



Bricoleurs in the Landscape of Practice: An Exploratory Case Study of the Learning
associated with the Role of the Cooperating Primary Teacher in the Irish Context

by

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Declaration

I have read and understood the Departmental policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other tertiary education institution.

Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text, and a list of references has been provided.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. J. Pull', is displayed on a light blue rectangular background.

Date: 19.10.25

Abstract

The historically informal role of the cooperating teacher in Ireland has seen considerable change in recent years, stemming from an evolving policy landscape attempting to formalise the role and attach specific responsibilities to it. However, there is still an identifiable absence of a formalised and standardised national approach to professional learning for cooperating teachers who undertake this role. Accordingly, this study sought to explore the informal learning and preparation for this role amongst a select group of cooperating primary teachers, using the lenses of social learning theory and bricolage.

The study employed a qualitative multi-case methodology, comprising six cases. Data collection harnessed a three-phase approach: an initial semi-structured interview with each case; the sourcing and analysis of secondary data sources mentioned by the cases in the initial interviews; a follow-up interview with each case. An inductive approach was taken to analyse the data generated across the three phases of the study.

Three key findings were identified from cross-case analysis of the data. The ‘influence of induction’ as a phase of teacher education, was seen as central to how the cooperating teachers conceptualised their role. Experience as a student teacher and as a cooperating teacher over time also proved influential. Finally, the ‘role of relationships’ emphasised the extent to which the cooperating teachers drew on and were influenced by other individuals in their interpretation and enactment of their role. The discussion highlights the complexities associated with navigating the landscape of being a cooperating teacher, with different cases demonstrating bricolage to varying extents. Challenges arising from blurring boundaries between stages of teacher education are considered, as well as possibilities and pitfalls associated with a reliance on experience. Where, how and from whom cooperating teachers learn are also explored. The study contributes to theoretical and practical understandings of cooperating teacher learning and how this is approached and undertaken. Recommendations include suggestions for schools and Higher Education Institutions regarding cooperating teacher learning, and how this can be further supported through conceptualising the cooperating teacher as bricoleur in the landscape of practice. The implications for policy and future research are also considered.

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Acronyms and Initialisms

BERA:	British Educational Research Association
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
CT:	Cooperating Teacher
DE:	Department of Education
DEIS:	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
DES:	Department of Education and Science
DES:	Department of Education and Skills
DEY:	Department of Education and Youth
HEI:	Higher Education Institution
ITE:	Initial Teacher Education
LAOS:	Looking at Our School
NQT:	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PST:	Professional Support Team
SET:	Special Education Teacher
SP:	School Placement
TC:	Teaching Council

Glossary

Bricoleur

Derived from the work of Levi-Strauss (1962), the bricoleur is an individual who takes elements of what is available to them and combines, creates and innovates to use these in new ways. The act of doing so is referred to as **bricolage**.

Continuum of Teacher Education

‘This describes the formal and informal educational and developmental activities in which teachers engage, as life-long learners, during their teaching career. It encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development and, indeed, late career support’ (Teaching Council 2011, p.5). The Teaching Council have since developed a specific policy for each stage within the continuum. Initial teacher education is referred to as *Céim* (the Irish word for step). The induction phase is referred to as *Droichead* (the Irish word for bridge). The in-career development phase is referred to as *Cosán* (the Irish word for pathway).

Cooperating Teacher

The cooperating teacher is the classroom teacher who hosts the student teacher while they are on school placement as part of their initial teacher education programme. In Ireland, the term *Treoraí* (the Irish word for guide) has been introduced in recent years, as an alternative to the term cooperating teacher.

First- and Second-Order Practice

Based on the work of Murray (2002), first-order practice within this study refers to one’s professional role as teacher of pupils, within the first-order context of the school. Second-order practice refers to the practice of sharing knowledge, information and insights into one’s first-order practice with another individual, to support their understanding of the first-order practice and its setting. In this instance, second-order practice refers to talking and teaching about being a teacher.

Informal Learning

The ways in which one learns outside of formalised and structured approaches to learning, including through work tasks, conversations with others, problem-solving as challenges arise and so on.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

‘ITE refers to the initial phase of learning to be a teacher when student teachers are engaged in a recognised teacher education programme’ (Teaching Council 2020, p.4).

Landscape of Practice

Based on the work of Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015), landscapes of practice refer to the various communities, practices, boundaries and peripheries that make up the complex nature of professional practice.

School Placement

‘The term school placement refers to that part of the [ITE] programme which takes place in school settings and which is designed to give the student teacher an opportunity to integrate educational theory and practice in a variety of teaching situations and school contexts. The school placement experience encompasses a range of teaching and non-teaching activities and affords the student teacher opportunities to participate in school life in a way that is structured and supported’ (Teaching Council 2021, p.4). This element of ITE was previously known as teaching practice and this term is still used locally in schools and by teachers in some instances.

Student Teacher

The student teacher is the individual undertaking a programme of initial teacher education in a Higher Education Institution.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Initial teacher education (ITE) in Ireland has undergone significant change in the last two decades (Dolan 2016; O'Donoghue, Harford and O'Doherty 2017), and with it, the practicum experiences required of student teachers enrolled in these programmes. With the announcement of extended programmes of ITE (Department of Education and Skills (DES) 2011) came elongated periods of practicum, typically referred to as school placement, for student teachers on these courses (O'Doherty 2016). This in turn meant that longer periods of time would be spent with cooperating teachers, those teachers who have voluntarily agreed to host student teachers in their classrooms. A myriad of both regulatory and advisory policies have since been published regarding the school placement process specifically (Gorman and Furlong 2023; Sloan and Dolan 2025), and the responsibilities of those engaged in it, as evident in the policy timeline provided below. The visibly evolving policy landscape has the potential to cause tension between the voluntary engagement of cooperating teachers with the role, and the expectations placed on them when hosting a student teacher in their classroom. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is currently no formalised, standardised national model of professional learning available to cooperating teachers who host student teachers on school placement (Young and MacPhail 2016; Hall et al. 2018; Hall et al. 2019; O'Sullivan and Ó Conaill 2022). Therefore, this study uses a multi-case study approach to explore how cooperating teachers have learned to enact the role they undertake during school placement, in the absence of specific professional learning for this role.

1.2 Rationale and Background to the Study

In order to understand the significance and timeliness of this study, historical, policy and contemporary perspectives on school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher must be considered. In doing so, the rationale and background to the study are addressed within this section.

1.2.1 The Historical and Policy Context and Trajectory

The teacher education landscape in Ireland is a dynamic and developing space, from the ITE phase (known as *Céim*), through induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (*Droichead*), and into the in-career education phase of teachers within the system (*Cosán*). This study relates to two domains within that sphere, initial and in-career teacher education, through a focus on school placement. While this process is a distinct element of ITE, the *Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning* (Teaching Council 2016) identifies it as an opportunity for the in-career development of the class teachers who host and work with their student teacher counterparts. While the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021) clearly define the role and responsibilities attributed to cooperating teachers, they suggest an air of 'desirability, rather than obligation' (Gorman and Furlong 2023, p.8) because of the historical contexts associated with how the role has been conceptualised in Ireland to date. This is explored in more detail below.

In setting the context for such a study, and arguably evident thus far, the policy influences on school placement, and subsequently the role of the cooperating teacher, cannot be overlooked. These stem from both national and international perspectives and have had varying degrees of influence dependent on their purpose. For example, some policy influences offer commentary on the school placement process, such as the Inspectorate's (2006) *Learning to Teach* report, while others critique and instigate

change, such as the *Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland* (Sahlberg, Munn and Furlong 2012). Given the range and expanse of this policy landscape referring to schools as a site for student teacher learning, and the associated nuances of the role of the cooperating teacher in these settings, as evident in the policy timeline in Figure 1.1, an awareness of this landscape as the background for practice is important. Such policies developed in Ireland currently tend to be the responsibility of the Teaching Council, the body with which responsibility resides for maintaining standards within the profession and the country's programmes of ITE (Teaching Council Act 2001). This is particularly evident from 2011 onwards, visible in red on the timeline, where policies pertaining to school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher are numerous.

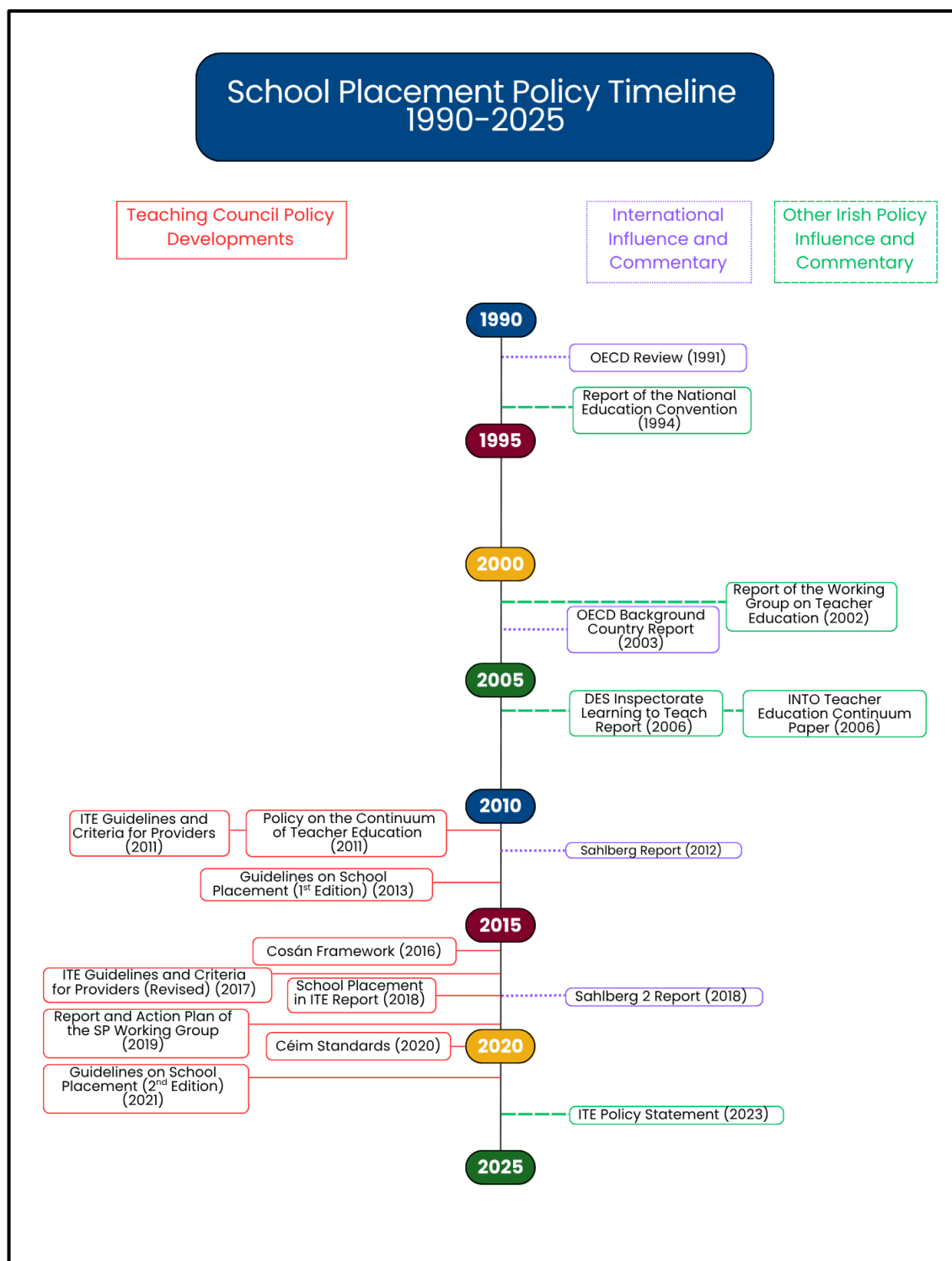


Figure 1.1: *Policy Timeline documenting key policies and publications referring to school placement, school-university partnerships, and the role of the cooperating teacher.*

In recent years, such policies have aimed to define the role of the cooperating teacher, outlining specific responsibilities ranging from pedagogical support for the

student teacher, to observing, offering feedback, and promoting reflective practice during placement (Teaching Council 2013a; Teaching Council 2021). Similarly, policy pertaining to teacher professional development and learning highlights the important role acting as a cooperating teacher can have on in-service teacher learning within classrooms and schools, through enacting some of the responsibilities highlighted above (Teaching Council 2016). As such, the policy framing of the role of the cooperating teacher in Ireland depicts a formalised role within the process of school placement, yet without any involvement in the formal assessment of the student teachers with whom they work (Hall et al. 2019), reverting to Gorman and Furlong's (2023) argument of 'desirability, rather than obligation' (p.8). The problematic nature of this gradual formalisation of the role is clear when superimposed on the historical trajectory of the role in the Irish context, which too requires consideration.

The literature indicates that historically, the role of the cooperating teacher in Ireland has been an informal one, derived from volunteerism and a willingness to engage on the part of the in-service teacher (Kellaghan 2002; Department of Education Inspectorate 2006; Long et al. 2012; Hall et al. 2018). This is because there are no formal partnerships between schools and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Coolahan 2003; Hall et al. 2018; Farrell 2023; Sloan and Dolan 2025). This emphasises the aforementioned difficulty with the implementation and enactment of the role of the cooperating teacher, as envisaged in policy, in the classroom context. This challenge has been highlighted by Clarke and O'Doherty (2021) through acknowledging the misalignment between the role of the Teaching Council in policy development, but the financing of such policy enactment lying with the Department of Education (DE). In addition, the broader issue of privately owned, but publicly

funded primary schools in Ireland¹ (Hyland 2022), is a noteworthy dichotomy when considering the operationalisation of policy in practice. Therefore, despite the clearly identified roles and responsibilities attributed to cooperating teachers from the policy perspective, their implementation is at the discretion of the individual teacher due to the absence of supports and structures to ensure this. Such supports might include cooperating teacher professional learning, substitute cover to engage in professional conversations and so on. However, due to this informality in the role's enactment and preparation to date, there is currently no requirement for those engaging with the role to engage in formal professional development, which is typically only available at the discretion of the various HEIs. Instead, a reliance tends to be placed on previous experience and informal opportunities (Young and MacPhail 2016; Hall et al. 2018; Mitchell et al. 2024; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025).

The latest policy advice from both the Teaching Council and the Department of Education (DE) suggests that the development of a national, standardised programme of professional learning for cooperating teachers is underway (Teaching Council 2019; Department of Education 2023), but this has yet to transpire. In the absence of such a national, formalised model to date, cooperating primary teachers in Ireland have largely relied on their own informal learning experiences to guide their practice (Hall et al. 2018; Mitchell et al. 2024; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). Given that *Cosán* (Teaching Council 2016) documents the range of formal and informal learning experiences that constitute professional learning for teachers, this

¹ In Ireland, the vast majority of primary schools are owned and under the patronage of private bodies, although in receipt of public funding through the Department of Education and Youth (DEY). For example, in 2023/2024, 88.4% of primary schools were under the patronage of the Catholic church (DE 2024, p.5).

push towards a formalised model of cooperating teacher learning, could suggest a level of disregard for how teachers have learned about and enacted their role heretofore. Accordingly, this study encompasses exploring and understanding this informal and non-standardised learning, and the ways in which cooperating teachers learn about, prepare for and enact their role within school placement in practice.

1.2.2 The Cooperating Teacher – A School-Based Teacher Educator

Different perspectives and insights on the role of the cooperating teacher are evident in the literature. There is also an obvious link between the level of formality assigned to the role within a jurisdiction, the ways in which the role is conceptualised within that jurisdiction and accordingly, the ways in which it is discussed in the literature (see Chapter Two). The role of the cooperating teacher in the Irish context is synonymous with other names internationally, including mentor teacher, associate teacher, supporting teacher and so on (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Kennedy and Bell 2023). The work they undertake in supporting student teachers, however, is largely similar, bar jurisdiction-specific requirements of the role and the level of formality attributed to it.

In Ireland, a somewhat recent terminological change is the referral to the cooperating teacher as *Treoraí*, the Irish word for guide. The Teaching Council suggests that this term ‘more accurately reflects the nature of the role’ as one of supporting and guiding the student teacher on school placement (Teaching Council 2021, p.4). However, this presents a dissonance with the growing international discourse on the recognition of the cooperating teacher as a school-based teacher educator. A term referred to by Bullough (2005), in more recent times, researchers in

the field have increasingly adopted it to firstly emphasise that cooperating teachers are considered teacher educators, and secondly in recognition of the complexity of the work involved for those engaged in school-based teacher education (*inter alia* White, Dickerson and Weston 2015; Stanulis et al. 2019; White 2019a; White 2019b; White and Berry 2022; Czerniawski et al. 2024; Kennedy and Bell 2023; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024; Vähä et al. 2025). It also supports the locating of the role in relation to its academy-based counterpart, the university-based teacher educator. The term, while relevant and useful in acknowledging the complex work of cooperating teachers and signalling their important contribution to ITE, tends to encapsulate a broader conception than just the role of the cooperating teacher. For example, it has been noted to encompass the work of teachers who support NQTs during their initial periods of professional practice and induction, as well as those who support and lead the learning of their more established colleagues (Kennedy and Bell 2023; O'Donnell 2024; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024; O'Donnell 2025). As such, the term cooperating teacher has been purposefully chosen in this study for its demarcation of the role, as those teachers who host and engage with student teachers on school placement.

Conceptualisations of the role of cooperating teacher are broad. In their extensive literature review on the role, a significant and defining undertaking, Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014) identified various categories of participation undertaken by those enacting the role, based on how the role was interpreted and engaged with. These are summarised in Figure 1.2 below and demonstrate the complex ways in which the role can be understood.

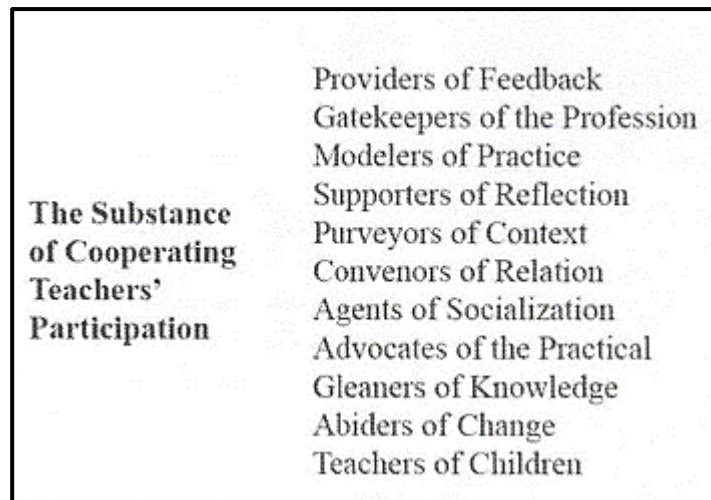


Figure 1.2: Taken from Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014, p.189, Figure 3)
'Categories of Participation'

These categories demonstrated the ways in which the cooperating teacher role might be perceived, ranging from being a placeholder in the classroom, whose primary responsibility is to the pupils in their class, to a more responsibility-driven professional disposition to support student teachers in developing as a teacher through modelling and feedback (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014). Expanding on this, the role is often considered from the perspective of mentoring (Kennedy and Bell 2023; Kennedy 2024), with some authors conceptualising the role specifically in terms of 'educative' mentoring (*inter alia* Feiman-Nemser 1998; Trevethan 2017; Stanulis et al. 2019; Wexler 2019; Wexler 2020). In such conceptions, it is expected that the teacher undertaking the role can 'interrogate, explain and justify their practices' to the student teacher they are supporting (Trevethan 2017, p.221), irrefutably a useful skillset for a school-based teacher educator. However, this can be problematic when there is ambiguity regarding whether required teaching experience or specific qualifications are necessary for mentors (Kennedy, Beck and Shanks 2021, p.13). This is pertinent in the Irish context, given the aforementioned informality of practice associated with

the role. As such, it has led researchers to analyse role identity considerations, with the argument that cooperating teachers, along with other school-based teacher educators, create a fictitious identity in attempts to fill the voids left by such informality (Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). This informality has also resulted in a recognition of the nature of experience as being formative in many cases, given that a national approach to professional learning is unavailable to cooperating teachers in this jurisdiction (O’Sullivan and Ó Conaill 2022; Mitchell et al. 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025). The reliance on experience is a stance that is acknowledged internationally as well. Such experience, while often arising from a teacher’s ‘own experiences of learning to teach’ (Kennedy 2024, p.9), is arguably also gleaned from the various activities in which cooperating teachers engage, which serve to expand their understanding of their role (Czerniawski et al. 2024; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). It is from these contentions in the literature, along with the policy and historical contexts explored above, that the research question and aims for this study emerge, focused on the learning and preparation of cooperating teachers for their role in school placement, in the absence of specific, formalised professional learning.

