



The Emerging Role of the Cooperating Teacher in Art & Design Teacher Education in the Republic of Ireland

Tanya O’Keeffe¹, Mary Isobelle Mullaney¹

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the role of the cooperating teacher (CT) in Art & Design teacher education in Ireland with a view to clarifying and supporting that role for both teachers and students. The focus of this study was on the cooperating teacher experience within the Professional Masters in Art & Design Education (PME) programme in the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). This is a timely study as the two-year PME programme, established in 2014, produced its first graduates in 2016. The Teaching Council of Ireland (TC) have recommended a more structured approach to identifying and supporting schools who host PME students [1]. The TC extended the duration of time spent on school placement and devised guidelines for cooperating teachers as part of the move to a masters programme (2016). The students’ perspective as to the implementation of these guidelines by cooperating teachers was ascertained through a cohort study (n=30) by using questionnaires derived from these guidelines. The perspective of the cooperating teacher was ascertained using a qualitative approach through three semi-structured interviews. Overall, students and teachers viewed the experience as positive. The support experienced by students varied greatly. There were considerable deficits reported regarding guidance in planning, observation of the student teacher and feedback. Teachers identified communication with NCAD as an issue that needed to be addressed and requested more clarification and recognition for their roles.

Introduction

The main focus of this study was on the cooperating teacher (CT) experience within the Professional Masters in Art and Design Education (PME) programme in the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). The impetus for the research arose from the student teacher’s/researcher experience of the differing mentoring approaches taken by her three cooperating teachers on placement. The literature review illustrated that while the role of the cooperating teacher/mentor in art teacher preparation is internationally studied [2][3], this role has not been investigated within the Irish setting.

Literature Review

No formal partnership has yet been established between the University and host schools in Irish education programmes and the structure of the teaching practice placement lacks clearly defined roles for those involved [4]. Irish second level schools participation in teacher education and preparation is on a purely voluntary basis. The lack of structure in the identification, involvement and support of host schools and CTs leads to a great variance in the quality of school placement experienced by Irish student teachers [4]. The Teaching Council of Ireland (TC), in their recent *Guidelines on School Placement* address this lack of structure and recommend that “a more structured approach to School Placement (SP) would bring greater coherence to, and address issues of imbalance and capacity in, the placement of student teachers across schools nationally” [1].

If the effectiveness of the teaching practice experience is related to how CTs and university supervisors work together, to challenge the student teachers (ST) existing beliefs and practices [4], then STs that find themselves in teaching triads that are not ideal are vulnerable to the beliefs of veteran teachers [5]. Bad teaching experience can be more detrimental than no pre service experience [4].

Stanulis *et al* [6] speak of a conscious collaboration between CTs and STs and believe that this necessitates an awareness of Bruner’s concept of scaffolding [7]. For scaffolding to be effective, “it involves trust and communication and a collaborative support structure” [6]. This type of support enables the student teacher (ST) to successfully transition from as Ganser [8] describes a ‘student of teaching’ to a ‘teacher of students’. Additional shifts of identity occur in the case of artists becoming teachers [9]. Graduates come to the NCAD PME programme from a wide variety of art disciplines. Despite their diversity, these disciplines operate under a very similar value system of innovation and social or artistic critique and these student teachers are joining teaching institutions that do not match

¹ National College of Art & Design (NCAD), Ireland

these value systems and are indeed at odds with them [9]. In addition, Irish PME art students are confronting art education at post-primary level that is in a state of “frustrating stagnation” [10]. Faced with these challenges, these student teachers may need specific guidance and support whilst on school placement.

Various proposals have been made to address the underdeveloped role of the mentor/cooperating teacher both in Ireland and abroad [4] [11]. Research around implementing a pilot training programme for CTs in Irish Physical Education [4][5], show findings that indicate all three members of the teaching practice triad believed the programme had a positive impact on the teaching practice process. Hudson [11], albeit in relation to teacher training in an Australian context advocates that mentoring become a cost effective form of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers tailored to local teacher and school requirements. The concept of life long learning in the teaching profession has been endorsed by educationalists for many years [12]. The TC formally launched their national CPD framework for teachers’ learning *Cosán* [13] on 15/03/16. During the consultation phase of its development mentoring was highlighted, as a valuable form of CPD in itself and this should act as an incentive to CTs to host students.

