

## **Changing identities and practices: Transitioning from the role of supervisor to placement tutor in initial teacher education in Ireland**

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# **Changing identities and practices: Transitioning from the role of supervisor to placement tutor in initial teacher education in Ireland**

Recent structural and conceptual changes to initial teacher education in Ireland have impacted on the professional roles of many teacher educators. This study explores the perspectives and identity of seven placement tutors on the Professional Master of Education (PME) course in Maynooth University in relation to their role, past and present. The research explores the impact of the change in role title and specification from ‘supervisor’ to ‘placement tutor’ and the impact of this change on the professional role and identity of those undertaking this work. Situated within an interpretive paradigm, the research is exploratory in nature and captures the perspectives of placement tutors as they transition between roles. While the findings indicate much continuity in the role and identity of placement tutors, six distinct tensions emerged from the data. The change in role title and specification impacted on placement tutors in different ways, often depending on their career stage within the role. The community of practice, where shared understandings were nurtured and negotiated, proved instrumental in the shaping of role identity. This group discourse resulted in a situation where their practice had evolved ahead of policy and indeed, informed policy development in the area.

**Keywords:** Placement tutor; teacher educator; professional identity; Ireland; initial teacher education; community of practice

## **Introduction**

Moving from an era of policy development to its translation into practice within initial teacher education (ITE) in Ireland, the roles and responsibilities of the various partners in schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) are in transition. ITE for post-primary teachers has been extended to a two-year Professional Master of Education (PME) programme since 2014, replacing the one-year Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) and allowing additional focus to be placed on the central component of school placement. Within this context, the role of ‘supervisor’ of teaching practice was replaced by that of ‘placement tutor’ of school placement. While the role of supervisor for student teachers

on placement evolved over many years and was defined differently in various HEIs, the Teaching Council has now provided a structured outline of the key roles and responsibilities of placement tutors (Teaching Council, 2013). In addition to their function to assess student teachers, this places a strong emphasis on their mentoring and formative roles.

Recent developments in Ireland are reflective of wider European and international developments in ITE which sees the role of teachers as ever-changing and increasingly challenging (Sahlberg et al., 2012; European Commission, 2014; Teacher Education Group, 2016). The role of teacher educators is under-researched both internationally and specifically in Ireland (Dolan, 2012), referred to as an “unexamined occupational group” by Martinez (2008, p.36). Swennen, Jones and Volman (2010) note the multiple professional identities of teacher educators, with many identifying as school teachers, teachers in higher education, researchers or teachers of teachers. This identity is often developed and revised within the role of teacher educator and can be challenged as roles and responsibilities change (Murray & Male, 2005).

The purpose of the research documented in this paper is to explore the perspectives of PME placement tutors in Maynooth University in 2014-15 in relation to their role, past and present. It aims to elucidate the similarities and differences between being a supervisor on the previous one-year PDE course and a placement tutor on the current two-year PME course. The research is timely as it captures the perspectives of placement tutors on their shifting identity as they transition between their previous and current roles. The main focus of this paper is on placement tutors’ view of their overall role and identity as a teacher educator. The main question informing the research was:

- What impact have the recent changes to ITE and a change in role title and specification had on the professional identity of current placement tutors?

### **Communities of Practice and identity development**

The research is situated within a conceptual frame pertaining to the development of teacher educator identity. The frame is grounded in Wenger’s (1998) concept of identity and practice in communities of practice and incorporates the development of teacher educators (Murray, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Murray & Male, 2005; Loughran, 2014)

and the dilemmas encountered in this development (Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2005; Berry, 2007).

Wenger's (1998) seminal work shows that there is a profound connection between identity and practice. He depicts five aspects of identity in practice as follows: as negotiated experience, as community membership, as learning trajectory, as nexus of multimembership, and as a relation between the local and the global. In negotiated experience, identity is constructed through the interweaving of lived experience and social narrative. Therefore, one's own experiences of practice are mediated by the ways in which society perceives that practice. In this instance, those who work as placement tutors negotiate their identity through their own practice and how that practice is understood and viewed by others, including the student teacher, members of the school community where s/he undertakes placement, the programme staff in the university education department, and other placement tutors, within and beyond the university department where the placement tutor works. Harrison and McKeon (2008) report on the formal and informal ways in which teacher educators learn based on their interactions with colleagues in communities of practice.