1.3 Research Question and Aims

The central research question is:

- In the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, what informs primary teachers’ practice for their role as cooperating teacher in the school placement process in Ireland?

The key aims and objectives of the study were:

- To explore the sources of information and learning which cooperating primary teachers draw on in their discussion and enactment of the role.
- To uncover how cooperating teachers discuss the movement from class teacher to cooperating teacher when working with student teachers and the skills required in this change of role.
- To explore how these sources of learning, discussions with others, and/or engagements with others, inform their conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher.

1.4 Positioning the Personal and the Professional

In considering the above contexts within which the study is situated, I as researcher also bring a lot to bear on this research. I am an educator who has been fascinated by education before I ever began studying the discipline itself. I enjoyed school and come from a family of teachers. Many of my friends and close network are teachers. I have often been affectionately mocked for this fascination by my friends and colleagues, who chorus ‘you’re not doing another course, are you?!’ But alas, I usually was. I often considered that doctoral education was something that I would be drawn towards but simultaneously wondered what would interest me and sustain me in undertaking something of such magnitude. Early into my teaching career, I became a cooperating teacher for student teachers on school placement, and that is when my journey to doctoral education began.

The role of the cooperating teacher is one which has intrigued me since my early days as a teacher. I, like many others, had a variety of experiences as a student

teacher in which I interacted with and was supported by a cooperating teacher during my ITE course. However, it was not until I was asked by the principal of the school in which I worked to host a student teacher, that I began to explore what I could do to be best prepared for the task at hand. During my undergraduate studies, I always had an interest in the work of my lecturers and considered what it would be like to play a part in shaping student teacher understanding of the role they were about to commence upon graduation. As I embarked on my first time working with a student teacher, I began to consider how I would be the one to possibly have an influence on the student teachers who were coming into my classroom. I sought out information on the role and read, to the dismay of some of my colleagues, the Teaching Council's original *Guidelines on School Placement*, published in 2013, to ascertain what was expected of the student teacher and of me during school placement. I began to ask my colleagues, my friends who were teachers and any other contacts I had, about their experiences and what they did when they had a student teacher. From there, I began to develop a picture of who I wanted to be in the role of cooperating teacher.

My first time hosting a student teacher was a steep learning curve. Every day I encountered something new that I had not considered, and I was required to be responsive to the emerging scenarios as they arose. Shortly after, I undertook a master's programme and decided to focus on trying to understand what other teachers experienced in the role of cooperating teacher. This helped me contextualise my own practice in relation to that of others. However, there was still something missing for me. I struggled to understand the learning and preparation aspects of the role, or the lack thereof. I undertook a summer course on the topic of school placement, run by an ITE institution, to engage deeper with some of the ideas about school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher within. However, I was the only teacher that I knew

in my circle and network who had chosen this course as my area of focus over the summer. So, I began to wonder how others who enacted the role learned to do so.

My curiosity about teacher education and learning, and more specifically, my curiosity about cooperating teacher learning for the role deepened. This led me to Maynooth University in early 2021, and my application to the teacher education specialism on the Doctor of Education programme. Initially, I entered the programme with a desire to create a professional learning experience for cooperating primary teachers, a tangible course or learning programme that could be used to support teachers enacting the role in schools. My desire to develop such a programme only strengthened as I moved from my position in school to fulltime roles in teacher professional learning with the teacher education support services. Now working in teacher induction, I began to see how formalised professional learning benefitted experienced and newly qualified teachers alike and wondered about the potential impact of a more structured and formalised approach, similar to this, on cooperating teacher learning and their engagement with student teachers. However, as I started to engage with the literature more deeply, I soon realised that what was known about cooperating primary teacher learning and preparation for the role in Ireland was limited. I needed to learn more about what cooperating teachers already did to support them in their understanding of and enactment of their role before I could begin to consider how that could be further developed through a professional learning programme.

It was this curiosity that has driven my motivation to engage with this study and to theorise and consider, in the absence of a formalised and standardised national programme of learning for cooperating teachers, how they learn about their role in order to be able to engage with the role during school placement. This motivation has

undoubtedly influenced the ways in which I think about teacher education, school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher and this is something I have had to be acutely attuned to throughout the study, to ensure my biases and assumptions have been monitored from the outset. This is explored further in Chapter Three, the methodology chapter, later.

1.5 Chapter Overview

The purpose of this introductory chapter was to locate this study within the broader policy landscape and literature and to outline the rationale for and significance of the study. The subsequent chapters in this thesis build upon this introduction in a number of ways. As such, a brief overview of the remaining chapters of the thesis is provided below.

Chapter Two consists of the literature review, which focuses on the systematic approach taken to explore the literature relevant to the study, and presents the findings of this review thematically, focusing on the learning and preparation of cooperating teachers for their role in school placement. The chapter then segways into the key concepts and constructs underpinning the study, leading to an exploration of the theoretical framing for the study. This is then considered throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter Three, the methodology, explores my positionality as researcher, building on my personal investment explored in Chapter One, as well as the paradigm in which the study is located. The research design and ethical considerations are outlined, as well as the data collection and analysis processes that were undertaken.

Chapter Four presents the findings through an individual case overview of the six cases. The six cases are introduced and the nuances associated with the cases are explored.

Chapter Five expands on the initial findings presented in Chapter Four, through the presentation of the key insights from the cross-case analysis. This consists of a thematic exploration of the cases through the three emergent key themes.

Chapter Six brings the findings of the study, as presented in the previous two chapters, into conversation with the study's theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. The findings are also considered in light of key literature in the field, to contextualise the study's findings in the broader landscape.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, draws together the findings and discussion, to present the conclusions arising from the study. Recommendations are suggested and the implications of the study are considered. Potential areas of further research are also identified.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the historical and policy trajectory of school placement, and in particular the role of the cooperating teacher within this distinct element of ITE. Through exploring the current policy landscape, the long-standing and historical traditions at play, and the proposed future direction regarding the preparation of teachers for the role of cooperating teacher, the significance of the study was identified. This was further strengthened given the personal and professional investment embedded within the study and the contributions of this research to the

practice of school placement in the future. By concluding with an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis, it provided an insight into how the study was situated within current discourse and theory in the field. Chapter Two will now explore this in more detail.

Chapter Two

*Literature Review and
Theoretical Framework*

2.1 Introduction

As evident in the introductory chapter of this thesis and particularly given the policy context in which school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher are embedded, the nuances associated with the role of the cooperating teacher in Ireland are complex. As such, this chapter looks outwards and explores the learning and preparation of cooperating teachers for their role in ITE nationally and internationally, through analysis and synthesis of current research in the field. This culminates in the identification of key concepts and constructs relevant to the study, evident in the literature, and a discussion on the study's conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings is presented. As indicated in Chapter One, while different jurisdictions may use alternative terms to reference their cooperating teachers, in their literature review, Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014) suggested that the term 'cooperating teacher still remains the most frequently used descriptor' of the role (p.165) and thus has been chosen due to its universality. Throughout this chapter, other synonyms used in the literature are referred to on occasion, including the terms mentor teacher, school-based teacher educator, supervising teacher and so on.

Because of their involvement with their student teacher counterparts, cooperating teachers are expected to demonstrate a range of duties and responsibilities relevant to the role, the extent of which are again dependent on the jurisdictional and system requirements in which the teachers work. However, it has been argued that cooperating teachers are generally underprepared for their work (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Setlhako 2019), are sometimes unaware of the extent of the role they are enacting (Mitchell et al. 2024), and often require formal training in mentoring and feedback skills (Hudson 2014; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020; Yilmaz and Bikmaz 2021; Mitchell et al. 2024). Yet, Czerniawski et al. (2024), in their international survey

of school-based teacher educators, found with surprise that ‘...just under half...reported they received preparation and support for their role...’ (p.7). Accordingly, this review focuses specifically on the learning and preparation of teachers for this role as cooperating teacher. However, with varying requirements in different jurisdictions comes a myriad of approaches to cooperating teacher learning and preparation, some formal and structured, others much less so. As such, the various sites and models of learning and preparation, attitudes towards cooperating teacher preparation and the perceived benefits or challenges of learning and preparation in various contexts are considered. Given the significant variability in requirements of the role from country to country, providing a jurisdictional overview would prove a lengthy and complex process. Instead, the country from which the research has emerged will be referenced on occasion throughout the review to contextualise the nuances associated with the role in that particular jurisdiction as necessary.

2.2 Search and Review Process

The review presented is the result of a targeted search and review process. The methodology employed ensured a comprehensive and contemporary overview and analysis of current research relating to cooperating teachers and their learning and preparation for their role. Organisation is considered a central factor in ensuring an effective literature review process (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey 2011; Hart 2018), and so, systems were developed to ensure the search and review process was systematic and well-documented. A variety of databases were used as primary search engines, namely EBSCOHost, Academic Search Complete and the British Education Index. Various keywords and search terms were identified, with combinations of these terms

being used to yield results from a variety of databases. A selection of these terms is summarised in Appendix A, and terms were managed using tables and spreadsheets for effective organisation and strategic retrieval. For the most-part these search terms remained static, however, where a new and relevant term was encountered, it was included.

Following initial searches of the literature, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to refine the search and ensure results were specifically related to the area under exploration and reflective of contemporary developments in the field. These inclusion and exclusion criteria are summarised in Table 1 below. These were influential in determining the material and research to be considered in this review and were effective in refining the literature search from its broad initial foundations, as evident in the summarised findings in Appendix A, to its thematic presentation explored herein. While the methodology was structured and logical in its approach, it is worth noting that the omission of studies published in non-English language journals may limit the breadth of the review from an international perspective. However, given that the aim of this work is to provide an overview of cooperating teacher learning and preparation for the role, rather than a comparative discussion on jurisdictional practices of same, this decision was justified.

<i>Literature Review Criteria</i>	
<i>Inclusion Criteria</i>	<i>Exclusion Criteria</i>
• Written and published in English • Peer-reviewed • Empirical in nature • Based on identified key words/terms • Specifies cooperating teacher learning rather than student teacher learning • Freely available through institutional access • Within specific fifteen-year timeframe	• Non-peer-reviewed/ discussion-based analysis • Policy documents • Non-English written/published papers • Papers discussing mentoring/ school-based teacher education outside school placement in ITE • Outside fifteen-year timeframe

Table 1: *Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

As mentioned, this review is organised thematically. Literature was read, analysed and organised relevant to other research explored during the review process. Empirical studies were analysed using literature review tables (sample, Appendix B) and collated according to emergent themes. This resulted in the thematic review presented, structured around three key themes, namely:

- School-Based Cooperating Teacher Learning and Preparation
- External Cooperating Teacher Learning and Preparation
- Cooperating Teacher Experiential Learning and Self-Preparation

These themes and related subthemes are summarised in Figure 2.1 below and are each discussed and presented subsequently in this chapter.

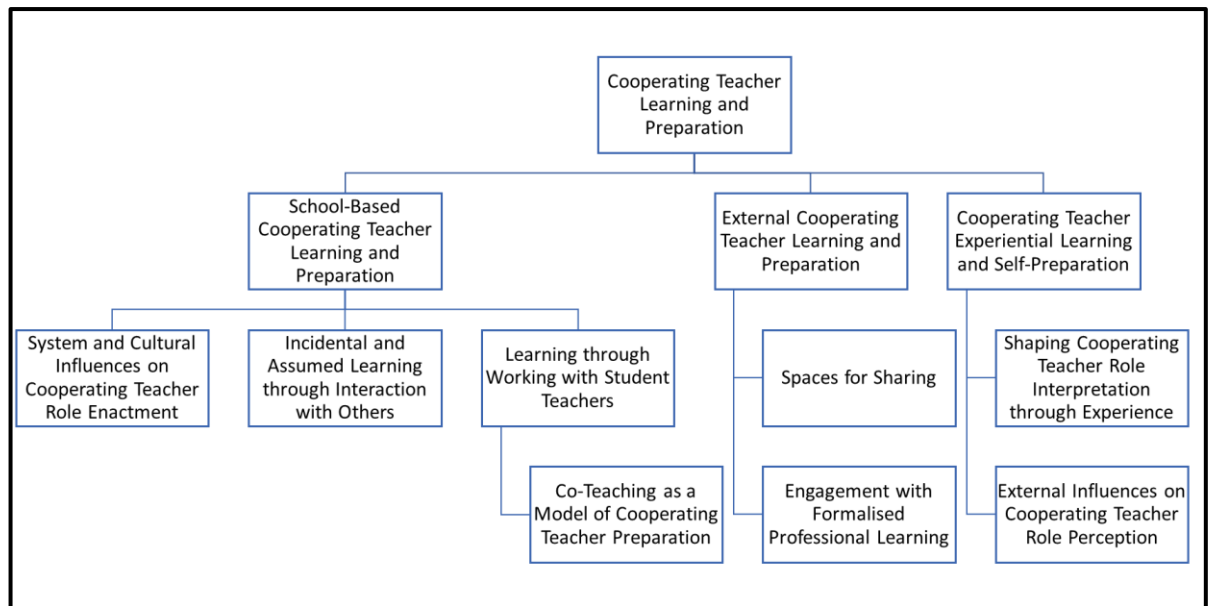


Figure 2.1: *Emergent themes and subthemes from literature analysis.*

2.3 THEME ONE: School-Based Cooperating Teacher Learning and Preparation

Much of the literature available on cooperating teacher learning and preparation nationally and internationally refers to the notion of the school as the site for cooperating teachers to learn about their role, either before, after or while they work with student teachers. However, this school-based preparation appears to manifest as both unplanned, incidental or assumed learning experiences through interaction with others, and other more structured approaches assumed beneficial to cooperating teacher preparation. This theme explores both structured and less structured school-based scenarios.

2.3.1 System and Cultural Influences on Cooperating Teacher Role Enactment

The systems and schools within which cooperating teachers work influence the ways in which cooperating teachers enact their role. In their study, Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen (2018) identified that placement schools with a supportive school climate had the potential to be effective learning communities for all parties involved – school leaders, mentor teachers, class teachers and student teachers, where each could enhance their practice within their role. However, they identified that discontinuity between school leaders’ desires to host student teachers, and their limited actual involvement in student teacher learning while they were on site, resulted in significant pressure on mentor teachers, and the isolation of mentors in the navigation of the role at school level. ‘Exam culture’ might also contribute to such pressures in some school environments, with student teachers highlighting this as being an aspect of their interaction with cooperating teachers (Ó Gallchóir, O’Flaherty and Hinchion 2019, p.383). In these settings, such culture may manifest from a school’s focus on terminal exams as the culmination of a student’s schooling experience, thus shifting the cooperating teachers’ focus away from the student teacher with whom they work and instead emphasising their own role as class teacher with responsibility for success in these examinations. This suggests that despite the potential of school placement to benefit the professional learning of various actors within the school environment, it is dependent on support from all those involved.

Extending the argument further, it may be the case that more nuanced influences are also at play at school level, beyond school personnel. The influence of value judgements, school rankings or teacher reliance on standardised documents and textbooks is significant on the positive or negative mentoring practices understood to be necessary and thus offered to student teachers at school level (Mahomed and Singh

2022; Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn 2022). In one of the above examples, schools ranked as low achieving saw mentors interpret their role as being to explicitly direct student teacher practice, rather than allow for exploration of the role (Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn 2022). These findings, paired with those above, proffer that there is merit in exploring the various influences and practices at a variety of levels on cooperating teachers' understanding of their role and resultant practice at school level in a variety of contexts. For example, external influences can evidently impact on the school culture and climate, which can filter through to how those within the school, like school leaders and other teachers, interpret or value the role of the cooperating teacher. This in turn has the potential to influence the type of learning and preparation for the role which manifests in individual school contexts. As such, the interactions between cooperating teachers and others must be considered.

2.3.2 Incidental and Assumed Learning Through Interaction with Others

Further within such spheres of influence at school level are the interactions between cooperating teachers and others, which the literature suggests are assumed beneficial to cooperating teacher learning and preparation for the role. Arguments are made by Escalié and Chaliès (2016) which augment the contention about school-based influences discussed thus far, but who emphasise an alternative perspective. The authors critique the French system of shared student teacher observation by the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. This is assumed to act as a professional development tool for both parties through the sharing of expertise. However, this was not the case in their small-scale case study, where diverging viewpoints and lack of clarity resulted in unclear feedback to the student teacher, and limited learning for both the cooperating teacher and university tutor, where differing

opinions led to tension between the roles. Similarly, Young and MacPhail (2016) found that while the interaction between cooperating teachers and university tutors had potential for knowledge sharing, a lack of 'infrastructure' and formal partnership hindered this in the Irish context (Young and MacPhail 2016, p.299).

These examples demonstrate the complexity of assuming that placement within an environment as a cooperating teacher is enough to prepare one to execute the role effectively. Instead, these contentions perhaps point to the need for explicit professional learning prior to engagement with the role, in order to be able to benefit from the less formal professional development opportunities which may then arise from this engagement. Studies by Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen (2018) and Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn (2022) are complementary in their demonstration of the impacts of school climate and culture on how the cooperating teacher role is understood in schools, while Escalié and Chaliès (2016) and Young and MacPhail (2016) highlight that simply introducing an external other into cooperating teacher practice within schools is not enough to assume learning about the role. These collective findings suggest that perhaps more structured initiatives may have increased impact on role preparation.

2.3.3 Learning through Working with Student Teachers

The literature suggests that working directly with student teachers in the role of cooperating teacher impacts on cooperating teacher understanding of the role. Minott and Willet (2011) found that cooperating teachers working in a supervisory capacity identified their engagement with the role as enhancing both their teaching and mentoring skillsets, with skills ranging from utilising best practice approaches in

their own practice, to competency in delivering feedback and promoting reflective practice. Similar findings were identified by Rinne et al. (2025), who also indicate that when mentor teachers receive feedback from student teachers following an observation period, it can prompt reflection on practice for both parties. However, Wagner and Lewis (2021) argue that teachable moments can be missed in the interaction between student teachers and cooperating teachers, if cooperating teachers are unsure how to deal with the issues presented by the student teacher during discussions, possibly due to their uncertainty about how to navigate such issues. This is problematic considering that many cooperating teachers identify relying heavily on their experience in shaping their work in their role as cooperating teacher in the Irish context (Hall et al. 2018; Mitchell et al. 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025). This will be revisited later in this chapter.