Methodology

Specific questions guiding this investigation included:

1. How clear are CTs in relation to their role as specified by the TC in the *School Placement Guidelines*?
2. How do CTs experience their position within the triad that exists between themselves, NCAD, and the ST? Do they feel recognised, supported and adequately communicated with?
3. In what ways, if any, could they envision this role becoming more supported and recognised?
4. How do PME students rate the effectiveness of their CTs in carrying out their role as specified by the TC in the *School Placement Guidelines*?

A pragmatic stance was taken in this study where a mixed methods approach was used, as this was deemed most effective in answering the above questions. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed; a survey of a cohort of students and interviews with a purposive sample of Art and Design teachers. The survey was administered to the cohort of first and second year PME students in NCAD in 2015-16 (n=30). The interview participants were a purposive sample, selected because they were the three cooperating teachers that hosted the researcher/ST over the course of her two-year school placements. Figure 1 describes the interview subjects and allocates their anonymous identifiers.

CT Identifier	CT Gender	CT Career Stage	Pupil Gender	School Ethos	Location / Socio Economic Setting of School
CT 1	Female	Mid-career	All Girls	Catholic	Dublin suburbs Middle Class
CT 2	Male	Mid-career	All Girls	Catholic	Dublin suburbs Middle Class
CT 3	Female	Late novice teacher	Mixed gender	Christian	Dublin suburbs DEIS*

Fig. 1 Interview subjects * Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

In order to identify emerging themes and patterns within the qualitative data collected, thematic analysis was used [14]. The themes were then discussed in the light of the findings from the student questionnaire and the literature review and recommendations were made.

Limitations of this Study

Ideally a representative sample of PME CTs would have been interviewed, representing a greater variety of individual personalities and school types as well as gender and career stage.

Findings and Discussion

An overall level of satisfaction was reported by PME students in relation to how effective they perceive their CT to be at carrying out their role as defined by the TC [1]. On closer analysis, the results show

the support experienced by students varied greatly. There was a lack of consistency amongst PME's experience of their cooperating teacher in relation to areas such as 'discussion of planning', 'observation of the student' and 'feedback' which correspond to previous research carried out on the same topic [5]. CTs identified communication with NCAD as an issue that needed to be addressed and requested more clarification and recognition for their roles.

Variances occur throughout the findings of the survey regarding PME's experience with their CT. Regarding the CTs helpfulness in assigning areas of the curriculum to the PME ST, 36.7% (n=11) reported that their CT was either 'very' or 'extremely' helpful at carrying out this induction task whilst 23.3% (n=7) reported that their CT was 'slightly' or 'not at all' helpful. This variability is also reflected in the interview findings. CT 1 & 2 both requested the ST to teach within particular parameters "I'd be quite defined in the skills and techniques that have to be covered" CT 1. CT 3 took a more open approach "I'd be very open, just bring your ideas in and let's see if they work".

PME's showed a low level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of their cooperating teacher in areas such as observation, feedback and reflection. Figure 2 shows that half of the respondents reported that their CTs were 'slightly' or 'not at all' effective at observing their teaching practice and providing them with oral or written feedback

Q6 STs perception of CTs effectiveness at observing their teaching and providing feedback

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0

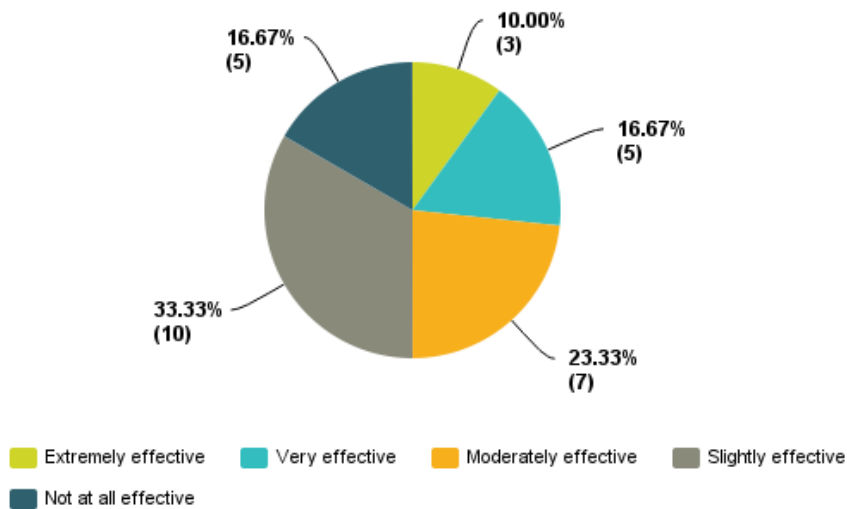


Fig. 2. Student teachers perception of cooperating teachers effectiveness at observing their teaching practice and providing oral or written feedback

