for credit points towards a Masters degree.

Another area for further investigation would be the possibility that something approaching a formula could be developed for the very basic practice of teaching.

This initial study has demonstrated the need for further investigation of these issues and the ensuing proposal, from which there could evidently be significant benefit to all those concerned with application of a collaborative model in Ireland and other countries.

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