2.3.3.1 Co-Teaching as a Model of Cooperating Teacher Preparation

In contrast to some of the previous more haphazard interactions and assumed learning for cooperating teachers in school-based scenarios, co-teaching, where cooperating teachers and student teachers work together to plan, teach and evaluate a lesson, is a frequent model of interaction between cooperating teachers and student teachers identifiable in the literature (Tschida, Smith and Fogarty 2016; Chang 2018; Kim 2019; Rickard and Walsh 2019; Zach 2020; Walsh 2022). Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury (2016) found that structured and planned interactions through a co-teaching initiative had a significant impact on cooperating teacher confidence in the role. While this longitudinal case study demonstrated identifiable benefits to role preparation, the extended and multifaceted nature of the data collection phase increased the interaction between the researchers and the cooperating teachers,

prompting reflection on and discussion about the role, a privilege arguably not readily available to most cooperating teachers. This raises questions about where the effect on cooperating teacher confidence and preparation stemmed from: the co-teaching initiative or the incidental interactions as a result of the initiative.

Augmenting this argument, others have found that while cooperating teachers' reflective and pedagogical skills may have been developed during a co-teaching initiative between cooperating and student teachers, there was no reference to how or if the initiative explicitly supported or developed their cooperating teacher skillset (Murphy, Scantlebury and Milne 2015; Smith and Nandelson 2016; Carmi and Tamir 2023). However, the pairing of a co-teaching initiative with specific preparation and training for the initiative, has yielded positive results for developing cooperating teacher key skills, like addressing power imbalances in the dyad, and initiating effective dialogue to build relationships (Rabin 2020). Therefore, these findings have implications for how school-based initiatives are understood in terms of their role in cooperating teacher learning. It could be argued that pairing school-based initiatives or experiences with additional, structured professional learning focusing on key skills for communication and dialogue, offers more opportunities for cooperating teachers to benefit from these school-based experiences they engage with thereafter.

The extent to which schools influence cooperating teacher understanding of the role, and accordingly, preparation for and enactment of the role, is varied. This theme has demonstrated how school climate, culture, interactions and initiatives have been shown in the literature to impact cooperating teacher understanding of the role positively or negatively. Yet, it is also important to note how some of the above factors

have been argued to have little impact on the role and thus, their assumed importance in cooperating teacher learning is questioned. This leads to the notion that perhaps more formalised models of cooperating teacher learning and preparation may address some of the challenges highlighted thus far. These are subsequently explored below.

2.4 THEME TWO: External Cooperating Teacher Learning and Preparation

Perusal of the literature suggests that some jurisdictions and ITE institutions aim to provide opportunities for cooperating teachers to develop their skillset outside of the school building in which they work. In this review, these models of professional learning have emerged, and have been termed as the external preparation opportunities provided to cooperating teachers for their role. They include the provision of spaces outside the school, where participants come together and share their learning, and more formal training or courses that have been developed for cooperating teachers and facilitated by tutors or instructors from HEIs, either on-site in the school environment, or in an alternative location.

2.4.1 Spaces for Sharing

The literature indicates that spaces where cooperating teachers can share their practice, external to their own school, can be beneficial for their learning in a range of relevant skills, from understanding the complexities of the role to more practical skills, like giving feedback. Hudson (2014) found that providing a contrived observation and feedback scenario for a selection of mentor teachers offered them a chance to demonstrate their feedback skills to other mentors, while also seeing other mentors' approaches to the same task. This highlighted the significant variability in mentor

teacher feedback, leading to the contention that increased, formalised training is required to support developing consistency amongst mentors. This is echoed in the field, with findings suggesting that providing space for mentors to discuss their practice with others influenced their awareness of their interpretation and enactment of their own role as cooperating teacher (Ambrosetti 2014). Wexler (2023) offers an augmentation to this, noting that bringing an artefact, such as a recorded mentoring conversation between student teacher and cooperating teacher into this shared space, can support the ‘deprivatisation’ of the mentoring experience, offering ample learning opportunities for the mentor teachers involved (Wexler 2023, p.667).

While the above examples utilise a shared space external to the school environment, context-specific support within the school can be offered through providing space and time on-site to support learning and role preparation. This can be sometimes facilitated by an external other, like researchers or HEI-tutors, particularly when or if cooperating teachers are engaged in research studies relevant to the role (Betlem, Clary and Jones 2019). Given that there are calls for cooperating teachers to have particular standards in relation to working with student teachers, such as ‘developing a disposition and professional knowledge’ (Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020, p.5), this idea of providing dedicated space is notable. The opportunity for like-minded professionals, or those simply enacting the same role across a specific school context, to meet and discuss their practice, could provide an alternative to the informal or assumed school-based learning previously discussed. It also differs from the often utilised, more formal model of a professional development programme which will be explored below.

While shared spaces for cooperating teachers to learn from one another are advocated above (Ambrosetti 2014; Hudson 2014; Wexler 2023), Mauri et al. (2019)

detail the benefits of developing shared spaces where university tutors, student teachers and cooperating teachers discuss and reflect on their practice, but not necessarily within the setting of the school, and rather suggest reframing the shared space as a collaborative learning space. This proved beneficial to cooperating teacher learning, where participants noted their increased ability to reflect on and critique the benefits of their practice as cooperating teacher for the student teachers with whom they worked. In contrast however, Chen, Daniels and Ochanji (2017) found that encouraging both university tutors and cooperating teachers to lead sessions in this shared space specific to teaching, learning and mentoring, rather than solely reflecting on practice, affected how each party understood the work of the other, and supported the broadening of perspectives on how student teachers could be best supported. These differing contentions are important, as, although different in their approach and organisation, they highlight how more structured, explicit and planned approaches, than the scenario discussed by Escalié and Chaliès (2016) earlier, can provide learning opportunities to cooperating teachers, when spaces are shared and more removed from the school site as the setting for learning.

While this subtheme has focussed on shared spaces and the perceived benefits of these spaces for cooperating teacher preparation, the literature tends to explore formalised professional development opportunities more frequently. The following discussion analyses the contributions of research in the field on these opportunities and the associated considerations arising from these programmes.

2.4.2 Engagement with Formalised Professional Learning

Current trends in ITE have begun to shift the role of cooperating teacher as supporter of the university or college, into the more formalised school-based teacher educator space (Zeichner 2010; Grimmer et al. 2018; White 2019a; White 2019b). As a result, ‘...there is very strong support in the literature... for STs [*supervising teachers*] undertaking formalised learning as a mentor’ (Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020, p.5). Understandably, various models of external, formal cooperating teacher training programmes and opportunities are trialled, discussed and evaluated in the literature, ranging from university-based programmes to practical skill development courses and so on. Some of these are guided by, or dependent on, the jurisdiction in which the research was completed. However, regardless of these demands, the programmes have varying effects on cooperating teacher preparation for the role.

Research indicates that cooperating teachers engaged in formal, structured learning opportunities about the role, where they receive input from a tutor or instructor, along with support materials, self-identified changes in their practice over the course of, or after, their engagement with the learning experience (Ambrosetti 2014; Erbilgin 2014). This suggests that extending learning beyond reflection on personal experiences and broadening it to include new information can have a positive effect on cooperating teacher learning, preparation for, and engagement with the role, particularly where there is a focus on key teacher education concepts and second-order practice skills (White 2019b). Participants of the formal programme explored by Childre and Van Rie (2015) cited increased confidence in supporting their student teachers and an understanding of the students’ placement requirements as key learning outcomes arising from engagement with their mentor teacher learning programme. Arguably, these are important aspects of learning which may not be a focus of attention

without the support of a facilitator who has an explicit understanding of the place of school placement within the broader context of a student teacher's ITE programme. This is noteworthy given that cooperating teachers have identified a lack of information about student teacher learning prior to practicum, as a challenge to their practice as cooperating teacher (Nielsen et al. 2017).

As highlighted above, although structured professional learning opportunities are available to cooperating teachers in some contexts, issues of their adequacy in terms of effective preparation for the role can be found in the literature. In the Norwegian context where mandatory training for teachers who work with student teachers is a requirement, only moderate correlations between mentor education, and mentor effort in the role and their integration, as mentors, into university-based programmes for the benefit of student teachers, were identified (Sandvik et al. 2019; Sandvik et al. 2020). Similarly, Trevethan (2017) reported that cooperating teachers in New Zealand did not necessarily enact aspects of learning they had received input on and instead reverted to past experiences and practices in some cases. This suggests that although cooperating teachers have received formalised professional preparation in these contexts, it may not have as strong or direct an impact on their practice as could be assumed above, based on the arguments of Ambrosetti (2014), Erbilgin (2014), Childre and Van Rie (2015) and White (2019b).

Another central facet of discussion in the literature is the place of the online environment in cooperating teacher preparation for the role, with arguments for and against its use. This online space is used in different ways and seems to be effective in providing cooperating teachers with external supports in a structured manner, where remote synchronous or asynchronous engagement can be provided, and where resources can be made available with relative ease (Caudle 2013; Erbilgin 2014;

Childre and Van Rie 2015; Black, Olmsted and Mottonen 2016). Contrary to these many positive aspects listed however, issues with the level of engagement between participants in the online space versus the face-to-face space have been noted (Caudle 2013). This is a worthy consideration, given the extent to which formalised professional learning opportunities can also provide participants with the chance to share and contextualise their practice relevant to theory, policy and the experience of others in shared spaces, as discussed above. However, caution with overreliance on face-to-face training is also evident in the literature, with some cooperating teachers, despite noting their preference for it, suggesting that careful cognisance of the timing and location of such training, and the effort involved on the part of the cooperating teacher is required (Black, Olmsted and Mottonen 2016). Therefore, while it is clear that there are benefits associated with formalised and structured cooperating teacher professional learning, the format and structure of such learning opportunities can be contentious.

Although the discussion thus far has centred around the formalised programmes available to cooperating teachers, it is also worth considering the effects of the facilitators of these programmes on the preparation of cooperating teachers. Caudle (2013) found that the role of the facilitator in the mentor teacher professional development group under exploration was central in ensuring group cohesion and validating feelings and concerns in order for participants to feel comfortable in the remote learning space and in their sharing of their experiences with others. This is noteworthy in the context of the previous school-based learning and shared spaces discussions above. While these are reliant on cooperating teachers engaging with each other and making visible their practice through discussion, one could question the effectiveness of this in the absence of a facilitator to guide and scaffold learning.

Perhaps some of the value of external and more formalised professional learning lies in this facilitator's role, in order to marry participant experiences with new learning, and ultimately to enhance their skillset as cooperating teacher and mentor.

This theme has illuminated the concept of cooperating teacher preparation and professional development as external to the school setting, or within the school setting but with input from an external provider. It is clear that models of preparation vary depending on region, the ITE institutions involved, the chosen mode of delivery and the motivation of the cooperating teachers involved to engage with new learning and share their experiences. The benefits and challenges of both spaces for shared learning, and for more formalised programmes have been articulated, indicating the complex nature of cooperating teacher learning and preparation for the role. However, the literature also accounts instances where cooperating teachers neither benefit from school-based nor external preparation opportunities and instead navigate the transition to cooperating teacher themselves. This is the focus of the third theme and is explored below.

2.5 THEME THREE: Cooperating Teacher Experiential Learning and Self-Preparation

In reviewing the literature, it is apparent that discourse surrounding the individualised nature of interpreting the role of cooperating teacher is prevalent, and that transitioning from the role of classroom teacher to cooperating teacher requires teachers to reflect on and consider this change. In some instances, this becomes a discussion of teacher identity, in other cases, a discussion on how teachers are

influenced by other factors in their self-identification as cooperating teacher. However, in all of the literature explored within this theme, the focus is on the teacher themselves navigating, preparing for, learning about and executing the role.

2.5.1 Shaping Cooperating Teacher Role Interpretation through Experience

Amaral-da-Cuhna et al. (2020) highlight the aforementioned issue of individual teacher navigation through the transition from classroom teacher to school-based teacher educator, when one becomes a cooperating teacher. The complexity of the role is highlighted in terms of locating oneself within the role and questioning who and what exactly one wants to be within that role – an advisor, a friendly support, and so on. This echoes many of the contentions of Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014), who, as shown in Chapter One, determine the various categories of participation one might ascribe to, knowingly or unknowingly, in their engagement with the role of cooperating teacher. These ranged from teachers of children to convenors of relation and providers of feedback, to name but a few (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014, p.189).

What is evident in analysing the findings of Amaral-da-Cuhna et al. (2020) with those of Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014), is the space for inaccurate or misinformed interpretation of the role, in the absence of guidance for the role. This variability across cooperating teacher interpretation can be seen when cooperating teachers emphasise the importance of different things within their practice, ranging from the practical mechanics of teaching to the more complex professional learning of their student teachers (Garcia and Badia 2023). Of greater concern in this reliance on one's own experience, is the notion that in certain circumstances, mentor teachers don't see the need for specific preparation to enact the role until engaged in a

formalised programme where they are exposed to some of the complexities of what being a mentor entails (Leshem 2014). The possibility to become reliant on one's own pedagogical knowledge and desire to be 'friendly' with student teachers, rather than strive for their development through making connections between theoretical and practical learning, is evident if, and when, one is left to navigate practice in the absence of some of the formalised supports mentioned thus far. This is an understandable issue, as when one considers where a cooperating teacher's predominant experience lies, it tends to be in the classroom space as classroom teacher, rather than in the classroom space as cooperating teacher, which they now find themselves in. This tension in role duality is well documented in the literature (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Grimmer et al. 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020; Czerniawski et al. 2024) and irrefutably influences the way in which cooperating teachers identify with and enact their role in practice.

Not only is there the initial challenge of moving from classroom teacher to cooperating teacher and conceptualising one's experience within this transition, but these teachers must then reconstruct and re-enact the role when a new student teacher enters their classroom. In this constructing and reconstructing, experience is influential. Experiences of being a student teacher or mentee have been shown to shape how teachers then perceive themselves in their role as mentor (Lunsmann et al. 2019; White 2019b; Mitchell et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Chu (2019) found that previous experiences of being a mentor teacher shaped how participants initially interpreted and engaged with their role. In this study, despite growing in confidence the longer they worked with student teachers, participants still struggled to see themselves as teacher educators, and they clearly outlined, from their perspective, the differences in role between cooperating teachers and university tutors (Chu, 2019). This is important, as

recalling the aforementioned duality of the role, the literature suggests that teachers acting as cooperating teachers often revert to their practice-based knowledge, rather than assuming a more teacher educator-orientated mindset. This is supported by Neilsen, Tindall-Ford and Sheridan (2022) who, again using Clarke, Triggs and Neilsen's (2014) concept of categories of participation (Figure 1.2), highlighted how individual interpretation of the role can result in cooperating teachers relying heavily on their pedagogical knowledge rather than attempting to incite student teacher's reflective skills to enhance their learning. Interestingly, some cooperating teachers in this instance did not use the guidelines provided for observations during the placement and instead utilised their own practice knowledge. This echoes Trevethan's (2017) finding that mentor teachers do not necessarily use the new knowledge to which they have been exposed in their learning about the role. These examples raise questions about whether participants did not value the supports offered to them, or whether they reverted to their own experiences as a preference in interpreting and executing the role of cooperating teacher.

What is evident in this discussion thus far, is the place of experience in determining how cooperating teachers engage with and enact their role. Experience as a student teacher, experience as a classroom teacher, experience in transitioning between classroom teacher and cooperating teacher, and experience as a cooperating teacher to others, are all influential in the learning and preparation of a teacher to undertake the role of cooperating teacher, and in how and if a teacher understands their interpretation of the role. Yet, harnessing personal experiences are a mere facet of the ways in which teachers prepare for their role as cooperating teachers, with many other factors also at play.

2.5.2 External Influences on Cooperating Teacher Role Perception

While the internal aspects of cooperating teacher self-preparation for the role are challenging and complex, as explored above, the range of external influences affecting how cooperating teachers perceive their role are significant in how teachers subsequently interpret their role when preparing for, or while working with, a student teacher.

It has been found that cooperating teacher self-identity and moving into the mindset of being a teacher educator is influenced by various external factors, including school climate, the perceived value of the role by colleagues and the university, and interacting with others (Andreasen, Bjørndal and Kovač 2019). Tangible links between many of the aspects explored in Theme One and the contentions put forward here are clear, where school climate, expectations and value-judgements may affect the ways in which a cooperating teacher identifies with their role and the subsequent development of their understanding of the role in that context (Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen 2018; Ó Gallchóir, O’Flaherty and Hinchion 2019; Mahomed and Singh 2022; Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn 2022).

One might argue that professional development, as explored in Theme Two, might contribute to alleviating the influence of some of the above factors on cooperating teacher perceptions. While this might be true to suggest in some instances, it has been shown that despite cooperating teachers stating that their preferred models of professional learning included video tutorials and face-to-face seminars, they actually tended to rely heavily on self-preparation strategies for the role, like finding and reading policy documents and necessary forms, and asking student teachers information about the placement (Franks and Krause 2020). Therefore, regardless of the input received by a cooperating teacher for the role, it could be argued that there

is a significant amount of self-preparation that is required in the role, from interpreting policy to interpreting value for the role at school level and framing this within personal and professional experiences to date. This highlights the complexities associated with being a cooperating teacher, and the learning and preparation involved for those who engage as such.

2.6 Implications of the Literature Review

The thematic review provided herein has highlighted the complexities associated with the role of the cooperating teacher and how current arrangements to enhance understanding of the role are being implemented internationally. A number of key considerations have arisen from this review which must be considered through the lens of future research into the role and the preparation of those engaged with the role.

Firstly, it can be argued that there is a significant amount of assumed learning for the role, as evident in the literature. The focus on school-based learning brought this to the fore, where analysis of contemporary research by the likes of Escalié and Chaliès (2016) and Murphy, Scantlebury and Milne (2015) demonstrated that teachers are expected to benefit from various initiatives occurring at school level, without the support or knowledge required to be able to benefit from such initiatives. This is a concern in light of the work being done by others in the field, where variability in interpretations of and participation in the role (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014, Garcia and Badia 2023), and the increasing demands associated with the role (Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020) are to the fore. The ability of cooperating teachers to enact the role and achieve these demands based on the assumed learning they engage with

suggests that there is much to be done to bridge the gap between cooperating teacher expected practice and their level of learning about, and in, the role.

The second important notion is based on this idea of bridging the above gap. The review has explored different forms of school-based and external learning and preparation and alluded to some of the benefits and challenges associated with these. It is clear that efforts are being made in some jurisdictions to formalise the role of cooperating teacher, and as such offer mandated programmes of learning for those enacting the role, as described from the Norwegian perspective by Sandvik et al. (2020). Yet evidently there are issues in the format of these programmes (Caudle 2013; Black, Olmsted and Mottenon 2016), and how they can be best suited to the needs of the teachers involved. There is also the issue of role clarity and the place of partnerships between schools and universities which must be considered, most especially in regions where standardised training for the role is optional or does not yet exist, like in Ireland.

Finally, cognisance of the complex nature of the role, and the level of self-preparation required is essential. As demonstrated, the transition between classroom teacher and cooperating teacher can prove challenging (Amaral-da-Cuhna et al. 2020) and the duality of the role is intricate, when trying to meet the needs of both the students in the class and the student teacher (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Grimmer et al. 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020). Therefore, consideration needs to be given to how cooperating teachers manage these intricacies in practice and the supports required at school and system level, in order to ensure that time is allocated to self-reflect and prepare for the role effectively.