The findings in Figure 2 can be seen to relate to the differing attitudes of the CTs interviewed regarding time spent in the classroom. CT 2 was concerned with being in the classroom as much as possible "I can't give the same feedback if I'm not in the room....I have given....back notes.....at the end of class and observations and I think that's a good thing to do" CT 2. CT 3 however favoured giving the ST space "I definitely was around but I also want to give them space. The last thing you want is someone at the back of your classroom looking at what you're doing" CT 3.

In relation to recompense for their role CT 1's recommendation was that the cooperating teacher role be seen as continuous professional development (now being proposed in Cosán [13]). CT 2 was in favour of time in lieu and CT 3 did not feel the need to be recompensed in any way. All three CTs identified communication with NCAD as an issue that needed to be addressed and proposed that there would be some forum established whereby they could supply NCAD with additional feedback



around the progress of their ST. They all stated that they would like more clarity around their role as a CT from NCAD. It has to be acknowledged that these findings are very limited as they are only based on the views of three teachers but they do offer valuable insights.

Conclusion

In conclusion the research shows that although there is an overall positive view of how CTs are carrying out their role the opportunity for less than satisfactory ST experience still exists. This could be somewhat addressed by improved communication between the NCAD and the CTs involved. The recently launched *Cosán* [13] recognises mentoring as CPD and while this is very timely, one would hope that those who intend to be Art & Design CTs will be able to avail of mentorship training in order to maximise this opportunity and improve on the weaker areas identified here of 'observation' and 'feedback'. However, at this juncture there is no guarantee that CTs will invest their personal time in this without suitable reward. Further research needs to be done into how best to acknowledge and support the role of the cooperating teacher.

References

- [1] The Teaching Council. "Guidelines on School Placement 1st Edition-2013", Kildare, The Teaching Council, 2013, p8.
- [2] Wilhelm, C. "A Case Study of three Cooperating Teachers in Art Education", Ohio, Kent State University, 2007.
- [3] Silverstein, T. "Host Art Teachers and Their Feedback During Student Teaching Practicum", Marilyn Zurmuehlin Working Papers in Art Education, 2006, Iss. 1: Article 11.
- [4] Dunning, C. "The development of a cooperating physical education teachers' (COPET) programme and an investigation into how this programme impacts on the teaching practice experiences' of the three members of the teaching practice triad", Dublin, Dublin City University, 2012.
- [5] Kelly, S. & Tannehill, D. "The mentoring experiences of an Irish student teacher on his physical education teaching practicum", Graduate Journal of Sport, Exercise & Physical Education Research, 2012, 1: 47-64.
- [6] Stanulis, R. N. & Russell, D. "'Jumping in' : trust and communication in mentoring student teachers", Teaching and Teacher Education, 2000, Volume 16. p.78.
- [7] Bruner, J. "Actual minds, possible worlds", Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986 p
- [8] Ganser, T. "How teachers compare the roles of cooperating teacher and mentor". The Educational Forum, 2002, 66, p380-385.
- [9] Adams, J. "Artists Becoming Teachers: Expressions of Identity Transformation in a Virtual Forum", International Journal of Art & Design Education, 2007, 26(3), pp. 264-273.
- [10] Granville, G.. "'The falcon cannot hear the falconer...'" The Pedagogical Turn and the Negative Space of Irish Art Education", International Journal of Art & Design Education, 2011, Vol. 30, No. 3. p. 349.
- [11] Hudson, P. "Mentoring as professional development: 'growth for both mentor and mentee", Professional Development in Education, 2013, 39:5, p771-783
- [12] Sherrington, T. "What's the incentive? Systems and culture in a school context", In: Hallgarten, A., Bamfield, L., and McCarthy, K. Licensed to Create: Ten essays on improving teacher quality, London: RSA Action Research Centre, 2014, p. 79.
- [13] The Teaching Council. "Cosán, Draft Framework for Teachers' Learning", Kildare, The Teaching Council, 2015.
- [14] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2006, 3 (2). p. 79.