Membership of and engagement in a community of practice of placement tutors develop the recognition of competence by oneself and by others in that community, thus leading to a greater sense of identification with that group, provided there is a shared understanding and agreement of what constitutes competence. The trajectories of learning within the community of practice are described as peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary or outbound, depending on one's position in the community of practice, where participants typically begin as peripheral and move towards the centre. Interactions with and belonging to other communities of practice cause the member to move within that community, sometimes taking up a position at the boundaries of communities of practice or perhaps becoming outbound in perspectives on practice.

Wenger's final two categories consider identity beyond one specific community, highlighting memberships of multiple communities that are linked to boundary and/or outbound trajectories of learning, and broader horizons as places where different dimensions of identity are tested, integrated and interwoven. All of these contribute to one's identity development and recognise that identity is fundamentally temporal (Wenger, 1998, p.154).

The initial three categories, namely negotiated experience, community membership and learning trajectory, form the foundation of the conceptual frame for this

paper. Wenger's (1998) concept of identity as negotiated experience of self within the realm of practice offers the following perspective. It is in the negotiation of self, through words and actions, that identity is constructed. That construction takes place within the self and also within the community of practice to which one belongs. To understand identity, one must explore practice and the community within which that practice occurs, and conversely, to understand practice and community, one must explore identity.

In general, the identity of those who are placement tutors in ITE has been initially constructed as classroom teacher within a school. Murray (2002) describes this as a first order practitioner (teacher) working in a first order setting (school). When the teacher becomes a teacher educator, in this instance as a placement tutor of school placement, s/he becomes a second order practitioner i.e. a teacher of teachers. This requires a mid-career or even end-of-career transition that includes a change in role, a new community of practice and a change in identity. Murray and Male (2005) indicate that such changes in professional identity, knowledge and understanding are characterised by an initial sense of professional unease and discomfort, a need for induction support and that the establishment of the new professional identity takes at least two to three years. Similar findings in relation to the challenge of transition from teacher to teacher educator have also been noted by Berry and Loughran (2002), Dinkleman, Margolis and Sikkenga (2006), Ritter (2007), Boyd and Harris (2010), and Field (2012). Indeed, Clemans, Berry and Loughran (2010, p.215), referring to a school-based context, note the 'identity crisis' teachers experienced as they transitioned to the role of teacher educators. These changes link to Wenger's community membership, complete with issues of competence in the role and correlated confidence in developing and establishing this new identity.

The trajectories of learning are also significant in identity and practice. For those who are new to the community, the trajectory may be peripheral and may remain at that level. They may be on an inbound trajectory moving towards the centre where the insiders' reside. Those who are already insiders may also reform their identities, depending on whether their identity is affected by membership of other communities (boundary trajectory) or by moving outward and seeing practice in different ways (outbound). The interplay of the trajectories of learning of the members of a community affects the identities of those involved, sometimes in small ways and in more significant ways at other times. Those on an inbound trajectory are in the process of analysing the knowledge of first order practice that they bring with them (Loughran, 2014) while those on the inside, boundary or outbound trajectories, who have already engaged in this

process, are now re-engaging but in different ways, affected by the other learning trajectories that they interact with. As Clemans et al. (2010, p.223) note, “[I]t is not a process by which their identity naturally and unproblematically surfaces, but one in which their identity is constructed—by themselves, by others and by the traditions and assumptions each holds around these identities.” Indeed, the identity of teacher educators, the ‘who am I?’ (Clemans et al., 2010, p.226) is often as important as the content in teacher education courses (Furlong et al., 2000).

Cochran-Smith (2003, p.7) argues that learning communities “...may be a vital part of teachers’ and teacher educators’ ongoing education.” Such communities allow for discussion, debate, negotiation and an opportunity to articulate the vision, purpose and practicalities of the assigned role (Bullough, 2005). Through this process, professionals create a shared culture (Tuohy, 1999) and identity unique to their role. The creation and development of this community of practice has provided a professional space to adopt an ‘inquiry as stance’ approach, where “...the practitioner/ researcher is both user and creator of knowledge, which is always regarded as generative and tentative, to be questioned, challenged, connected, tried out, revised, reshaped, and held problematic” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p.21).