In summary, this review has emphasised the various aspects associated with cooperating teacher learning and preparation for the role, through the thematic lenses of school-based learning and preparation, external learning and preparation and self-preparation. By examining a range of schools of thought evident on this topic in current discourse in the field, it demonstrates that there is much to be done to understand the extent to which cooperating teacher preparation will be required in the future for further development of the role. While the role itself is a complex one and requires much on the part of the teacher in the execution of its demands on a day-to-day basis, the process of preparation and professional learning for the role is equally as complex, given the many competing modes of learning and preparation available to and utilised by teachers. Some of the strengths and challenges associated with these various approaches to learning have been explored, and ultimately, it appears a combination of these are in operation in many jurisdictions across the world, as policymakers, institutions and teachers try to navigate the cooperating teacher role in the contemporary ITE space.

The subsequent sections of this chapter draw on the key theoretical aspects and concepts at play to contextualise the study in broader conceptual and theoretical discourse, to move from contemporary perspectives on cooperating teacher learning, as explored in the literature review heretofore; to begin to conceptualise and theorise about this learning.

2.7 Developing the Conceptual and Theoretical Framing

The study is situated within a social theory of learning, drawing on Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayer's (2015) work on landscapes of practice. The study

situates cooperating teacher practice within a complex landscape of practice, where myriad boundaries and peripheries between and among practices are navigated in the course of their work, all of which support the cooperating teacher in learning about and understanding their role. In this locating of practice within the landscape, the study draws on three central concepts to construct the theoretical frame, namely: informal workplace learning; first- to second-order practice; and bricolage. Informal workplace learning acknowledges the ways in which one learns outside of formalised and structured approaches to learning, including through work tasks, conversations with others and problem-solving as challenges arise. First- to second-order practice draws on the work of Murray (2002), and within this study refers to first-order practice as one's professional role as teacher of pupils, while second-order practice refers to the practice of sharing knowledge, information and insights into one's first-order practice with another. Finally, bricolage is derived from the work of Levi-Strauss (1962) and considered the action of taking elements of what is available to an individual and combining, creating and innovating with these available elements in new ways. Each of these constructs supports the development of the complexity of cooperating teacher learning in practice in the Irish context, as they navigate the landscape they inhabit, and are explored in the following section.

In their navigation of this landscape, cooperating teachers are continuously engaging in informal workplace learning practices to support them in understanding their role. Drawing on understandings of informal workplace learning acknowledges the informality of practice associated with the cooperating teacher role in Ireland, due to the absence of formalised professional learning for the role. Informal workplace learning occurs in many different ways in the case of cooperating teacher practice, and this will be explained further below. However, such informal workplace learning must

occur due to the policy-defined roles and responsibilities attributed to cooperating teachers in the Irish context. They are not merely classroom placeholders, but rather, expected to be actively engaged with student teachers, discussing practice, and promoting student teacher reflection (Teaching Council 2021). As such, there is an evident expectation that as they navigate their landscape of practice, they learn to move between their first- and second-order practices (Murray 2002; Murray and Male 2005). This concept of moving between first- and second-order practice will be articulated and analysed in relation to the role of the cooperating teacher, and how or whether the landscape of practice enables or hinders this will be considered.

The final aspect of the framework explored in this section, is Levi-Strauss' (1962) concept of the *bricoleur*. This is introduced and analysed in relation to the role of the cooperating teacher to demonstrate the complex mindset and consideration that is required when drawing from practices in the landscape to conceptualise one's understanding of their role. Using the idea of the *bricoleur* in this way, it depicts the cooperating teacher as an individual traversing the landscape and making decisions about what practices or experiences will be drawn upon in their work with student teachers towards the development of their second-order practice knowledge. However, locating the *bricoleur* within the landscape, acknowledges that cooperating teachers can draw on sources both within and beyond their workplace, in the broader landscape that they inhabit and navigate, to support them in conceptualising their role. In framing the study through these lenses, it highlights the complexity associated with being a cooperating teacher in Ireland, enacting a role that is unsupported at system level, due to the lack of formalised professional learning for same.

2.8 The Cooperating Teacher in a Landscape of Practice

The term landscape of practice was originally introduced by Wenger (1998) to conceptualise how practices in different spaces and communities can interact with, draw from, coincide with or diverge from one another, through encounters at boundaries and peripheries of practice. While boundaries highlight the distinct nature of practices, peripheries allow practices to see and draw from one another and allow for the emergence of ‘areas of overlap and connections’ (Wenger 1998, p.120). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) explicitly acknowledge that a ‘body of knowledge’ associated with a given professional practice, in this instance, the practice of being a cooperating teacher, cannot be understood in the isolation of that practice alone. Instead, they advocate that professional practice is ‘...best understood as a ‘landscape of practice’...’ to encapsulate the various communities of practice, relations with others and interactions that occur when one considers a ‘social perspective on professional learning’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.13). As such, landscapes of practice are complex spaces where practices converge and diverge at boundaries and peripheries.

The cooperating teacher navigates the landscape of being a cooperating teacher and all that it entails in their daily work. However, this landscape that they encounter is broad and varied, particularly given the dualistic nature of the work they undertake as class teachers and cooperating teachers (White 2014). As such, their engagement with various practices within the landscape they navigate is complex. How cooperating teachers navigate these boundary and periphery encounters in their work with student teachers requires creativity, innovation and the taking of opportunities to develop an understanding of their role within school placement. These encounters can be intricate due to the dynamic nature of landscapes.

2.8.1 The Nature of the Landscape Inhabited by Cooperating Teachers in Ireland

The landscape navigated by cooperating teachers is political, a key characteristic identified by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p.15). Chapter One outlined the discrepancies between historical and policy perspectives currently identifiable in the phenomenon of school placement in Ireland and particularly relating to the role of the cooperating teacher. The *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021) outline clear expectations of cooperating teachers and their responsibilities when enacting the role. However, such expectations in a system built on informality and volunteerism (OECD 1991; Kellaghan 2002; Coolahan 2003; DES Inspectorate 2006) suggests tension between policy and the realities of the informal, voluntary nature of the role. Similarly, cooperating teacher practice has become the focus of myriad Irish research in recent years, in attempts to understand, advise on and improve practice in this under-researched role in the Irish context (*inter alia* Young and MacPhail 2016; Ó Gallchóir, O’Flaherty and Hinchion 2019; Mitchell et al. 2024; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025; Sloan and Dolan 2025). Although such research is arguably beneficial to developing understanding about the role to a greater extent, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) consider this a power shift in the political sense, in attempts to shape practice through research.

As such, this contested space, where misalignment between policy, historical context, research and practice can occur, has the potential to result in cooperating teacher disengagement from and rejection of policy and research developments. Given the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, these same cooperating

teachers are unsupported in critiquing whether such developments may or may not shape practice. In addition, the extent to which cooperating teachers may encounter these policy and research practices and perspectives is questionable, given the range of other competing practices and encounters they face when navigating the landscape they inhabit. An evident example of this is in Trevethan's (2017) study, previously mentioned, which signalled that despite engaging in professional learning for their role, some cooperating teachers reverted to their prior practice and experience when enacting the role. This signals the power of other influences on practice within the landscape.

The notion of the landscape as being diverse is also suggested by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015). Cooperating teachers encounter various practices when navigating the landscape and as a result, various boundaries and peripheries between practices manifest. As mentioned heretofore, White (2014) refers to the duality of the role of cooperating teacher, in straddling both the practice of class teacher and the practice of cooperating teacher, yielding boundaries and peripheries between and among these roles. This too indicates the boundaries and peripheries that exist between an individual's first- and second-order practice (Murray 2002; Murray and Male 2005) and the fleeting transitions between these practices in the context of the classroom when engaging in a dual role. Yet, looking beyond the immediate classroom, cooperating teachers also work within specific school contexts, as well as with various ITE providers, in hosting student teachers for school placement. This points to other, differing practices within the landscape which they may encounter on their journey of being a cooperating teacher. They also bring with them their experiences as teachers and the influences that have brought them to the point they are at when they undertake the role of cooperating teacher. These diverse contexts,

experiences and encounters all signify the likely boundaries and peripheries confronted by cooperating teachers in the course of their navigation of the landscape as they engage in their role.

What happens at these boundaries is dependent on how cooperating teachers understand their practice in relation to these other practices across the landscape, with such boundary encounters and boundary crossings being a ‘crucial aspect’ of traversing the landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.18). While this may cause confusion or challenge practice at times, it can also prove insightful and offer opportunities for learning. How the cooperating teacher uses these insights gained at the peripheries or boundary crossings and applies such knowledge to the scenarios they face in the course of their work as a cooperating teacher has the potential to shape their understanding of and enactment of their role. This requires knowledgeability of the landscape and an awareness of how varying aspects of practice can be used in one’s work as cooperating teacher.

2.8.2 Identifying and Dis-Identifying within the Landscape

Through journeying in the landscape, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) proffer that one goes through processes of identification and dis-identification with the practices one comes upon at the boundaries they encounter and whether those boundaries are crossed or upheld. How these practices are interacted with varies, with some being engaged with fully, others being visited periodically, more being merely glanced toward and some being actively avoided (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.19). How one experiences these encounters, interactions or avoidances within the landscape shapes how one understands themselves, and

subsequently how they identify, or dis-identify, with those practices and communities in their journey through the landscape. Examples of this are evident in the literature, where cooperating teachers have been noted to have periodic engagement with placement tutors or supervisors (Escalié and Chaliès 2016; Mauri et al. 2019) and more prolonged engagement with fellow cooperating teachers from school contexts outside their own (Ambrosetti 2014; Hudson 2014; Wexler 2023). Moreover, traversing a landscape helps one to identify or dis-identify with practices and communities at local levels and across the landscape as a whole. This is important given the location of a cooperating teacher's practice: the classroom.

Looking outward from the peripheries into the landscape offers opportunities to look beyond the immediate, the classroom, and seek potential learning from other endeavours and encounters. It is suggested that this is done in three key ways (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015): through engagement (engaging with practice); imagination (constructing an image of the landscape and who we are in it); and alignment (aligning practice to the context in which the practice occurs). This helps the locating of oneself in the landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.21), which is essential for cooperating teachers, in understanding their role not only in the context of their immediate classroom and practice, but also more broadly in the context of their school, the ITE institution which the student teacher attends, their past experiences, their colleagues, and other practices they consider and draw on in the course of their work. The list goes on.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2025, p.22) suggest that individuals may identify or dis-identify at different levels of scale when considering their practice within the landscape. This process of identification and dis-identification supports locating the individual and their practice within the broader landscape of practice more

generally. Balancing all three of these aspects, engagement, imagination and alignment, is essential then to ensuring that one can be productive within the landscape. Knowledgeability, how one relates to the various practices within the landscape, supports this. Knowledgeability in the breadth of the landscape involves translating the complex experience of navigating one's way within it, its practices, its boundaries and peripheries, into meaningful moments and engagements within the landscape and being able to ascertain the value of these varying practices in different situations (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.23). The cooperating teacher must engage in these considerations and translations at regular intervals to determine what they can use at a given time or in a given scenario, to support their engagement in their role.

In the translation and consideration of the complex web of practices they encounter in the landscape, cooperating teachers may find themselves in spaces between the practices and communities they encounter. As such, the practices and communities that they find themselves accountable to may vary. Accountability within the landscape depends on how one identifies with a given practice at a given time or in a given scenario, as well as where one considers their accountability should lie at a point in time (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). For example, cooperating teachers might find themselves considering whether they are or should be accountable to the practices or requirements of the ITE institution which the student teacher attends, or the given practices of their school or their colleagues. They might also find themselves considering their accountability towards practices of a similar, yet distinct role that they possess in another community, but which may have useful components relevant to their role as cooperating teacher. Modulating identity is a complex task when navigating the landscape, but something that cooperating teachers inevitably

face, due to the absence of formalised professional learning to support them in their role. In this absence, learning informally within their workplace both individually and with colleagues, can give rise to instances of identification and dis-identification at local level. Considering this through the lens of informal workplace learning is an important next step.

2.9 Informal Workplace Learning

Informal learning in the workplace is a concept which has been written about both generally and from within specific disciplines, from a variety of perspectives and with variation in how the term is used and what is meant by it in different contexts. A variety of different terms are used when referring to informal learning, with terms like implicit learning (Eraut 2004) or incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins 1990; Watkins et al. 2018) also appearing in the lexicon. However, in this study, these terms are considered aspects of informal learning more generally, given its broad connotations. Arguably, there is no agreed, universal definition in the literature about what informal workplace learning is, but rather various attempts at definitions which include and exclude particular practices that constitute informal learning. This is possibly due to its complexity as a concept (Garrick 1998), given that it is not necessarily explicitly visible.

An effective place to begin a discussion of this concept is in its location in relation to formal learning. This is often considered to be the more structured and organised learning opportunities with which professionals engage, typically harnessing the expertise of another individual in its implementation (Marsick and Watkins 1990; Turner 2006). This perhaps is a clearer concept to define in general

terms, as engagement with learning in this way tends to be more obvious to the individual, similar to some of the examples documented in the literature review. However, one might then assume that informal learning is the direct opposite of this more tangible formal learning. It has in fact been argued that informal learning should not necessarily be viewed in this manner. Instead, it is advocated that an understanding of workplace learning demands one to shift one's mindset to learning as a 'continuum of formality' ranging from activities and engagements that are more formal to those which are less formal in nature, and that elements of this continuum can be used in complementary ways, when they are understood (Eraut 2004, p.250). Interpreting learning in this way creates scope to consider a range of activities which may or may not constitute informal learning and the way in which it manifests in the workplace. Importantly, the emphasis here is on the learning that occurs in everyday practice, often spontaneously, rather than the conceptualisation of informal learning as something that can be mobilised and assessed for purposes of productivity, which is sometimes how the term is used or understood in business and economic disciplines (Garrick 1998), rather than through the educational lens being applied herein.

The link has been made between informal learning and one's experiences, which tends to view informal learning as an umbrella term encompassing many different actions and activities on the part of the individual, which make up this experience and how they understand or make sense of their surroundings through this experience (Marsick and Watkins 1990; Eraut 2004; Watkins et al. 2018). Eraut (2004) argues that the term 'experience' might represent an individual experience or accumulated experience, both of which can influence meaning and learning in different ways. In their conceptualisation, Marsick and Watkins (1990) use the terms informal learning and incidental learning to delineate between the intention of a

learning action. Here, informal learning, while unstructured, may be either planned or accidental, while incidental learning is always an unintended result of engagement with a task or activity. In contrast, Eraut (2004) suggests that the concept of informal learning can be broken down into implicit, reactive and deliberative learning, where informal learning occurs in the workplace on a continuum of unintentional to intentional engagement in learning, the former unknown to the individual at the time. In this development of the concept, implicit is considered unconscious learning, reactive as occurring in action and in response to action, and deliberative as working towards a specific learning goal, or working intentionally in practice, where learning is occurring simultaneously (Eraut 2004, p.250). Regardless of the terms used, it is evident that this foundational work on the concept of informal learning suggests there are both intended and unintended ways of learning informally.

Eraut's (2004) conception of informal learning is noteworthy, particularly in terms of how the concept might be understood in the literature from differing perspectives along this intentional to unintentional continuum. Evans (2019) augments this notion, advocating for the broadening of definitions of professional development to include the individualistic nature of informal learning. In doing so, she coins the term 'micro-level professional development', to denote an enhancement to an individual's professionalism and professional practice, which may be conscious or unconscious, but results in a change to one's knowledge, skills or attitudes necessary for engagement with their professional role (Evans 2014, p.186; Evans 2019, p.9). The important understanding which arises here, is the notion of an individual's awareness, or lack-thereof, of their informal learning, and whether this learning is intended or unintended even when this awareness is present. It is in this broad conception of the concept that its complexities lie.

Further development of this idea of levels of awareness of one's informal learning can be identified in the literature. This is evident in studies which classify workplace learning into typical learning activities, and those which document learning as arising from engagement with the work itself (*inter alia* Lohman 2006; Eraut 2007; Wofford, Ellinger and Watkins 2013; Armstrong 2021; Berg Jansson and Engström 2022). It is perhaps through this engagement with, or enactment of, a professional role, that an individual may be unaware that they are learning while engaging with their work-related tasks. For example, Eraut (2007) builds on his previous work in his research with early-career professionals across various contexts, from engineering to accountancy, and categorises learning as a 'by-product' of work, as well as outlining different strategies used by individuals in increasing their skillset for the work with which they engage. These strategies range from asking questions to reflecting in and on their practice. This suggests that informal learning and workplace activity often occur simultaneously, which perhaps is the reason why an individual might classify a particular practice or activity as work rather than learning.

Armstrong (2021) strengthens this notion of blurred lines between work and informal learning, as participants in his study demonstrated their learning and understanding of their role through performing the role in context, rather than learning about the role prior to engaging with it. This suggests the enactment of Eraut's (2004) aforementioned elements of informal learning, namely, implicit, reactive and deliberative learning, where participants of the study recounted seeking out information in context, in response to particular issues that arose, or actively seeking learning opportunities to better their practice. These examples demonstrate the ways in which informal learning can manifest in a workplace setting, whether there is intention there for this to happen or not.

Armstrong's (2021) findings in relation to informal learning and the participants link between this and responding to challenges, is echoed in the literature across various workplace domains, including that of the cooperating teacher. For example, responding to challenges to enhance professional practice has been identified as an informal learning opportunity for police educators (Holmgren and Sjöberg 2022) and for government middle-management employees (Cunningham and Hillier 2013) in different jurisdictions, suggesting that individuals tend to associate how to manage difficult situations with learning on or within the job. This is noteworthy, as Berg Jansson and Engström (2022) found that while the nurses in their study relied on informal learning to guide their practice in response to the pressures of the job, they identified limited access to formal professional development as pushing this reliance on the informal. One might question whether an over-reliance on the informal learning aspects of their work is at play here, and what this might mean for their practice in the longer term. If Eraut's (2004) argument for viewing learning as a continuum of formality is recalled, a debate about whether drawing solely on informal learning in directing and governing one's practice is the best approach for enhancing that practice. Instead, there is the possibility of reinforcing 'inaccurate ways of doing things' (Marsick and Watkins 1990, p.4). Similarly, if Eraut's (2004) ideas about the link between experience and informal learning are considered, the possibility for negative experiences to influence practice is clear, particularly when informal learning and dealing with issues in the workplace appear connected in the literature.

Considering this in light of the findings of White (2019b), Mitchell et al. (2024), and Furlong and Gorman (2025) where cooperating teacher learning and practice was heavily rooted in experience is noteworthy. This idea lends itself to considering the place of informal learning and how it is developed in conjunction with

other people in the workplace. Perhaps this offers possibilities in contextualising one's learning more broadly, while still maintaining the informality of that learning, but not leaving it in isolation within the individual.

2.9.1 Informal Learning and the Interaction with Others

A pointedly absent feature of this discussion on informal learning thus far, has been the social aspects associated with the concept in the literature and the idea of the 'other' in the informal learning experience. Given the prevalence of this aspect of the concept within the literature, it denotes a need to devote a specific segment of this discussion to it. It is worth noting here that the 'other' in this regard does not refer to the external 'other' or expert, mentioned earlier in relation to formal learning, but rather those who are present in the workplace with the individual, or those with whom the informal learning experience is shared. This is a particularly important aspect of this discussion on informal learning. Identifying and dis-identifying with others, with communities and with practices within a landscape is expected when navigating a landscape. Interaction with others can be central to this process.

The involvement and influence of others in the informal learning process is explored through different lenses in the literature. Turner (2006) considers this social domain from the perspective of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory yet also refers to how behaviours are learned informally in the workplace through legitimate peripheral participation and engagement in communities of practice within that workplace, based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical contributions. This theory, which defines a community of practice as 'a set of relations among persons, activity and the world, over time...' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.98), has also been used

elsewhere in the literature to conceptualise the social aspects of informal learning (*inter alia* Murray 2008; Goldman et al. 2009; Evans 2019; Furlong and Gorman 2025). However, interaction with others is not necessarily considered from a theoretical perspective in all papers focused on informal learning, but rather it is embedded within the understanding of informal learning as a concept more generally.

