

Abstract

This research study is an exploration of sixty-one teachers' perceptions of the role of the cooperating teacher as part of the school placement process. It has its origins in the conviction that cooperating teachers can have a huge influence, positively or negatively, on student teachers. Changes to the Initial Teacher Education programmes have led to student teachers spending more time in Irish primary classrooms. Mentoring of student teachers is an important aspect of school placement as it is a critical time for supporting trainees as they gain classroom experience. However, it is important to note that teachers do not receive any training on how to mentor student teachers that will be undertaking placement in their classrooms. The research focus was on the level of understanding of the role as a cooperating teacher, the degree of confidence teachers have in taking on this role, the gap between policy and current practice as well as exploring possible improvements that could be made to the system to enhance the role of the cooperating teacher in the student placement process going forward.

Questionnaires were used to ascertain the views of teachers while semi structured interviews were conducted to gain an insight into the perspectives of principals and student teachers. The data was analysed and reveals that considerable inconsistencies occur in current practice. The majority of participants were unaware of the Teaching Council guidelines which has serious implications for all involved. Some general and specific recommendations are outlined in the dissertation as a more structured approach is being advocated for the future. Based on the findings it is necessary for all stakeholders involved in the school placement process to continue and really engage with the conversation that the HEIs and INTO have started at the joint seminars that have taken place in recent years.