As the knowledge of first order practice is analysed and explicated, assumptions, beliefs and practices are explored and challenged (Loughran, 2014). This exploration can lead to the uncovering of tensions between ways of thinking and of being with resultant tensions developing in the teacher educator’s identity and practice. Some of these tensions have already been explored by researchers such as Tillema and Kremer-Hayon (2005) and Berry (2007). Tillema and Kremer-Hayon’s research highlights five dilemmas of practice for teacher educators: theory vs. practice, reflection vs. action, supervising vs. mentoring, delivery vs. inquiry, and professional growth vs. stability.

If Tillema and Kremer-Hayon’s dilemmas represent practice, Berry’s six tensions, namely telling and growth, confidence and uncertainty, action and intent, safety and challenge, valuing and reconstructing experience, and planning and being responsive, link strongly with identity as teacher educator. Viewed together, the dilemmas and tensions clearly indicate the duality, and at times conflicting nature, of the practice and identity of the teacher educator. For instance, the supervising vs. mentoring dilemma sees the teacher educator choose between instructing the (student) teacher about teaching and creating opportunities for the (student) teacher to learn about teaching through his or her own experiences. This dilemma strongly maps to Berry’s tension between telling and growth

and demonstrates an identity fluctuation between that of first order practitioner/expert teacher and second order practitioner/teacher educator. These have strong resonance with Boyd and Harris' (2010) findings in relation to the newly appointed teacher educators' tasks of pedagogy reconstruction and of identity boundary crossing between expert teacher and teacher educator.

It is within this interplay of identity and practice, simultaneously individual and community, externally acted and internally constructed, concrete in the moment and temporal in the career stages, that this research question is raised. If we rename a teacher educator's role, changing it from supervisor to placement tutor, what effect does it have on the practice and identity of the individual?

### **The Study**

As this research aims to understand the subjective worlds of the placement tutors as they transition in their role, this study is situated within a constructivist, interpretive paradigm. Savin-Baden and Howell Mayor (2013, p.29) advocate a constructivist paradigm when there is a belief "...that knowledge lies in the minds of individuals, who construct what they know on the basis of their own experiences." It is an interpretive, qualitative enquiry with the researchers utilising a variety of data gathering strategies, primarily document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews with placement tutors working in the Department of Education of Maynooth University in 2014-15 were chosen as the preferred method of data gathering as this allowed core content to be covered with each of the research participants while also allowing the interviewee the opportunity to develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the interview (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007). The interview schedule was piloted with a critical friend (Bell, 2005; Suoninen & Jokinen, 2005), following which refinements were made to ensure clarity and coherence. The interviews were undertaken in a natural and unobtrusive way (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003) with seating arranged to reduce any feeling of discomfort (Denscombe, 2011). Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Faculty Ethics Committee. As both researchers work in the Department, there was a need to be cognisant of the insider nature of the research and the resultant challenges to voluntary participation in and withdrawal from the research study (Greene, 2014). Processes were put in place to address this, including the appointment of a gatekeeper as liaison with the research participants, a strong emphasis on the voluntary dimension of participation in the research, and

information about how to withdraw from the research process at any time. All placement tutors were informed about the purpose, design and format of the research at a meeting and a consent form, outlining the process and format of the research, was provided and signed by each participant.

Arising from the literature review, the following areas were identified as topics for the interviews:

- View of placement tutor role / differences and similarities to supervisor role
- Role and identity of placement tutor within context of school
- Role and identity of placement tutor within context of university

In order to maintain the semi-structured approach, prompts were created for each of the topics and those who consented to participate in the research were provided with a copy of the topics and prompts in advance of their scheduled interview.

Permission was sought from the participants to audio record the interviews. This permission was granted in six of the seven interviews and these audio recordings were transcribed. Detailed field notes were made and subsequently written up for the non-audio recorded interview. The [initial](#) data analysis began with a thematic coding based on each interview question using a six step process: transcribe and organise, read and record initial thoughts, start coding and label, generate categories and themes, representation and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Points of similarity and of dissonance within the responses were noted, yielding subcategories for further analysis. As Stake (1995) suggests, meaning emanates from key words and themes that appear again and again in the data, and the data was reduced into smaller sub-groups around major themes.