In his research, Eraut (2004, p.266) identifies different types of activities in which informal learning occurs socially, ranging from ‘participation in group activities’ and ‘working alongside others’ to ‘working with clients’. Evidently, there is variation in the level of formality and structure these social relationships have, and their impact on the learning which occurs as a result. For example, it has been found that informal relationships in the workplace can positively affect the informal learning which occurs in these interactions, while more formal and structured relationships can feel contrived and reduce informal learning opportunities (Cunningham and Hillier 2013). Similarly, practice issues have been identified as central to interactions with peers in the workplace, and different issues may warrant interactions with different actors and with varied levels of formality (Holmgren and Sjöberg 2022).

Not only is there learning here for the individual who asks the question, queries their practice or seeks additional information, but Megginson and Whitaker (2007, p.80) suggest that ‘teaching someone else’ about your practice is in itself a form of informal learning for the individual offering advice, in the ‘making explicit’ of their knowledge and understanding. This is a particularly relevant consideration in the discussion herein, as not only is the cooperating teacher engaging in informal learning of their own in conceptualising their role in practice, but they are also increasing that informal learning engagement in explaining their practice to the student teacher with whom they work. The same may be evident in the interaction between one cooperating

teacher and another, through discussing issues of practice and thus allowing for development of their individual practice as cooperating teacher. These ideas are explored further below.

While the social aspects of an individuals' learning can be considered at the level of the individual, they can also be considered at the organisational level, in the influence of the workplace itself and the opportunities offered for engagement with work, learning, or both. Workplaces have the ability to afford different learning opportunities to those who work there depending on what it offered and valued in terms of space, time, and the practices available for engagement in learning in the workplace. This can transform what may be assumed to be an informal setting into a highly structured setting whether knowingly done so or not (Billet 2004). This is important in the informal learning discussion generally, but particularly when it is applied to, and considered in relation to, education, schools and the place of the cooperating teacher.

Murray and Male (2005) refer to the 'professional' and 'organisational' socialisation of teacher educators, and their place in the education system more broadly, but also the challenges in understanding what is expected of them within specific institutional structures. Arguably, such structures could be schools or HEIs. In these instances, interactions with colleagues have been found to support teacher educator knowledge and practice (Ping, Schellings and Beijaard 2018). This has been further refined with specific reference to cooperating teachers, and the ways in which they learn about and execute their role based on the organisational influences at play in their workplace, such as the school setting itself, the values and culture of the school, their colleagues, and their school's leadership (White 2014; Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen 2018; Ó Gallchóir, O'Flaherty and Hinchion 2019; Mahomed and Singh

2022; Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn 2022). This is important to understand as this discussion begins to explore the role of the cooperating teacher more deeply, and specifically, the place of informal learning in the development of an understanding of the role.

In the context of this study, the term informal learning is used to marry many of the considerations discussed thus far. It considers learning that may be incidental in nature, arising as a by-product of engaging in a professional role or work task. But it also includes learning that may be reactive, based on an emerging need or in response to a scenario. It can also sometimes be deliberate, sought out through interaction, discussion and connection with others. This understanding of the concept supports its use in relation to the role of cooperating teacher. In navigating the landscape of practice, cooperating teachers can be understood to engage in many informal encounters in the workplace, in attempts to contextualise their role to that of others in the school. This is particularly pertinent due to the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, as through enacting the role, cooperating teachers develop their understanding of their place within the landscape of school placement and how this is understood in the context of their school. However, it can be argued that the reason this modulation of identity takes place within the workplace in the first instance, is due to the demands placed on cooperating teachers from the policy perspective. There is an expectation that they engage beyond their first-order practice and begin to work at a second-order practice level, as mentioned previously. As such, this becomes a potential key aspect of their navigation of the landscape, in order to understand what this means, and how this manifests at school level and beyond.

2.10 The Cooperating Teacher and First- to Second-Order Practice

Arguably, developing a knowledge of second-order practice and what it means to work with student teachers in this way is a key boundary encounter for cooperating teachers in navigating the landscape of practice. In conceptualising the difference between the role of teacher and the role of teacher educator, Murray (2002) harnesses the terms first-order and second-order practitioner. The use of these terms particularly emphasises the differing skillsets required on the part of the individual in moving from one role to the other. For example, in their first-order practice, the individual is a teacher with knowledge and expertise in teaching and learning, and the nuances of school life. In the second-order practice space, the individual, as teacher educator, must teach about the teaching and learning they practice or practiced in the first-order setting (Murray and Male 2005). This suggests the need for a definite familiarity with and fluency in one's first-order practice, but also the ability to be able to describe the actions undertaken and the decisions behind those actions in the second-order space. When this first-order fluency is not present, it can lead to a 'threat' to one's professional identity (Burn 2007, p.457), which may then hinder one's ability to engage in effective second-order practice and to describe the tacit knowledge which must be made explicit in the second-order space. This highlights the varied skillset required on the part of teacher educators, in being able to move between the first- and second-order practice spaces and articulate their work with confidence in these spaces. This is particularly complex in instances where engaging in the second-order practice space must occur within a first-order practice setting, as is required of cooperating teachers within their classrooms. As such, this second-order practice space is abstract and must be created by the cooperating teacher, as opposed to a physical change of setting to signify moving between first- and second-order practice spaces.

While many of the skills required of teacher educators, and the demands in moving from first-order practice to second-order practice may be evident across a range of individuals defined as teacher educators, the literature suggests further distinctions between teacher educators based in HEIs and those who are based in schools. For example, White (2019a) makes a clear distinction between different categories of teacher educators, and the challenges faced in that regard, particularly in terms of an understanding of the role of school-based teacher educators, and the value placed on them. This is echoed by Parker, Zenkov and Glaser (2021) in their work with cooperating teachers, as the teachers themselves found difficulty in viewing themselves as teacher educators, rather than merely teachers who facilitate practical experiences for student teachers. Their proposed solution to this problem was the formalisation and integration of the cooperating teacher role more fully into ITE, in order to support the necessary skill development of this cohort of teacher educators (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser 2021).

These findings suggest that not only are cooperating teachers expected to have the ability to move between the first and second-order practice spaces in their dual role, but they are also expected to be able to navigate the professional changes that such movement entails in their practice. However, the notion of informality of practice, which, as evident thus far, is at play in many instances of second-order role enactment, is problematic. It raises questions about how such significant role reconceptualisation can be fully understood through an informal lens. It also raises questions of how cooperating teachers identify and dis-identify with the practices of being a teacher and/or teacher educator momentarily and often simultaneously when engaging in school placement.

As highlighted previously, formalised professional learning opportunities may be available to cooperating teachers in certain jurisdictions internationally, depending on the level of formality they possess within a particular education system. Nonetheless, this discussion has also demonstrated a range of literature which documents the self-preparatory practices, and personal or professional experiences, this cohort of school-based teacher educators utilise, to guide their practice. These are examples of informal cooperating teacher learning in practice. One such influence is experience (Garcia and Badia 2023; Kennedy 2024; Mitchell et al. 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025), which as discussed thus far, can shape learning and meaning (Eraut 2004). Past experiences of being a student teacher themselves, and past experiences of working with other student teachers, have been found to shape how the role is perceived, and the skillset utilised by those engaging with the role (Chu 2019; Lunsmann et al. 2019; Furlong and Gorman 2025).

Similarly, engaging with student teachers demands the adoption of differing roles, depending on what the needs of the student teacher are, which in turn demands reflection and self-awareness (Amaral-da-Cunha et al. 2020). As such, it can be argued that if one feels a ‘threat’ to, or a level of uncertainty in, their identity as teacher or cooperating teacher (Burn 2007, p.457), as previously mentioned, they might revert to where they feel most confident in their practice – typically, their first-order practice, suggesting dis-identification with their second-order practice, and identification with their first-order practice. Nielsen, Tindall-Ford and Sheridan (2022) found this to be the case when individual interpretation of the role was evident, where cooperating teachers tended to revert to their first-order practice knowledge as teacher, rather than their second-order practice knowledge as school-based teacher educator, in their interactions with student teachers. This sharply brings into focus the difficulties

associated with the role of cooperating teacher, and the use of informal learning in guiding their practice. When one considers Eraut's (2004) contentions that atypical behaviours or episodes tend to stand out more than typical and expected behaviours, it raises questions about what this might mean when a cooperating teacher has a challenging experience in engaging with their role.

This modulation of identity between first and second-order practice, as evident herein, is complex. But thus far, this discussion has largely focused on the workplace and personal or professional experience as being the key influences on or sources of learning for the cooperating teacher's role. However, within a landscape of practice as political and diverse as that which is navigated by cooperating teachers, other practices and influences may too shape how the role is understood and interpreted at an individual level. In order to theorise about how cooperating teachers use the knowledge and insight gleaned from encounters at peripheries between practices in the landscape, acknowledging the decisions that are made and the piecing together of their learning about the role to support its enactment, is necessary. Conceptualising the cooperating teacher as a bricoleur is a useful approach to take and this is explored in the next section.

2.11 The Cooperating Teacher as Bricoleur

Through the traversing of the landscape of practice, the cooperating teacher is afforded the opportunity to visit different practices and experiences and accordingly, make decisions about how practices overlap to support their understanding of the role. However, this can be considered as more than just a transfer of skills or knowledge from one practice to another, and instead a complex repertoire development through

the piecing together of skills, knowledge and understandings that can support their enactment of their role. They draw from and on a variety of sources, from personal and professional experience to other people and practices both within and outside their own organisation. Therefore, this leads to the possibility that the cooperating teacher can be considered a *bricoleur*.

The conception of teacher as bricoleur and discussion of teaching and/or teacher education as endeavours of bricolage are evident in an array of literature (*inter alia* Hatton 1988, Tice 1989; Hatton 1997; Honan 2004; Hutchinson 2011; Jenlink 2015; Freathy et al. 2017). However, the concept stems from the work of Levi-Strauss (1962), who introduced the idea of bricolage as the innovative combining of available elements to create something new, and the bricoleur as the agent who innovates and creates from what is available (Johnson 2012). Hatton (1988) took Levi-Strauss' concept and theorised the parallels between the work of teachers and the work of the bricoleur. In doing so, she identified six foci, as summarised in table 2, below.

<i>Summary of Hatton's (1988) Teacher as Bricoleur Considerations</i>	
Focus	Summary
Conservativism	Work within constraints, with a tendency to accommodate such constraints rather than transcend them.
Limited Creativity	Although sometimes creative, limited by institutional constraints or a reliance on the concrete.
Repertoire Enlargement	Repertoires typically expanded through practice, experience, observation of others etc., rather than theory and critique of practice.
Teachers' Use of Theory	Tendency to rely on practice and the technical, aiming to identify what works rather than a sharing of craft knowledge derived from theory.
Devious Means	Use of familiar elements to arrive at surprising results, where the connection between the means employed in an action and the intended outcome may not be explicit.
Ad Hocism	Approaches used to achieve particular outcomes, where due to the confines of the structures in which they find themselves, problems may not be resolved but rather, temporarily 'diminish'.

Table 2: Adapted from Hatton's (1988, p.340-342) considerations for 'Teachers Work as Bricolage'.

While Hatton's work above centres on teachers' practice as bricolage, it can be argued that there is much applicability in the above considerations to the work of the cooperating teacher in the Irish context. For example, repertoire enlargement through engagement in practice, and *ad hocism* can be identified in the practice of cooperating teachers in Ireland, given the lack of formalised professional learning for the role, and the notion that cooperating teacher practice is often rooted in experience (Hall et al. 2018; Mitchell et al. 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025). As such, cooperating teachers' access to theory to support their work is questionable, and instead they work within the constraints in which they find themselves, spanning the dual role they possess, as teachers and teacher educators.

Negative connotations might be assumed regarding the work of cooperating teacher as bricoleur, given the language that is used above to consider what bricolage as a cooperating teacher might look like. Yet, Hatton (1988, p.349) makes the explicit point that 'bricolage is not a bad thing *per se*...' Rather, Mateus and Sarkar (2024) suggest that the bricoleur adopts a 'mindset' that is resourceful and refuses to be restricted by the limitations that surround them, and thus tends to adopt this disposition of innovation, creativity and resourcefulness in instances of uncertainty. While there is no universally agreed definition about what a teacher's innovative or creative practice looks like, it tends to encapsulate curiosity, openness to new ideas, developing and adopting these ideas, and reflection (Livingston 2024), extending Levi-Strauss' (1962) notion of combining available elements to create something new, particularly in response to a situation or scenario. This is especially important within the context of this study. This research is located within a practice of informality associated with the role of cooperating teacher. There are clearly defined policy aspirations for those

engaged in the role, as outlined in Chapter One, but these are present without the formal partnerships and supports required to realise such aspirations in practice (Clarke and O'Doherty 2021).

Developing knowledge of working with student teachers by HEI-based teacher educators has been identified as bricolage (Hatton 1997), as although these teacher educators worked with student teachers throughout their programmes of ITE, they demonstrated a limited depth of understanding of core knowledge, skills and concepts required by teacher candidates. Therefore, it is unsurprising that cooperating teachers must work as bricoleurs to draw on the knowledge, resources, experiences and sources of information they have available to them at a given time within their landscapes of practice, as instances arise which require them to enact particular elements of their role at different junctures. Given that there is no dedicated time, formalised professional learning, or structural supports at a policy and system level for cooperating teachers, their conceptualisation as bricoleur acknowledges creativity and innovation in their approach. This is demonstrated through drawing on the knowledge, skills, experiences, tools and influential others they have available and accessible to them, to ensure that they can enact the role when a student teacher enters their classroom and requires contextualised support in that setting.

The cooperating teacher as bricoleur develops an understanding of and engages in their role through the creative bringing together of different aspects of practice, experience and knowledge as they traverse the landscape, to support them at particular points when enacting the role. However, given that this engagement with informal learning occurs within a social context, as outlined in the literature review and key concepts above, the cooperating teacher must navigate the landscape in which this practice occurs and determine what they draw on to support their enactment of the role

at a given juncture. As such, exploring the cooperating teacher as bricoleur through the theoretical lens of this study, contextualises the ways in which cooperating teachers draw on aspects of practice in their work as second-order practitioners and school-based teacher educators.

2.12 Considering the Study's Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

Conceptualising the cooperating teacher as bricoleur navigating a landscape of practice demonstrates the complexity of the role in its truest sense. It considers how they engage in informal workplace learning in the context of their school, attempt to navigate a complex dual role involving first- and second-order practice, and make decisions about how they identify with, dis-identify with, draw from or discard particular practices they encounter. It looks beyond the role envisioned in policy in the Irish context and considers how those enacting the role come to learn about it through their enactment of it. The use of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) landscapes of practice offers a way to theorise about the cooperating teacher as an active individual traversing a political and diverse landscape and visiting practices and experiences to support them in their understanding. Pairing this with Levi-Strauss' (1962) conception of the bricoleur, offers a lens through which to understand cooperating teacher consideration of these practices and experiences that are visited and re-visited. It also allows for exploration of the decisions behind using and combining these experiences with other elements of practice to develop a picture of who they are or should be in their role as cooperating teacher, or discarding those experiences or practices not considered relevant and perhaps more difficult to identify with. Through drawing on informal workplace learning, the place of the school as a

source of influence on cooperating teacher practice, within the wider landscape of practice is acknowledged, as are the other individuals called on in the cooperating teacher's endeavours of bricolage. Drawing on Murray's (2002) work on first- and second-order practice acknowledges why cooperating teachers must undertake this complex work of navigating the landscape, to piece together their understanding of their new, second-order practice role and the potential influence they have when working with student teachers.

In the bringing together of the theoretical and conceptual influences of the study, it also acknowledges the ways in which cooperating teacher learning is represented in the emergent themes in the literature review. As evident, cooperating teachers are informed for their role in school placement through school-based learning, input from external others, and their own self-preparation for the role. The components of the theoretical and conceptual framework align with these themes. For example, practices visited by cooperating teachers within the landscape may include formalised professional learning for similar yet distinct roles, while informal workplace learning acknowledges the school-based preparation for the role evident across jurisdictions based on the literature.

Through framing cooperating teacher learning in this way and using these theoretical and conceptual lenses, it allows for the remainder of the study to consider what informs cooperating teacher practice for their role in school placement. It invites the exploration of context-specific and wider influences to be considered in cooperating teacher practice, as well as how cooperating teachers understand the duality of their role when engaging in school placement. Finally, considering the cooperating teacher in this way affords the opportunity to gain insight into the individual and collective landscapes and practices that cooperating teachers inhabit,

visit and navigate when enacting the role, and how these are interacted with on the level of the individual, to shape and inform their practice for the role, in the absence of formalised professional learning.

2.13 Conclusion

The landscape of cooperating teacher practice is complex. This is clear from the literature review and theoretical discussion undertaken herein. It is evidently peppered with boundaries and peripheries of both compatible and distinct practices, all of which must be considered by the cooperating teacher during their negotiation of the landscape. The places and practices they glance toward, visit, engage with or avoid, and their identification or dis-identification with these places and practices, shape how they understand their role within the landscape and thus, how they enact their role in practice. The decisions that they make throughout their navigation lead to questions of accountability to different practices that they may draw on at a given time. How they negotiate these questions of accountability can then influence how their role is enacted within the phenomenon of school placement. Through drawing on their experiences and informal workplace learning, to help them in their first- to second-order practice work, they act as bricoleurs, innovating and creating as they traverse the landscape, and gathering what they can to support them in their work. This is complex and individualised, depending on the contexts in which cooperating teachers find themselves. Exploring the sources of information and the practices within the landscape, that a selection of cooperating primary teachers in the Irish context use to help them understand and enact their role, is central to this study. How this was achieved is explored further in the following methodology chapter.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations involved in this study. It begins with an exploration of my positionality and then focuses particularly on the philosophical underpinnings of the research project, exploring why it has been designed in the way in which it has. The design and phases of the research are documented, along with an overview of the data analysis strategies employed. Consideration is then given to the ethical aspects of the study, and how these have influenced the study's design and implementation since its conception. By the end of this chapter, it will be clear how the research was conducted, the decisions made throughout this process and the reasons behind these decisions.

3.2 Exploring my Positionality

As a researcher, I am cognisant of the need for an acute awareness of myself, my experiences, and the values which I hold. Accordingly, I am aware of their impact on the types of research in which I engage, as well as the ways in which I engage with these types of research. My journey as a student teacher, a teacher, a middle-leader, a school-based teacher educator and a teacher educator in the teacher professional learning sphere, have all contributed to my understanding of knowledge, my values towards learning and my perception of the importance of research in the field of education. This interplay between knowledge, values and research is something I navigate daily in my current role as an advisor with a Department of Education support service for teachers. I work with others in the many different roles and spheres I occupy, and have occupied, professionally and this awareness of the 'other' and the value I place on the 'other' within my work, is something I had to interrogate while

embarking on this research. I also understand that as a person, I am socially driven and motivated, enjoying any opportunity to interact with, learn from and learn with others.

Discussing and reflecting on my experiences and my values, and critiquing my assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, learning and their purposes, has not been without its challenges. However, it has prompted me to realise that I have a deep belief in the idea that people learn in interaction with one another, whether this is done knowingly or unknowingly. I mean this in the truest sense of the word *interaction*, rather than the sometimes-contrived learning activities that can be visible within our education system. Such activities may appear as interactive, collaborative or educational, where people are assumed to be learning from one another, yet whether this happens in reality is less certain. Instead, I refer to the activities in which one engages on a daily basis which causes them to think about things differently. This stems from my experience in the workplace, where I have often gleaned new information from those fleeting conversations with colleagues, and conversely, often departed ‘collaborative’ professional learning sessions with a more blurred understanding than with which I began. This has brought me to a realisation about how I perceive knowledge to be generated, how this knowledge might then be explored and how in turn it can be represented in an authentic way.