[The themes that had been identified at this point were influenced by the interview questions which had, in turn, been influenced by the literature review. As we discussed the initial findings, we realised that some data could not be understood in relation to those major themes. In light of this, a decision was taken to employ another inductive mode of data analysis in order to consider the data from an alternative point of view, namely using a grounded theory approach.](#)

Following this [decision](#), each transcript was reread and codified freely, using a grounded theory approach, to elicit themes that might not have been visible when using the interview themes as a base for analysis (Cohen et al., 2007; Charmaz, 2005). The coding on this occasion confirmed the findings from the earlier thematic analysis and, in addition, revealed an additional tension relating to the differing perception of their role by others. This final analytic approach allowed the coding categories to be adjusted in



light of emergent categories. Data were then triangulated by document analysis, including analysis of core documents related to placement and of reports written by the research participants when they were supervisors and in their new positions as tutors.

### **Profile of Participants**

Seven of the eight placement tutors consented to participate in the research. Of these, three were female and four were male. All research participants had worked as supervisors on the previous PDE and had extensive experience of working in the education sector. This experience included roles as teachers, deputy principals, principals and wider professional work such as curriculum development, delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) and lecturing. Approximately half of the participants had postgraduate qualifications to Master’s level and their experience of working as a placement tutor/ supervisor of school placement ranged from two to 30 years. In Maynooth University, placement tutors are assigned students based on geographical considerations and may not have experience of teaching all of the subjects they observe. Throughout this paper, the placement tutors have been assigned pseudonyms as outlined in Table 1 below. The placement tutors are ordered in terms of years of experience in the role from the placement tutor with the least experience (Adam) to the placement tutor with the most experience (Gillian).

Table 1. Placement tutors and number of years in the role. \* These categorisations correspond to Day and Gu’s (2007) professional life phases for teachers and are used here to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Placement tutor	Number of years’ experience as supervisor / placement tutor*
Adam	0 – 3
Bill	4 – 7
Chris	4 – 7
Dylan	8 – 15
Edel	8 – 15
Frances	16 - 23
Gillian	24 – 30

## **Findings**

From an initial analysis of the data, the shift in identity required between the role of the supervisor and placement tutor appeared minimal. When placement tutors were asked to describe the role they previously undertook as supervisors, there was a remarkable consistency between the description they provided and the current roles and responsibilities ascribed by the Teaching Council to placement tutors. They reported unanimously that central to the role of supervisor was the provision of advice, mentoring, coaching and formative development of student teachers. They emphasised the pastoral and supportive nature of the role that was underpinned by the relationship they developed with each student. They also reported few changes in their role from a procedural perspective as placement visits continued largely in the same vein within the new two-year PME programme. Indeed, a number of research participants indicated that they believed the title of placement tutor was far more appropriate and apposite to the role they had been undertaking in previous years. As Dylan stated:

So we had moved here in Maynooth in effect from supervisor mode oh a good four years ago, to tutor mode. So we saw ourselves as mentor, support, advisor.

However, analysis of the data revealed a number of tensions inherent in the change in role title and in the shifting identity of the placement tutors. These tensions are treated below under the following six umbrella themes:

- Advisory vs. assessment role
- Pastoral vs. making difficult calls
- Subject-specific advice vs. generalist advice
- Their view of the role vs. others' view of the role
- Feedback vs. feedforward
- Remembering last year vs. no experience of year 2

### ***Assessment vs. advisory role***

The tension between their roles as an advisor and mentor versus that of an assessor and grader was most prominent in the discussions of the placement tutors. Achieving balance

between both roles, especially as this balance shifted throughout the school year, was reported as challenging by many. Placement tutors saw the professionalism involved in the role as being able to negotiate that balance in line with the contextual and professional needs of student teachers and schools. While understanding the rationale for both elements in the role, almost all placement tutors raised this as the tension they found most difficult to reconcile:

We saw ourselves as, okay, the final assessor, and that was always part of it. But I think we were mentors. We were coaches...I always had a problem with the term supervisor because it was kind of a first cousin of an inspector... the term supervisor is cold. And I think, within the concept of what we call supervisors, there was very strong, not so much pastoral, but certainly there was an interpersonal development. (Chris)

With the two-year course, and considering they were all working with first year students in 2014-15, they felt that the balance had swung even further to focus on advice and support rather than assessment. As Edel stated:

I see the improvement in their teaching and I don't see that they are A, B, C, D or whatever it is.