Locating these understandings within the literature and the philosophical perspectives evident in the field supported the gradual development of the study. However, revelation of this positionality also required me to carefully monitor if, when and how these understandings impacted or limited the ways in which the research was conducted, and accordingly develop strategies to support this monitoring of these potential impacts or limitations. This will be explored further below.

3.2.1 Orientating towards a Philosophical Perspective

When considering the philosophical perspectives relevant to a research study, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend the careful consideration of one's own 'orientation' towards 'the nature of reality, the purpose of...research, and the type of knowledge to be produced...' and then asking the questions: 'which orientation is the best fit for your views?' and 'which is the best fit for answering the question' posed? (p.14). These key questions proved pivotal in supporting the alignment of my values as researcher, highlighted above, the formulation of the research question, and the design and implementation of the study documented herein. Because of these prompt questions, in this study I have aligned myself and my research with the interpretivist research paradigm most authentically. This has underpinned how the study has been conceptualised. While I am aware that I arrived at this paradigmatic stance based on the interplay between my own views and the orientation's fit for the question posed, I also acknowledge the potential of pragmatism to explore further questions on this topic in future research studies, to provide alternative perspectives.

However, if one considers the theoretical foundations of this study, as detailed in Chapter Two, and the social and experiential nature of learning, professional development, and professional experience, for me, there is no other way to understand and explore such experience and learning without exploring it within the context in which it occurs and how this is conceptualised by those who engage in the process. The focus of the study, as evident thus far, is about giving voice to those teachers who engage in this work-based, on-the-job learning and allowing them the opportunity to document and discuss this. Given that interpretivism is premised on the idea of exploring subjective, socially constructed experiences and interpretations (Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Creswell and Poth 2018; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018), it

aligns with the positionality sentiments above, but also with what the research question aims to achieve.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.21) noted the ‘significance of the interplay’ between one’s assumptions which underpin a research endeavour, thus suggesting an explicit need for awareness of these ontological and epistemological assumptions, which then influence the methodological considerations which subsequently occur. They too posit that these assumptions affect one another in the process of researching and ultimately have implications for the ways in which a study is designed and how data are collected (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). This was to the fore in considering how my positionality and understanding of knowledge and its value within teacher education, as documented above, would have consequences for the ways in which the study would be conducted. I became acutely aware of the potential tension between my thinking, my understanding and the contrasting perspectives of others, particularly the potential perspectives of individual cases enacting the role of cooperating teacher, causing me to think and rethink my paradigmatic assumptions in order to authentically interpret their experiences of preparing for and learning in their role.

Identifying and challenging such assumptions required extensive individual reflection and reflective conversations with colleagues and my supervisors. Some of those assumptions that truly challenged my thinking included the notion that all teachers want to learn, that all teachers want to support their colleagues and that all teachers inherently want to do good. These are things that are often taken for granted in my thinking, my research and my professional work, because these are things that I value and identify with in my own professional learning and professional interactions. I had to challenge these assumptions through reflection and looked at these from multiple perspectives, to identify times when I had encountered instances

where a teacher did not want to learn, did not want to support a colleague or even did not seem to want to do good. This was complex, but it was essential in ensuring that I was acutely aware of my assumptions, in order to be able to see instances in the data if, or where, contrasting opinions, perspectives or beliefs were discussed or alluded to within or across cases. This led to considerable reflection on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion that axiology should also be included in this consideration of interplay between assumptions, a proposition echoed by Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2018), who refer to axiology as '...the values and beliefs that we hold' (p.3). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) expand on this, noting that axiology involves the consideration of ethics within research, and awareness of where one places value within their research and how this influences the ways in which the research is subsequently conducted. It is arguably for these reasons that Creswell and Poth (2018) refer to the 'value-laden' nature of qualitative research, a key characteristic which differentiates this type of research endeavour to others. The interplay of these assumptions and influences can be summarised as shown below.

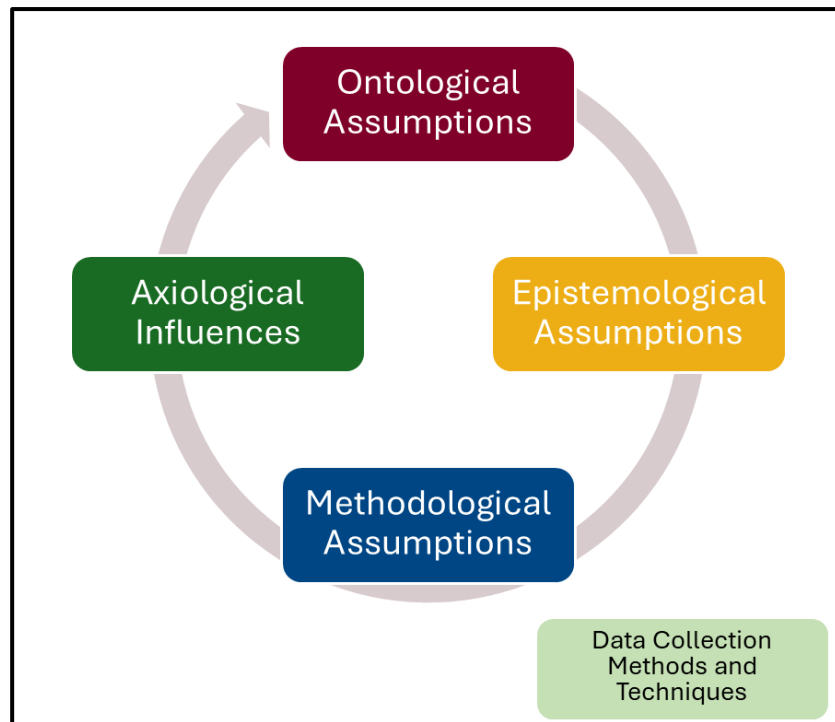


Figure 3.1: *Elements of philosophical perspectives of research, derived from Lincoln and Guba (1985), Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) and Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2018).*

In uncovering my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions and critiquing my positioning within the interpretivist paradigm, it was inevitable that a methodology aligned with the interpretivist foundations of the study would be harnessed. After considering and engaging with a variety of methodologies, I determined that use of case study, and more specifically, qualitative multi-case study, would afford the opportunity to explore the research question and research aims authentically within the paradigm, while staying loyal to the values which underpin my engagement with the study, and which have been so central to the study's development. I also determined that qualitative case study would afford me the opportunity to enact my responsibilities as researcher to authentically interpret each case within the broader study and build a picture of how each cooperating teacher learns for their enactment of their role within school placement and locate this within

the broader exploratory case study as a whole. This is explored further in the research design below.

3.3 Research Question and Research Aims

The above considerations and the review of the literature have led to the development of the research question and subsequent research aims.

The central research question is:

- In the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, what informs primary teachers' practice for their role as cooperating teacher in the school placement process in Ireland?

The key aims and objectives of the study were:

- To explore the sources of information and learning which cooperating primary teachers draw on in their discussion and enactment of the role.
- To uncover how cooperating teachers discuss the movement from class teacher to cooperating teacher when working with student teachers and the skills required in this change of role.
- To explore how these sources of learning, discussions with others, and/or engagements with others, inform their conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher.

3.4 Research Design

In considering the research question, and the interpretivist paradigm within which the research is located, it was clear that uncovering participant perspective, the influences on their practice and whether they worked as bricoleurs in their work as cooperating teachers, in navigating the landscape of practice, was essential. The study ultimately sought to explore and understand what sources cooperating teachers drew from to learn about, inform and influence their practice and role as cooperating teacher in the first instance. However, it was also decided to explore those sources and influences in greater depth, to build a broader picture of each cooperating teachers' context-specific experiences and learning for the role. As such, a qualitative, exploratory case study was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach (Schwandt and Gates 2018; Yin 2018). This was decided after careful appraisal for a number of reasons.

Firstly, case study is considered a particularly suitable methodology in instances when the phenomenon and context are considered inseparable (Yin 2014; Yin 2018), in this case, the role of the cooperating teacher, their learning for this role and the context in which this learning takes place. This is pertinent here, given the way in which the study conceptualises the role of the cooperating teacher in Ireland currently, as one which is depicted as formal from the policy perspective, but informal in the practice domain. Such informality implies the occurrence of informal workplace learning as the cooperating teacher acts as bricoleur in supporting their first- to second-order practice work, through the enactment of the role within the current system, given the lack of formalised supports. This specific, nuanced and informal learning, which is required by cooperating teachers, is inseparable from the landscape in which it occurs, namely the contexts and lenses applied by the cooperating teacher, such as

their background, their experiences, their school environment, their professional experiences outside of the classroom and so on. As such, framing each individual participant as an individual case was essential in this instance.

Secondly, case study offers the opportunity to explore the phenomenon under study from the perspective of different cases. This multi-case approach allows for ‘cross-case’ analysis and offers broader insight into the phenomenon under exploration (Yin 2009; Thomas and Myers 2015). This was particularly applicable to the study herein, as each cooperating teacher was conceptualised as an individual case within the broader study, where their learning for and understanding of the role was self-reported and considered at the individual level initially. It was then considered in terms of the broader influences on their practice. Finally, it was once again explored at the individual level, to gain insight into the phenomenon of the role and preparation for the role within the Irish context. This design is depicted in Figure 3.2 below, and was implemented with each case, resulting in a range of data sources. Cross-case analysis was then conducted across the cases to understand cooperating teacher role conceptualisations and learning for the role more deeply. This is expanded upon further in the data analysis section below.

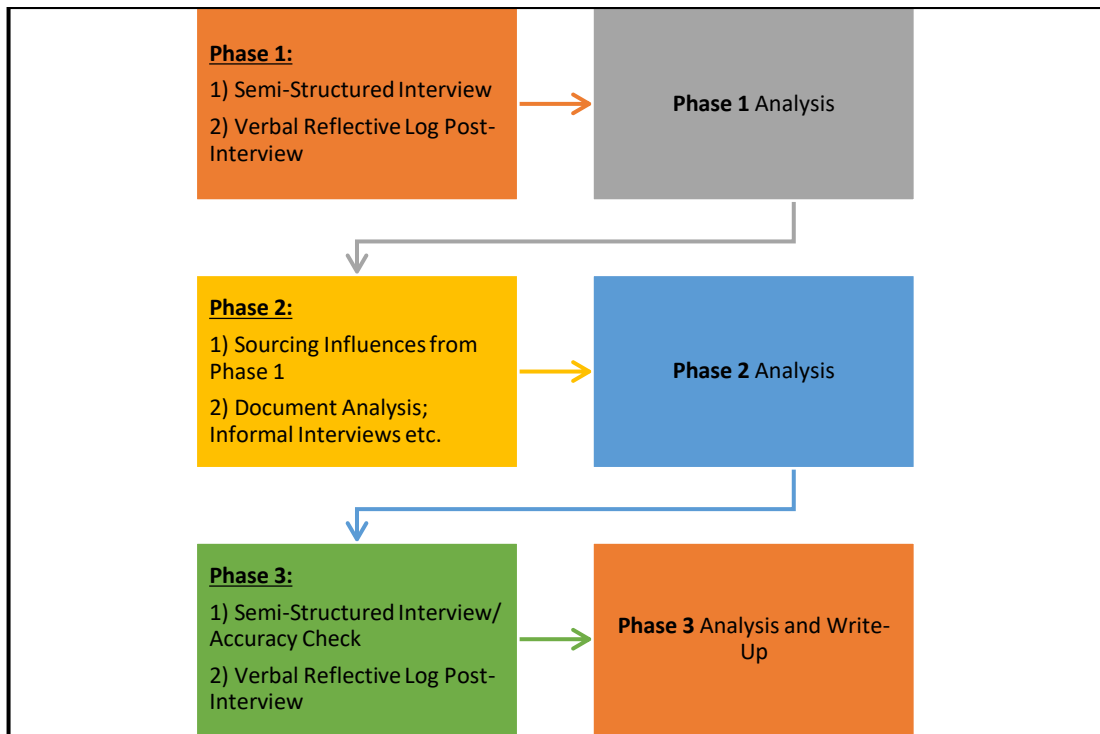


Figure 3.2: *Research Design and Data Collection Overview, as implemented with each case.*

While much of the data was self-reported in nature, particularly during Phases One and Three of data collection, additional data sources were considered during Phase Two, to complement interview data. The sources of influence or learning as reported by the participants during their initial interview, were gathered, explored and analysed where possible. In some cases, this included a brief discussion with a person considered to have influenced the participant in their practice as cooperating teacher, a context-specific policy, a handbook, or a module descriptor and so on, thus allowing exploration of the sources which participants had referred to within their initial interview and interpretation of the ways in which those sources were used by participants. The way in which the design was developed to answer each of the research aims is also depicted below, in Figure 3.3, emphasising the importance of the phased approach within the design.

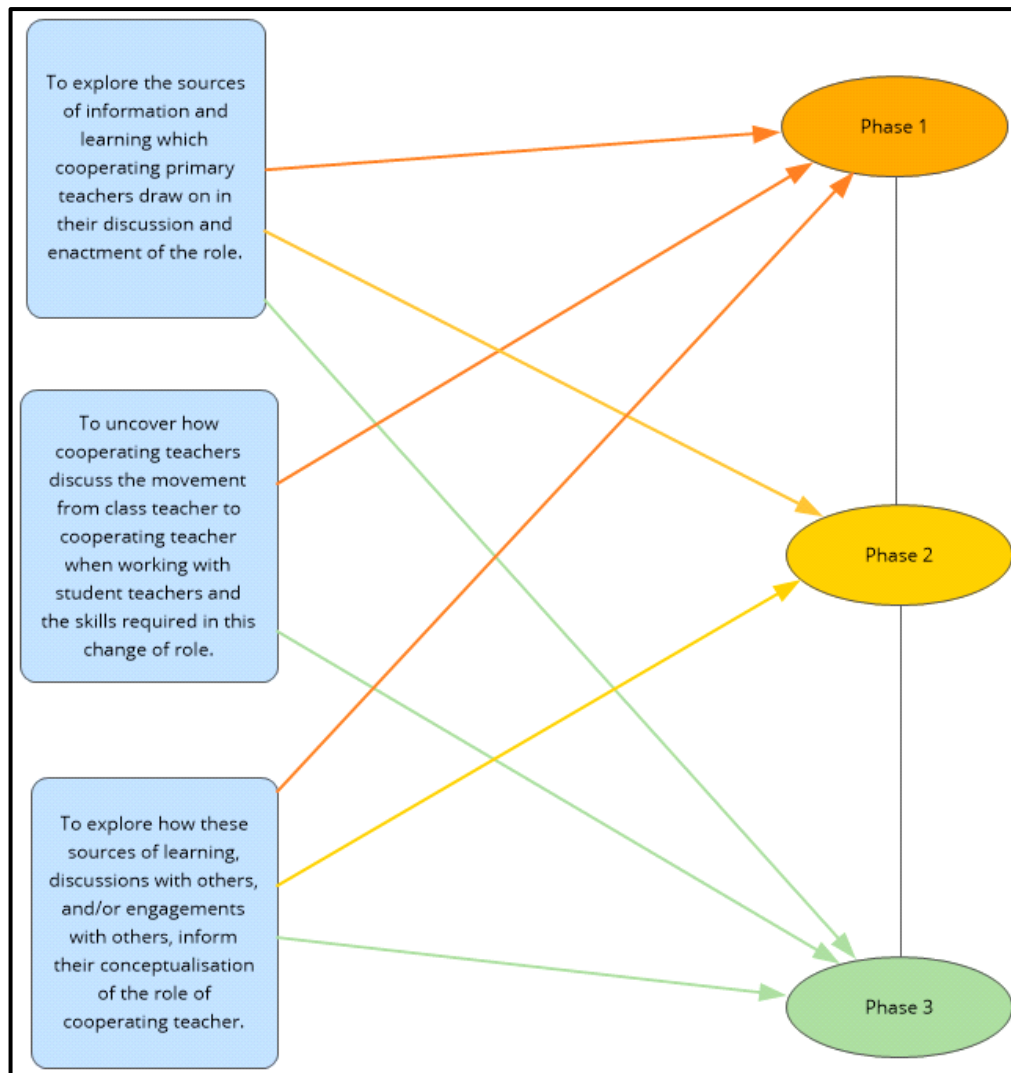


Figure 3.3: *Visual representation of how the research aims informed the research design, and how the design subsequently aimed to explore each of these aims.*

The study employed theoretical replication (Yin 2018), which is explored in detail in section 3.5 below, meaning each participant was a cooperating teacher enacting the role in the Irish system, however, the contexts, settings, and years of service in the role inevitably varied from one case to the next. Due to this variability, and in order for participants to engage with each phase of the study in an accessible way, they were invited to choose the location for their interview to take place. An

option was given between an Education Centre² close to the participant's home or place of work, from the Education Support Centres of Ireland network, or online via Maynooth University's Microsoft Teams platform. This varied from participant to participant, with all six choosing face-to-face interviews for their initial interviews, and two of the six opting for their follow-up interviews to be conducted online via Microsoft Teams. As indicated in Figure 3.2, the study employed the above three-phase approach, with opportunities for participant reflection throughout, in order to glean information about each case based on the research question and aims of the study. The rationale for case selection is explored in the next section.

3.5 Theoretical Replication

The research question clearly identifies a specific population from which the sample had to be drawn in order to effectively engage in the research. With this in mind, the study required a purposive sample (Teddlie and Yu 2007) of cooperating primary teachers. However, while there is evidence that the term sample has been used in the research literature in relation to case selection in multi-case studies (Merriam 1998; Gering 2017; Creswell and Poth 2018), case study researchers urge for emphasising replication logic as governing case selection, rather than terminology associated with sample, which tends to be used more frequently in other research methodologies (Stake 1995; Yin 2009; Yin 2012; Yin 2018). Therefore, the term replication logic is used throughout this thesis to signal why cases were chosen for

² Education Centres are a network of centres across Ireland defined as 'a place in which services are provided for schools, teachers, parents, boards and other relevant persons which support them in carrying out their functions in respect of the provision of education which is recognised for that purpose by the Minister...' (Education Act 1998).

inclusion based on specific inclusion criteria, and to explain why there are commonalities and differences between the cases.

In order to ensure that participants were experienced in working as both a primary teacher and as a cooperating teacher, general inclusion and selection criteria were required (Braun and Clarke 2013; Merriam and Tisdell 2016). For example, it was required that: 1) participants had worked as a primary teacher for at least five years and, 2) participants had worked as a cooperating teacher at least once within the last two academic years. The intention behind employing such criteria was two-fold. It aimed to ensure that participants had experience as a classroom teacher firstly, which could be drawn upon in their interactions with the student teachers with whom they worked. Secondly, it ensured they had up-to-date experiences of working as a cooperating teacher, which they could subsequently refer to when exploring the duality of the role of class teacher and cooperating teacher and the fleeting movement between both roles (White 2014) when working with student teachers. All participants met both of these general criteria, and the minimum number of years of teaching experience amongst the cooperating teachers was eight.

Given that this study subscribed to Yin's (2018) notion of theoretical replication within case study research, further specific criteria were also employed in addition to the above general requirements for participation. These criteria stemmed from the theoretical frame guiding the study and the concept of informal workplace learning and the cooperating teachers' work as bricoleur in the absence of formalised professional learning for the role. A summary of the categories for participation is provided in Figure 3.4 below. Their prescriptive nature aimed to enable exploration of the role of cooperating teacher and the learning associated with the role from various perspectives and provided clear, bounded criteria for inclusion in the study.