### ***Pastoral vs. making difficult calls***

Linked to the advisory-assessment tension that was raised by many placement tutors was the tension between their pastoral role in supporting student teachers and the necessity at times to make difficult judgements and decisions. This reflects the professional integrity of the placement tutors who reported their professional responsibility, for both the individual student teacher but also the wider needs of students and schools, in ensuring that professional standards are maintained. Placement tutors displayed a deep awareness of many of the personal and professional challenges experienced by student teachers at various junctures throughout their course and the need to separate this humanity from the overall professional standards required and expected. As Dylan stated:

I find the assessment role sometimes as distressing yeah...Because you know that you are part of a process which is going to disappoint someone and you may have to do that, but at the same time you can't lose sight of the human face.

This often meant that the placement tutors were challenged in the approach that they would take in the post-observation conversation. While a facilitative approach and the co-construction of the key features of learning are favoured by placement tutors, a tension emerged when there was a disparity in views between the placement tutor and student teacher. In such instances, placement tutors reported that they often had to assert their professional experience and expert position during such conversations to effectively communicate a message to a student teacher. In this way, placement tutors negotiate the complex relationship with student teachers but assert the need for certain messages to be delivered:

There have been a couple of times where they weren't overly happy with things that I, you know, was proposing to say and certainly in a couple of cases they were things where there were problems and they had to be said and I wasn't going to compromise on it. I mean I may have moderated the way I worded it slightly but you know, the point had to be made... This is a professional conversation we're going to have. It's not going to be over a cup of tea. We're going to look at practice and the feedback is going to be specific, is going to be looking to the future, and it's going to be developmental if at all possible. ...the feedback has to be fairly gentle and focused. But if the message has to be given, it has to be given... (Adam)

This is similar to Berry's (2007) tension of 'valuing and reconstructing' experience where the beliefs of the student are challenged and explored in order to facilitate development and growth.

### ***Subject-specific advice vs. generalist advice***

The professional identity of many of the placement tutors was often linked to the subjects they once taught as post-primary teachers, particularly in the initial phases of reconstructing a new identity as a placement tutor or teacher educator. As placement tutors are allocated more on geographical rather than subject-specific grounds, this means that they engage both with student teachers who may be teaching subjects they had extensive expertise in or subjects in which they had relatively little knowledge. For some, especially in the early stages of their career as a placement tutor, they felt that the specific subject-based knowledge and practical advice they had accrued was a key aspect of their

professional identity and was of significant value in their professional interactions with student teachers. This is evident in the assertion of Adam:

I think subject specific knowledge is critical for the teacher, as is the methodology of teaching that subject. And I know that mightn't be fashionable, but scratch a teacher and you will get a maths teacher or a commerce teacher or an English teacher, and that's their primary interest.

Ritter (2007, p.15) notes the challenge many teacher educators feel in "...relinquishing control as an expert." Interestingly, the level of affiliation to previous subjects appears to have dissipated over time among the cohort of placement tutors involved in this research. Some articulated the liberation they felt at being able to look at the bigger picture of teaching and learning in a classroom rather than being overly-focused on the pedagogical content knowledge of the subject alone. As Chris stated, it reduced the "...inclination to jump into the specifics of the subject." Chris had the following advice:

I'd place the tutors into classrooms which are not part of their own subject areas, because you're far easier to put yourself in the place of the student than.

This assertion demonstrates the shift of focus away from the role of the placement tutor, and even the student teacher, and concentrating instead on the needs and experiences of students in classrooms. This challenge in shifting identity from subject-specific expert echoes the professional unease and discomfort reported by Murray and Male (2005) and Clemans et al. (2010), and the need for time and support to establish this new identity.

### ***Their view of the role vs. others' view of the role***

High levels of personal and professional reflection were evident in the placement tutors' understanding of the tension between how they perceived and viewed their role and how it was perceived by others, most particularly student teachers. While placement tutors invariably placed their emphasis on the supportive and developmental aspect of their role, they understood that student teachers were often more focused on their assessment and grading function. This perception was often reignited and reinforced by co-operating teachers who generally remembered the 'inspector' from their teaching practice experience. This resonates with Wenger's (1998) concept of negotiated practice where

the role identity is constructed and mediated in a wider social and professional context. The wider understanding and perception of the role of placement tutors was one research participants worked hard to change among student teachers and others. However, they also realised the high stakes that were involved in the school placement grade, counting for one-third of the course in both years of the PME. Moreover, the grade awarded for the school placement component of the PME is often given significant consideration by principals and selection boards in terms of recruitment. A number of placement tutors actively communicated to student teachers that the final grade was not an average of all visits but more a reflection on the journey they had travelled and the standard they had reached by the end of the year. This often resulted in challenging conversations with student teachers who were unwilling to accept any constructive criticism of lessons lest it be seen as an admission that would affect their grade. As Gillian stated:

There were some [student teachers] who...want to say everything went very well because that's what I'm supposed to say and if I write anything...that says I'm not doing well, well that's going to be a black mark against me and you're trying to say no, that actually shows me that you can critique yourself honestly and you are aware...we never show any weaknesses and we hide weaknesses whereas this is a painful part of teaching.

### ***Feedback vs. feedforward***

The tension between feedback and feedforward emerged for many of the placement tutors. This again is linked to the advisory and evaluative tensions, and striking the balance between assessing where the student teacher is at or has done and what he/she might do to develop and enhance his/her professional practice. Through monthly meetings, the various other roles that placement tutors undertake within the Department (e.g., methodologists, tutorials, etc.) and access to materials on the virtual learning environment, most placement tutors are aware of the format of the course and the sequencing of various inputs on school placement for student teachers. Some of the more experienced placement tutors spoke about the 'bigger picture' of what the student teacher was achieving:

...really if you ask me what am I looking for, ...I'll sit at the back of the class and I look for a practical manifestation of the methodology lectures, of their research lectures, of their different lectures on psychology and on the theory and practice of

education and therefore my function then would be to help them develop a practical manifestation (Dylan).

Especially at the start of the year, there was a temptation to provide guidance and advice on aspects that they knew had not been addressed within the university element of the course, which would be feedforward for the student teacher.

An inadvertent consequence of the two-year programme, and extended school placement, was that student teachers taught fewer classes each week, especially in the first semester. The slower pace of developing teaching skills and automatizing many elements of teaching practices was relayed by a number of placement tutors, who noted the slower pace of progress by students between visits compared to other years. Many placement tutors commented that this resulted in spending more time with student teachers in post-observation conversations. There was a realisation that with the advent of the two-year course, there would be opportunities for them, or another placement tutor, to build further on the advice and support given to students as their professional practice developed.

### ***Remembering last year vs. no experience of year 2***

One of the interesting tensions that emerged was the challenge placement tutors articulated to predict or foresee how year two of the PME course would progress. All had experience of the one-year programme and had insights into the general expectations and milestones student teachers would meet at various junctures. In the new educational landscape, this previous professional knowledge that had accrued for many over a long number of years was thrown into doubt and all struggled to map what the new expectations should be and when these milestones should be met. As the student teachers now had a second year of placement, placement tutors felt a relief that they had more time to devote to the developmental and formative dimensions of their role. As a result, there was a need to temper expectations in terms of the anticipated progress across the year, holding in mind that these students had another year to develop and refine their professional practice. This resulted in a sense of relief for Gillian who stated there was a liberation in knowing that you did not have to "...have them ready by the end of the year." This meant that there was an opportunity in the initial visits to focus on advising and supporting, while they perceived that this role would evolve to a greater emphasis on

assessment and grading towards the end of each year, and most particularly in year two of the course. This led Gillian to reflect that the grading process now would be based more on the journey travelled by the teacher as opposed to comparing them to students the previous year. This was best articulated by Dylan:

We have no historical memory of a two year course and we are in year one of a two year course and we are saying what's the basis for our assessment of their progress at the end of year one and we are running up against a wall of, well we have no historical memory, we have nothing to compare it to. We have this [Appraisal Guide], but that has its roots in origin in a one year course.

This proved disconcerting for many placement tutors whose previous stance of certainty in their role was replaced by uncertainty and unpredictability.

## **Discussion**

The placement tutors involved in this research displayed well-developed identities as teacher educators. It is evident that this identity has developed and evolved over the years of engagement in the role of supervisor within the Department of Education. In this time, the group developed a strong collegial relationship and collectively forged their identity through regular meetings and discussions. This learning community led to the development of a shared culture through dialogue and conversation with others and afforded an opportunity to clarify and articulate their own thinking and to challenge or confirm their views in light of engagement with others (Wenger, 1998; Loughran, 2014). It is arguable that it was this community of learning that afforded supervisors the ability to extend and develop their thinking about their role beyond its former definition well ahead of the policy changes that introduced the term of placement tutor and its associated criteria. In this regard, the shift in identity was not as pronounced as might be expected. Indeed, as is often the case, policy followed practice and these placement tutors, among many others, were instrumental in shaping teacher education policy in Ireland by redefining in practice over time the role they had been assigned.