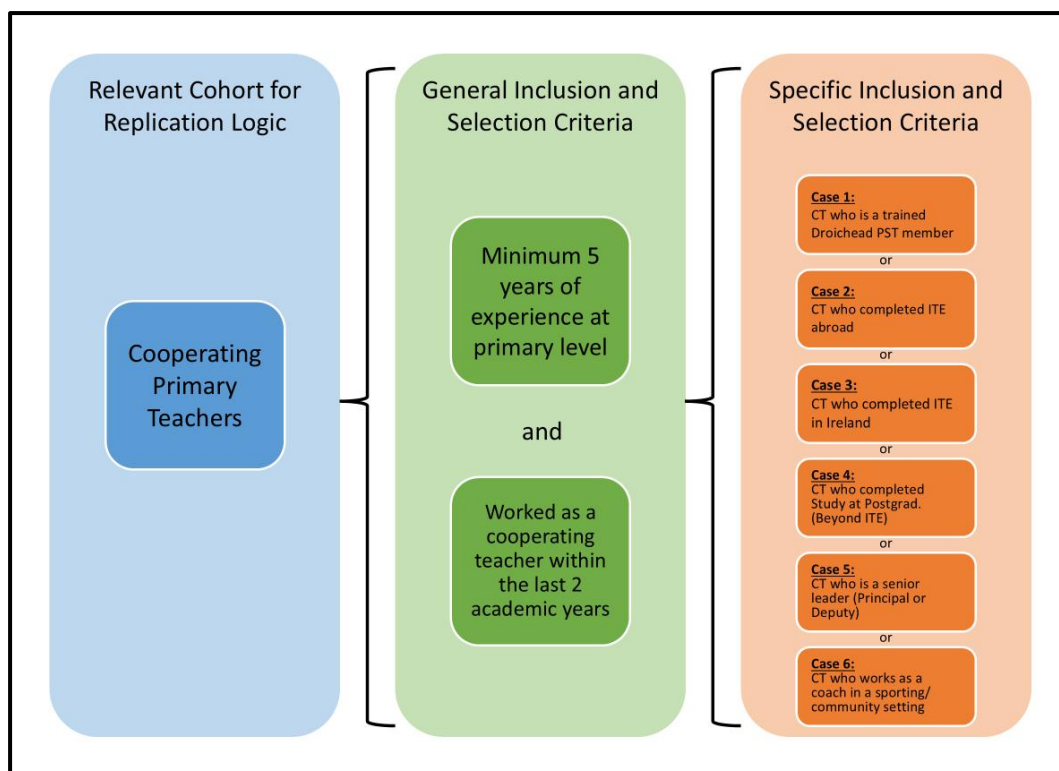


Figure 3.4: *Theoretical Replication Logic for case participant identification.*

The specific inclusion criteria were derived from the theoretical framing of the study, the literature and policy explored, and the possible sources of information, practices or influence that cooperating teachers were hypothesised to draw on in their endeavours as bricoleur, navigating that landscape of practice. These were used as inclusion criteria in the first instance. However, when it came to analysis of the data, these categories of participation were also considered in terms of whether or how they influenced the learning and work of the cooperating teacher in each case.

While the literature suggests that there is no clear or definitive sample size in qualitative research generally (Braun and Clarke 2013; O'Reilly and Parker 2013; Boddy 2016; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018; Yin 2018), given the qualitative nature of the study, it was determined that six cooperating primary teachers would participate. This was decided to allow for in-depth exploration of the nuances of each case as well as the potential volume of data generated for each of the cases listed

above, through the three phases of the research design. To identify the six participants, recruitment flyers were posted to a random selection of 100 primary schools from the Department of Education's database. This was supplemented with circulation of the recruitment flyer on X (formerly Twitter). Nine teachers expressed an initial interest in participating, following the call for participants. To ensure that each of the categories were represented, potential participants were asked to identify the category or categories that they represented after they expressed their initial interest. At this point, four of the potential participants declined engaging in the next step or withdrew their interest. The remaining five potential participants met the criteria for multiple categories, so this offered the opportunity to ensure representation of most categories as required. All five agreed to become the study's participants. For the category of cooperating teacher who was also a senior leader in their school, the participating teacher contacted me slightly later than the other participants, to note a recruitment flyer has been shared with them directly by someone known to them. At that point, they sought further information and clarity about the study. They subsequently agreed to participate.

Expanding on the rationale for the number of participants, the use of six cases also ensured that a level of individuality and 'idiographic' insight was maintained, where the voice of the individual was evident within and throughout the research (Robinson 2014, p.29). Given that the methodology employed understands each participant as an individual case, this number of cases seemed effective in order to gain insight into the questions posed, while maintaining the individualised nature of the participants' input. This number also allowed for more nuanced exploration of the additional, supplementary data sources accessed in Phase Two of the study, documented below, to develop a broader picture of each individual case.

In considering the potential attrition of participants after they had been recruited, it was decided that should a participant withdraw prior to or during Phase One of data collection, a call for participants would be repeated on social media using the same strategy as that used for the initial call for participants. If a participant were to withdraw from the study after this point, it was decided that the study would continue without representation in that category. While this may have resulted in somewhat more limited findings, it was ultimately decided the idiographic insights gleaned from the other cases would have ensured that the study continued to provide insight into cooperating primary teacher learning for their role in school placement. This attrition did not occur, and the six participants who agreed to participate, continued through the three phases of the study beyond the point of participant withdrawal, as communicated to them in the information provided prior to the study.

3.5.1 Secondary, Peripheral Participants

As outlined above, the six central participants in the study were the six cases, the cooperating primary school teachers. However, given the nature of the study as an exploratory case study, it was determined that additional, secondary participants would be recruited as required, given that there is convergence in the literature that case studies should draw on multiple sources of information (Flick 2009; Yazan 2015; Ridder 2017). The six cases were invited to nominate up to two other individuals who they deemed to be influential in their practice as cooperating teacher, if they mentioned interacting with others in the course of their initial interview. These are referred to as the ‘influential others’, a term used to describe their influence on the central participants, and how the cooperating teachers draw on their interactions with these individuals to support their learning for and engagement in their role. Up to two

secondary participants could be nominated by each of the cases if desired, leading to a maximum of twelve additional, secondary participants. Each case was provided with contact information to give to anyone they felt they would like to participate as an influential other within their case. In total, two of the six cases included a brief interview with an influential other, while the other cases did not have an influential other involved in their data collection.

Given that the rationale behind the design has now been explored, it is pertinent to consider the data collection methods which were utilised in order to achieve the design outlined in Figure 3.2 and which responded to the research question and aims, as outlined in Figure 3.3 above. This is explored in the following section.

3.6 Data Collection

Having documented the number of cases and participants involved in the study heretofore and emphasising the ‘uniqueness’ and the ‘idiographic’ aspects of the study (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018, p. 223), a selection of qualitative data collection methods were employed to explore the research question and research aims, focusing on cooperating teachers’ sources of learning for their role. As evident from the research design (Figure 3.2), different techniques were utilised at different stages of the process, to enable participant voice, and allow exploration of the sources referenced, in various ways throughout the study. This was done with the intention of gradually building the case around each participant. The selection of these techniques was carefully appraised, cognisant of three overarching considerations: the methodological literature on case study research; the philosophical orientation identified for the research; and finally, the conceptual literature on informal workplace learning and first- to second-

order practice. The selected strategies were used to realise and complement each of these aspects. These techniques are introduced and explained below.

3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The research literature suggests that interviews can be used as a data collection technique along a continuum ranging from the closed, formal interview to the informal, conversational interview (Kvale 2007; Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Brinkmann and Kvale 2018; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018). For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews were piloted as a data collection strategy and subsequently used at various points within the research phases.

3.6.1.1 Interview Piloting Phase

Piloting is considered an essential step in the development of effective interview protocols. Gillham (2000) considers this opportunity to practice an interview as essential to hone one's interviewing skills. This is echoed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) who suggest that such practice allows for the refinement of skill, but also the opportunity to practice making judgements during the interview, responding to context-specific anomalies and so on. While it was used for these reasons within this study, the pilot interviews also served other purposes. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlighted an alternative need for practising the interview in terms of ensuring the technology used was effective in recording the interview data. This was important here, given the variability in where participant's chose to engage in their interview(s), with some opting for face-to-face engagement and others opting for virtual interviews. As a result, ensuring adaptability of the recording device and clarity in recording

regardless of which setting the case participants opted for, was essential during the piloting phase.

Another alternative consideration of the pilot phase was for the purpose of ascertaining how the interview process and the questions posed were perceived by the pilot participants, given that being interviewed can prompt different reactions for different individuals (Dempsey et al. 2016; King, Horrocks and Brooks 2019; Toft, Lindberg and Hörberg 2021). As such, two pilots took place, one in person and one virtually, with two experienced cooperating teachers known to me. Augmenting this, I also piloted the interview on myself, to consider how the questions impacted on me and to evaluate my own reaction to each question. This was audio-recorded, and I took notes throughout this self-pilot to reflect on when I listened back to the recording subsequently. This supported me in developing strategies for how I would monitor my reactions should case participants discuss or omit certain aspects of their work or experience which I may have considered significant or conversely may not have considered at all prior to the interview. The final consideration on the value of the piloting phase was regarding the technical aspects of conducting the interview, including question clarity, timing, sequence and so on, all of which are considered important elements of an effective interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya 2016).

Following the pilot interviews with the pilot participants, we engaged in a robust discussion about the terminology used, questions asked, the topics explored, the sequence of the interview and the technological aspects of interviewing via Microsoft Teams (where applicable). As a result, minor changes were made to question sequence within the protocol, as well as the decision to allow adequate think-time to for participants and the inclusion of pauses during the interview to increase opportunities for participants to expand answers and verbalise thoughts. While none

of the pilot data were included in the final study, the piloting process proved useful in the subsequent data collection phases.

3.6.1.2 Conducting the Interviews

In the first instance, semi-structured interviews were utilised in Phase One of the study to glean insight into the ways in which case participants identified how they informed themselves about their role, and how they understood and discussed what they did as cooperating teachers. The interview guide (Appendix C) comprised general prompt questions and discussion topics, stemming from the research questions and aims guiding the study. These were provided to participants in advance of the initial interview to allow time for them to consider their responses and with the aim of increasing their confidence and level of comfort to engage with me during the interview. The questions and prompts utilised conversational language for the most-part, rather than the theoretical or conceptual language which comprised the research question and aims, in line with Kvale's (2007) recommendation, to encourage rich descriptions about practice and experience by the cases. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed, with key aspects of the interview and sources of or influence on their learning being identified and analysed in Phase Two of the study. A more comprehensive discussion of this data analysis strategy is included below in section 3.9.

During Phase Two of the study, a more informal, conversational interview took place with some of the 'influential others' identified by participants as influencing their practice as a cooperating teacher. Although most cases referred to 'influential others' in the initial interviews and were provided with contact information and

information relating to the study to share with those mentioned, only two of the six cases involved an ‘influential other’ in the data collection. To ensure that the focus of the discussion remained specifically on the suggested influence these participants had on the practice of the cooperating teachers who nominated them to engage in the research during the Phase One interviews, a prompt-style interview schedule was created. This was similar in design to the protocol that was developed for the initial interviews. However, for the two secondary interviews conducted, the prompts used were slightly different in each instance to ensure that these secondary interviews aligned with what was spoken about during the initial interviews with the associated cooperating teacher (samples, Appendices C and D). These too were audio-recorded for purposes of transcription and analysis.

Like in Phase One, a similar discussion-style, semi-structured interview was used for Phase Three of the study, where the six cases were re-engaged. This second interview focused on the data collected in Phases One and Two and encouraged participants to consider which sources of information and learning were more or less influential in their practice than other sources they had identified. This is discussed further in subsequent chapters.

3.6.2 Verbal Reflective Log

The six cases were invited to contribute to an optional reflective log at different stages throughout the study. The purpose of the reflective log in this instance, was to support participants as they moved between phases of the study, and to provide them with a space to document their thinking, learning or ideas outside of researcher-

participant interactions. Participants engaged with this reflective log at different intervals and to different extents, in a manner which suited them best. The six cases received prompts to support this engagement (Appendix E), which were discussed with them following their initial interview and subsequently emailed to them. Cognisant of the importance of respecting participants' time and the guiding foundational concepts of informal workplace learning and reflection in the move from first- to second-order practice, the reflective log was designed to be as time efficient as possible. Because of this, a verbal reflective log was proposed to participants, where they had the opportunity to self-audio-record their responses to reflective prompts provided between the phases of the study, and forward these to a secure Maynooth University email account, where they could be accessed and stored. They were also provided with an individualised, secure link where they could upload these recordings directly to a personal, secure OneDrive folder if they so preferred, with this folder only being accessible to the participant and the researcher. This idea of using 'voice notes' or audio reflections is a developing trend in data collection, particularly in the Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 eras (Hall, Gaved and Sargent 2021; Mavandu-Mudzusi et al 2022), which also aligns with the informal learning and reflective conceptual underpinnings of the study. As an alternative, participants were also given the opportunity to engage with the optional reflective activity in writing, if they preferred to do so. In total, two of the six cases opted to include responses to the reflective log as data source within those cases.

3.6.3 Documentary Analysis

While the term documentary analysis is used in a variety of qualitative methodologies, including studies aiming to understand historical perspectives (Cohen,

Mannion and Morrison 2018), in the context of this study, the term is used to describe the sourcing and analysis of documentary sources mentioned by participants as influencing their practice directly or indirectly, or being drawn upon in their work as cooperating teacher to support their engagement with the role. Examples here included policy documents, module descriptors of relevant courses with which participants had engaged and so on. These were analysed not only to ascertain how or why they may have been influential, but also in order to complement the self-reported considerations the participants discussed in their initial interview. With that said, the literature refers to documentation as being supportive in building up the case (Merriam 1998; Yin 2014). This was important here in considering the sources being used by cooperating teachers in their work as bricoleurs and how or if these were used to support their enactment of the role and their movement between first- and second-order practice.

3.7 Limitations

Although efforts were made to reduce the number of limitations related to this research, acknowledgement of some of the remaining limitations is important. Firstly, given the nature of the study as an exploratory case study, it is not generalisable to the broader population, although this was not the intention of this research. Additionally, the six cases self-selected to participate in the study, and each within specific categories of participation. As such, while the study provides extensive insight into the learning and preparation of the six cases, there are undoubtedly many cooperating teachers who use an array of skillsets from other practices in their work as cooperating teacher. Furthermore, there are likely many cooperating teachers who opted not to participate and self-excluded due to confidence, self-perceptions about their role or their work and so on. Therefore, the study is limited to those who were willing to

engage and share their experiences, and those who had an interest in the topic during the call for participants.

While the study aimed to ensure that the participants had agency and decision-making capacity over the data sources gathered during Phase Two of data collection, this resulted in access to the influential others being limited. Further engagement with influential others referred to by the participants could have enriched the study and provided additional insight into how the cases drew on knowledge of others in their enactment of the role. Despite these limitations, the study offers insight into cooperating primary teacher learning and preparation for their role within school placement in the absence of formalised professional learning. This is a valuable contribution to the field.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As with all research endeavours, the ethical dimensions of this research study have been of paramount importance from the formulation and design stage of the research, through to compilation of findings and completion of this thesis. The study required a significant number of ethical considerations throughout each stage of the research and accordingly, ethics was considered from a number of perspectives. In an attempt to document the array of ethical considerations, Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) terms 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics-in-practice' are used as the lenses through which this discussion is structured.

3.8.1 Procedural Ethics

When considering procedural ethics, this discussion focuses on the clear procedures required of research endeavours, and in this particular instance, those actions required by the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee and the British Educational Research Association (BERA), from which the Maynooth University Department of Education draw their ethical orientation. This notion of procedural ethics is based on the necessity of formal codes, standards and guidelines which guide a research endeavour (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Carter et al. 2017; BERA 2018). With that in mind, the initial stage of the research required submission of an ethics application review form, which demanded careful consideration of the procedures in place throughout the research process to protect the participants and the researcher alike. This was approved by the University's Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee prior to the recruitment of participants and the data collection stage.

In the drafting of the ethical review form, a number of clearly defined steps were required. For example, consideration was given to how participants would be recruited in an unbiased manner, and how they would subsequently receive more information about the study. To achieve this, and as mentioned previously, a recruitment flyer (Appendix F) was circulated on social media (X, formerly Twitter) and posted to a random selection of 100 primary schools across Ireland, based on available Government Department of Education data. Participants self-nominated to engage in the research by emailing their interest to participate, along with identifying the category or categories under which they would like to participate. As discussed above, some participants identified multiple categories of participation. Identification of the final participants derived from a first-come, first-serve basis regarding emails received for each of the categories, ensuring that participants were happy to proceed

within the category they were aligned to. In instances where participants identified multiple categories of participation, they were asked to engage in one specific category as per the theoretical replication category criteria above.

Clear procedures were developed around ensuring potential participants received adequate information about the study prior to fully agreeing to participate, in line with best practice for informed consent (BERA 2018). Accordingly, information sheets were provided to potential participants in hardcopy and digital format (Appendices G and H) and subsequently, where participants agreed to take part in the research, consent forms were signed (Appendices I and J). Sixtensson (2021) argues that merely having written consent is not enough however, and that one should strive to read a participant's disposition when being informed about the study, to ensure that participants do not seem pressured into giving informed consent. This is considered more in the 'ethics-in-practice' section below from a power perspective. However, from a procedural perspective, it was determined that revisiting the information sheet and consent form, as well as emphasising the participants' right to withdraw from the study prior to beginning the initial interview would be an important step in the process of ensuring informed consent.

Other key procedural ethics considerations included the gathering, management and storage of data. This resulted in clear procedures around data management. For example, interview data were gathered using a Dictaphone and subsequently transcribed, with both audio recordings and transcriptions being stored securely on the Maynooth University server. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality for participants, data were anonymised irreversibly one month after each participant's final interview and only excerpted data were used throughout the findings section of the thesis, limiting the possibility of identifiers in the final write-up. Data storage is in

line with Maynooth University's data retention policy and will be destroyed accordingly. These considerations required extensive engagement in risk assessment to maintain focus on the participants as central to the study and assure that data were handled ethically and respectfully. Consequently, these procedures ensure that the processes surrounding the study have been transparent and targeted at reducing any possible harm to participants.

3.8.2 Ethics-in-Practice

Ethics-in-practice are considered the 'day-to-day issues' that occur throughout the research process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p. 264), which require one to consider how they will respond and how the decisions they make may impact on the study. There were a number of necessary considerations here. Firstly, there was the need to identify areas of ethical ambiguity regarding the study, in order to be able to name them, and subsequently address them. Utilising the expertise of the research supervisors, experienced researchers in the field, was central to supporting this throughout the study. For example, careful consideration of the insider-outsider researcher disposition was important within this study. Lucas, Fleming and Bhosale (2018) note that being an insider is frequently used to access sites and cases in case study research, which was important to understand here in terms of my role as teacher, cooperating teacher and researcher and how I located and positioned myself within this practice-research space. However, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that being an insider brings with it a level of 'acceptance' from participants and allows for greater depth of study into the topic (p.58). Yet, this brought with it ethical responsibility for the pressure or expectation participants could have felt towards having to engage in the study with a fellow cooperating teacher, as well as how that

acceptance or trust had to be respected and maintained with participants during and after the study. Toy-Cronin (2018), although critical of the usefulness of the terms insider and outsider research, considers this as the conflict between the dual role as professional and researcher and the challenges one might face in such research in practice. Again, the research supervisors played a key role here, in supporting criticality and awareness of this dual role and the possibility for ambiguity between the boundaries of these roles, which prompted regular reflection.