The impact of engagement in this learning community on the deepening knowledge and thinking of placement tutors is evident in the analysis of the research. The most recently appointed placement tutors, Adam and Bill, often based their identity



primarily on their previous role as a teacher of particular subjects and on the expertise they had accrued in school-based practice, in a manner resonant with the findings of Boyd and Harris (2010). For example, Bill, while acknowledging the wider remit of the role, spoke about the demand from students for subject-specific advice:

...a lot of mine would be teaching [subject name] obviously, asking for advice on the basis of my practical experience in the classroom and in some cases, you know, the kind of nitty gritty of what did you find was the best way to teach a particular topic which is not really what, in one sense what the role is. I mean it's a more general role than that but again if they find that useful, I think it's worthwhile.  
(Bill)

This resonates with Murray's (2002) first order to second order practitioner identity shift where the identity as subject teacher is called to the fore through interaction with student teachers. It demonstrates a boundary crossing with a resultant fluidity in identity, not between placement tutor and supervisor but between teacher and teacher educator.

Some placement tutors with greater experience (Chris, Dylan, Edel) have shifted this focus from their subject origins to the wider needs of their student teachers. As Dylan stated:

...I'm not feeding back to them now, ...I'm looking to draw out from them. In other words what I'm trying to do is to model in myself what I'm looking for from them. If their function is to develop learning outcomes from the students, therefore I try to develop learning outcomes from them. So therefore it's through questions, it's through eliciting their own responses building on those, rather than saying I wouldn't do that if I were you, I'd do this you know.

The most experienced placement tutors (Frances and Gillian) focused in addition on the wider education system and the professional responsibilities of all within that system, while firmly rooted in a solid understanding of their role as a teacher educator. Gillian teased out the professional responsibility to support students to explore other options if it was felt that teaching was not the right career for a particular student teacher, noting the impact not fulfilling this responsibility will have on the life of the student teacher but also on the realisation that an unsuited teacher could "...ruin thousands of children's lives." The challenge for student teachers in the transition from being students and learners was well articulated by Gillian who noted that they often struggled in communicating their

knowledge to pupils, having generally been high achievers themselves. Moreover, many struggle with placing the emphasis on their students' learning as opposed to their own teaching and using this as the primary yardstick of success:

I think they need to be constantly aware that because I teach it doesn't equate to the students' learning and that at all times they have to think what the students learn is a measure of actually how well I'm doing my job. (Gillian)

Tensions in the role of placement tutor are inevitable and unavoidable. This is particularly true in terms of their dual, and often contradictory, role as both support/advisor and assessor/grader. It is also manifested in their knowledge that student teachers often perceive their role in strictly assessment and grading terms, which is the aspect that placement tutors emphasise least. These tensions could also be conceptualised as ongoing professional unease and discomfort, different to those described by Murray and Male (2005) as they are less to do with induction into a particular workplace. Rather they relate to an understanding of identity as an ongoing formation process with unease and discomfort at the heart of the process, allowing us to view identity as temporal. They point to the different stages of development of these supervisors/placement tutors and echo Swennen's (2017) recognition of the differing professional development needs across generations.

What is imperative for placement tutors is a forum or community where these tensions can be articulated, acknowledged, explored and unpacked in order to deepen awareness and understanding about the complex role they occupy in the field of teacher education. Within this community of practice, inquiry and learning, the negotiation of the self through experiences with others develops this changing identity. As the learning trajectories of these individuals meet each other, they change not only their own direction but also the direction of the other, similar to the manner in which a cue ball break in a game of snooker causes the snooker balls to move in different directions, affected not only by the effect of the cue ball striking them but also the effect of their collisions on each other's directions. The monthly meetings and other professional encounters placement tutors have with one another, with student teachers, HEI and school staff all impact on the ongoing shaping of professional identity. At a time where increasing attention is paid to the professional development of teacher educators (Van der Klink et

al., 2017), this raises questions about the kinds of professional development opportunities available to those who work as part-time teacher educators.

It would appear that changing the job title has little to do with identity change. Changing and developing one's practices, with resultant changes in identity, are already an ongoing part of the role of the placement tutor. But as their identity is also negotiated and affected by interaction with others, especially with student teachers, it leads to another interesting research question: "Does changing the title from supervisor to placement tutor change the perception or experience of student teachers?" That is a question for another day!

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