Another important aspect within the situational ethics dimension of the study was the awareness of possible power dynamics or perceived power dynamics (Brooks, de Riele and Maguire 2015). From an ethical standpoint, it is essential that participants know and understand that they have power within the research study (Iphofen and Tolich 2018). While aspects of the procedural ethics above, such as the right to withdraw, strived for this clarity around power relations, other situational considerations were necessary. For instance, a potential power imbalance may have arisen between my role as doctoral candidate and participants' role as teacher, and the knowledge that may be assumed in that regard. Reassurance of valid participant experience was built into the interview protocol and my role as researcher was explained in the information sheet and reiterated at the beginning of the interview. The role of the study was not to inspect or evaluate participant experience in any way, but rather glean insight into this experience, and this was made clear to participants.

A second consideration which arose was the possible power at play where participants were aware of my professional role as an advisor with a Department of Education support service for teachers. Again, this had the potential for assumed power imbalance by participants. To try and alleviate this, once again my role as a doctoral researcher for the purposes of this research study, was explained to

participants in the information sheet and at the beginning of the interview. This was to demonstrate that our interactions in this regard were again to solely gain insight into their experience as a cooperating teacher within my doctoral study, which was independent of my professional role within the support services. Reiterating this, only my Maynooth University contact details were given to participants in the course of our interactions and my professional contact details were not shared or used. This aimed to ensure that participants were comfortable to be open in their communications and discussions with me.

To try and address power in other ways, provision of choice for potential participants and actual participants was built into the study's design in various ways. This was illustrated through choice to participate or not in the study and choice in the location of interviews should they wish to participate. Participants also had opportunities to engage in reflection and additional verbal input where desired or could opt not to partake in this aspect of the study. Additionally, the six cases were requested to share my contact details with influential others mentioned in the course of our interactions and could give permission for me to speak with those individuals or could opt not to engage with that element of the study. Where participants opted to share my contact details with others, they were made aware at the initial interview and through the information sheet and consent form, of the limits of confidentiality arising from this. Therefore, choice was an important aspect of empowering participants within the various phases of the research.

A final noteworthy ethical consideration which pervaded the study was the possible impact of the study itself on participants. While no particularly sensitive data was being sought from participants, appraisal for how a participant might react to some of the questions posed was essential in ensuring that supports were provided should a

participant become upset. Given that participants can react in different ways to research questions (King, Horrocks and Brooks 2019), having procedures in place to allow for in-the-moment response should an issue arise, was beneficial. As such, participants were provided with a list of suggestions and supports available to them in the case that they became distressed, such as direction towards the Employee Assistance Scheme provided by the Department of Education – Folláine le Chéile (Appendix K). This was provided to participants at the start of their initial interview. To illustrate the importance of these supports, in a case where participants may have had negative experiences in their role as student teacher or cooperating teacher, and discussion around this topic may have triggered these experiences for them, the distress protocol was a useful tool to have accessible.

Evidently, the ethical considerations and implications of this study were vast. Through providing an overview of the procedural and situational ethical considerations at play throughout the study, it demonstrates the centrality of ethics to this overall research process.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data analysis process was multi-faceted and iterative in nature, to ensure data were analysed in detail and understood from multiple perspectives. Given the nature of the study as an exploratory, qualitative case study, an inductive analytical approach was determined as the most relevant approach to understand and explore the cases, and to support sense-making from the data gathered (Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Saldaña 2021; Lichtman 2023). Because of the volume of data generated from the various data collection techniques referenced above, data management and

organisation were essential, as this ensured ease of analysis throughout the data analysis phase (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018). As such, interviews and verbal reflective logs were transcribed and stored as Microsoft Word files, to allow working flexibly with each of these data sources. Microsoft Excel files were created to manage coding during the analysis phase, which allowed for manipulation of codes to support the iterative process involved. This will be outlined further below.

3.9.1 Preparation and Initial Steps

Due to the phased nature of the research, as outlined earlier, processes of transcription and analysis began from Phase One onwards. After each initial interview, I transcribed the audio-recording. Memoing and note-taking were features of this transcription, to support initial data analysis (Maxwell 2005; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018; Saldaña 2021). This was essential in ascertaining the sources which the cases identified as drawing from or influencing their understanding of their role as cooperating teacher. This allowed for the nuanced development of the follow-up interview protocol and the list of influences on practice for each case, which could be presented at the follow-up interview.

To support the memoing and note-taking process, a memo book was utilised. This provided a space to record key insights from the data, and any possible questions it prompted. It also supported familiarisation with the data in the early interactions with it (sample, Appendix L). This was employed in tandem with the research diary, which housed reflections on the data in terms of insights that were surprising, that challenged my thinking or aligned with my understandings or interpretations. Using both the memo book and the research diary collectively ensured familiarisation with the data

but also provided an opportunity to consider where further clarification might be needed from each case in the sourcing of additional information in Phase Two, or in the follow-up interview in Phase Three.

Throughout Phase Two of data collection, a similar process of preparation and initial steps was implemented, where memoing and reflection were used to consider my initial interactions with the data. Again, this served to determine follow-up questions for the interview in Phase Three of the study, and to consider ways in which the sources in Phase Two aligned with or diverged from the early insights of the initial interview. This led into Phase Three of the study, where the cooperating teachers engaged in a second and final interview. This interview was subsequently transcribed, and early analysis began in the same way as was undertaken for the initial interview, described above. This was the foundation on which the next stage of data analysis began.

3.9.2 Codes, Categories and Concepts

On completion of data collection, the more structured and sequential stages of analysis began. This started with revisiting the data which had been collected and transcribed throughout the three phases, to support a refamiliarisation with the data before initial coding. Literature suggests that this familiarisation process is key to ensuring a foundational knowledge of the data prior to beginning the coding process (Meriam and Tisdell 2016; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018). This stage too involved further memoing and reflection as required, to note any further considerations that may have been overlooked during the initial memos and note-taking as described above. Saldaña (2021) advocates that this strategy is supportive

when it comes to teasing out codes and categories as the coding process unfolds, and this was proven to be the case as the analysis further expanded.

The process followed Lichtman's (2023, p.309) 'three Cs' approach, comprising coding, categorising and concept development., summarised in Figure 3.5 below.

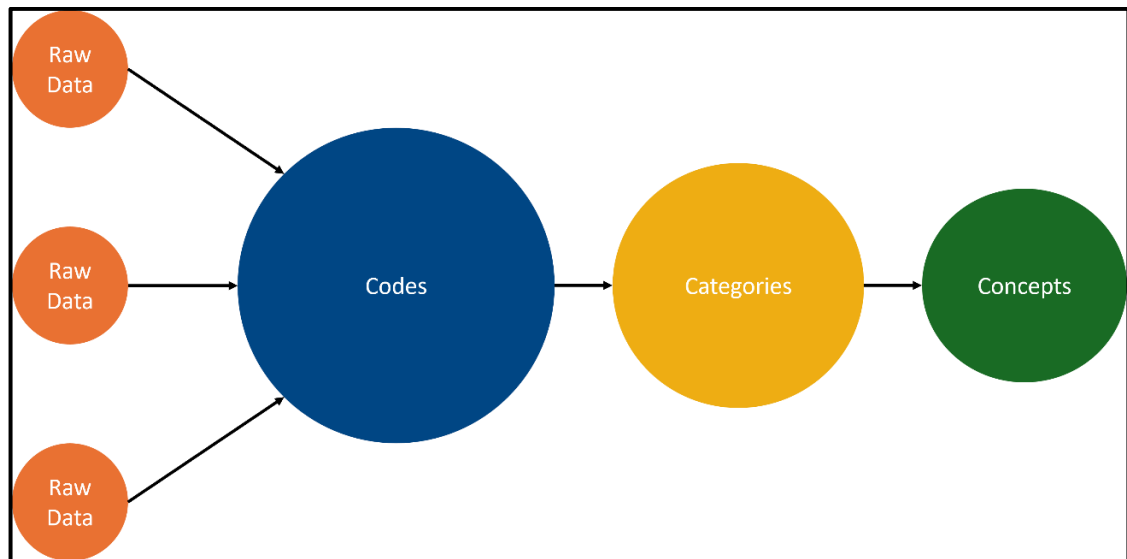


Figure 3.5: *The three Cs approach to qualitative data analysis, adapted from Lichtman (2023, p.309).*

This was used in conjunction with Saldaña's (2021) work on developing codes and categories when analysing and interpreting data. As such, following on from the initial memoing and reflective notes, initial codes were applied to the data. This was done using the comment function on Microsoft Word (Lichtman 2023) (sample, Appendix M). The initial codes were created using an 'open coding' approach (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p.204), in that the potential for all data to be useful in answering the research question and aims was recognised. These initial codes were created for all interview transcripts, reflective logs and materials gathered in Phase Two of data collection. The coding methods employed in this open coding approach were generic in nature, consisting of descriptive, in-vivo and affective codes as

relevant (Saldaña 2021; Lichtman 2023). They were then transferred to the relevant Microsoft Excel files to support further exploration and refinement (Appendix N).

The initial codes list was refined, and instances of code repetition were removed in the refined list. Some codes were collapsed into a single code which captured the meaning of the initial codes. This culminated in a refined code list for each data source, at which point the source was revisited and recoded using the refined list. This involved decision-making and analysis about which refined codes aligned with segments of the data, to ensure that the refined codes captured the essence of that data.

On completion of the second phase of coding, the refined codes list was revisited. Refined codes were manipulated and organised into categories. As per Lichtman's (2023) position, in some cases, the refined codes became categories in and of themselves, due to their prevalence in the data. Other refined codes became subsets of broader categories (Appendix N). When the categories had been determined, the data sources were again revisited and recoded, this time using the categories as the data labels. Analysis and reflection were once again central here, in ensuring that the category assigned to a data excerpt was reflective of the sentiments of that excerpt.

The final phase of Lichtman's (2023) analysis process involves the revisiting and refinement of categories, leading to the identification of key concepts. At this juncture, the categories from the various data sources were explored collectively, to ascertain what the emergent concepts were, and where outliers in the data sets or in the individual cases could be identified. The central concepts emergent in the data were then applied in a final round of coding, to ensure alignment between the raw data and the emergent codes developed. Accordingly, these categories and codes formed

the basis of individual case overviews provided in the findings, as well as the thematic cross-case analysis presented, which centres on the three emergent concepts as thematic findings. In doing this, the analysis supported the movement from the initial raw data to the findings explored in the subsequent chapters. An example of the analysis approach used is demonstrated in Figure 3.6 below.

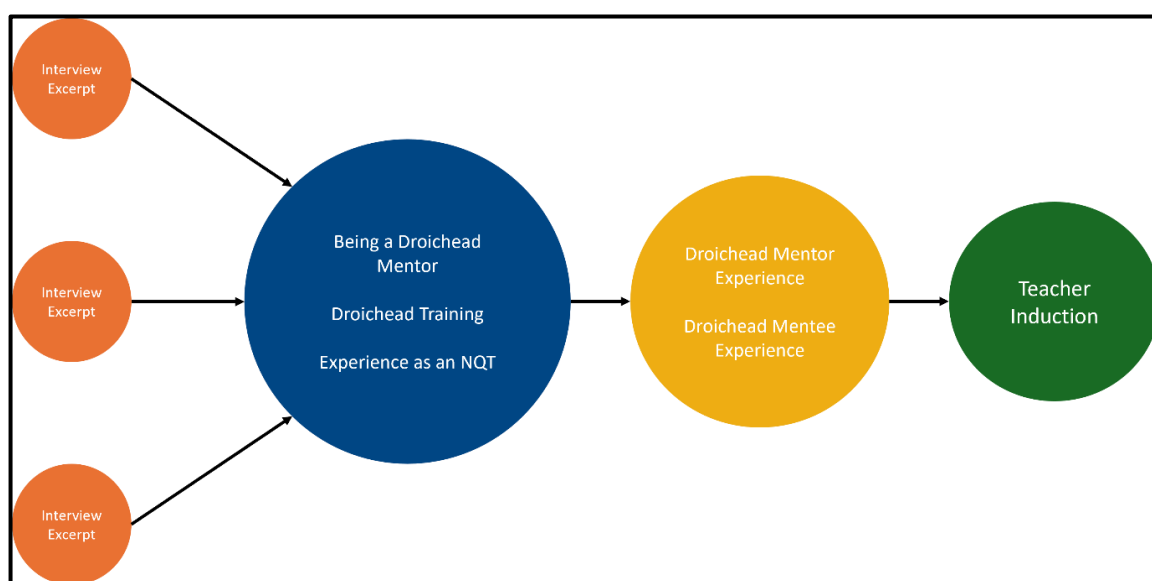


Figure 3.6: *A worked example of the ‘three Cs’ approach to qualitative data analysis, as suggested by Lichtman (2023).*

This sequence ensured that sense-making and interpretation of the data was sequential and logical in its approach to understanding the sentiments within each case. By moving from an individual view and interpretation of each case to an analysis of the data across the cases, it provided insight into how cooperating teachers learn to do what they do during role enactment within school placement. This sequential and logical process of data analysis supported the trustworthiness of the study, as the various steps that were involved were intentional and carefully considered throughout. The next section explores how trustworthiness and reflexivity were in-built in the study from its conception to its completion.

3.10 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Given the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study, as described throughout this chapter, ensuring strategies were in place to support the trustworthiness of this research, was essential. While the terms ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ are often identifiable in research literature, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative lenses are required to understand the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, rather than the frequently used terms above, which are traditionally associated with quantitative research. As such, the trustworthiness of this study must be considered in terms of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Nowell et al. 2017; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2018; Ahmed 2024).

The credibility of the study is evident in its design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate for prolonged engagement in the field or with participants, to ensure that participant views, opinions and realities are being represented fairly. The frequent interaction with the cases over the course of the study supported this. The use of the reflective log and the follow-up interview provided opportunities for participants to clarify their thoughts. However, it also provided me with the scope to clarify ambiguities and interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy. Phase Two of the study supported the exploration and analysis of data from other sources, outside those that were self-reported in the cases, to complement ideas and experiences discussed in Phases One and Three. This further enhanced the credibility of the study.

Although the findings of such qualitative and case study research are not intended to be generalisable, there is scope for transferability of the findings, when clarity around the nuances of the cases are included. As such, rich, thick descriptions are used throughout the findings to contextualise the cases in an open and transparent way (Wahyuni 2012; Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Ahmed 2024). Similarly, the replication

logic for how the cases were decided upon, as well as the specific inclusion criteria for participation in the study, were articulated earlier in this chapter. These strategies support interested parties in considering these factors when exploring the transferability of the study to their specific case or context (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Dependability in how the study was conducted was to the fore from the beginning of the process. Decisions that were made, and conclusions that were drawn, were logically derived, and this process was noted throughout. The methodological decisions made within the study have been documented within this chapter. However, they have also been demonstrated through use of an audit trail, via the appendices. The purpose of this audit trail was to document the activities and processes that were engaged with throughout the study (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Creswell and Miller 2000; Koch 2006; Carcary 2009; Nowell et al. 2017; Carcary 2020). Within the appendices, the various stages of the research have been recorded, including sample literature review tables, sample interview protocols, coded data, data analysis files and so on. These aim to ensure that the study was conducted thoroughly and dependably, adding trustworthiness to its overall execution.

The final area for consideration here is confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1989), as referred to in Nowell et al. (2017), suggest that this is achieved when credibility, transferability and dependability can be identified within the research study. An added layer to this is the use of expert others to critique and evaluate the findings, introducing elements of objectivity to the work (Ahmed 2024). Working closely with my supervisors was beneficial in this regard, in ensuring that the study aligned with theoretical and conceptual foundations in the field, as well as broader discourse around teacher learning, teacher education and the role of the cooperating teacher within

school placement. These lenses and interactions supported me in considering the research from different perspectives and my place within the study.

A notably absent feature of the discussion within this section thus far is the consideration of reflexivity within the study. Reflexivity underpinned each of the considerations discussed thus far and was central to how my role in relation to the research was monitored. Lichtman (2023) urges researchers to consider the ‘revealing’ of the self when engaging in qualitative study, and the importance of recognising how one locates oneself within their research. From the outset in Chapter One, and again within this chapter, I have identified my positionality in relation to this study. I have documented the assumptions I have brought to this research and the experiences that have shaped how I understand the role of the cooperating teacher and the centrality of the role within school placement. In section 3.2 above, I explored the interplay between my ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological assumptions and influences, and how these relate to the study. I was markedly aware of these assumptions, biases and experiences throughout the process and as such, employed strategies to monitor this. For example, the use of the research diary from the very beginning provided a space to monitor my assumptions and record my decisions throughout the study. This proved useful in reflecting on my thoughts and decisions, and why these were considered the best approaches to take at various points. Similarly, I engaged in frequent conversations and interactions with two critical friends regarding the nature of the decisions that I had to make on numerous occasions, and the possible impacts that these decisions could have on the research going forward. This supported me in looking at the study from different perspectives, engaging in critique and challenging conversations, but also opening up opportunities to explore further possibilities within the study (Foulger 2010; Appleton 2011). The same was

evident in my interactions with my research supervisors. While they provided a layer of confirmability to the study, as highlighted above, they also supported my engagement in reflexive conversations throughout the process (Fox and Allan 2014), which supported me in reflecting on and critiquing the reasoning behind the decisions I made. These interwoven strategies ensured I remained astute in monitoring my assumptions and biases as I engaged in this research, which ultimately enhanced the credibility, dependability and confirmability of the study, strengthening its trustworthiness.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter explored the methodology employed to ascertain how cooperating teachers learn for their role in school placement in the absence of formalised professional learning for the role. My positionality as researcher was considered, and how this influenced my ontology, epistemology, axiology and the subsequent methodology used. The decisions regarding why a multi-case study was considered the most appropriate methodology were appraised, and due to the exploratory nature of the study, the phased approach to data collection using a range of data collection methods and sources was explained. Given the array of methods employed, ethical considerations were to the fore, including attaining informed consent, cognisance of power within the data collection phases and the procedural components of receiving ethical approval and the management and storage of participant data. The ways in which this data were analysed, using the inductive analytical approach were outlined, including the sequential process from initial coding to concept and theme development. Focusing on how trustworthiness was established and maintained

throughout the study asserted the value of a study of this nature to explore cooperating teacher learning and preparation for their role as they navigate the landscape of practice. As such, this chapter lays the foundations for the findings which are explored in the subsequent chapters, and how these findings were realised over the course of the research.

Chapter Four

Findings Part I:

Individual Case Overview

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the six cases which have been explored using the methodological considerations outlined in Chapter Three. This is the first of two findings' chapters, the case overview, where the pertinent considerations and findings from each case are explored. The purpose behind this is to provide an insight into the unique nuances associated with each individual case. The next chapter builds on this introduction to the cases, and delves into the cross-case, thematic findings associated with the study as a whole. This demonstrates the similarities and idiosyncrasies evident across the six cases. On conclusion of both chapters, the key insights arising from the study will have been explored, in preparation for discussion of the findings in the context of the broader literature in the field. Through structuring the findings in this manner, the ways in which cooperating teachers enact their role as bricoleurs, as they navigate the landscape of practice of being a cooperating teacher, are identified.

4.2 Case Overview

As outlined in Chapter Three, each case was selected based on the clearly defined criteria set out through the theoretical replication approach utilised in this study. As such, the six cases shared commonalities, but each one also has unique characteristics. To support familiarity with each case as an individual entity in the first instance, this chapter introduces each one. Given the flexibility of methods used with and by participants, each case had some common and some differing data sources. These will be outlined as each case is introduced. During the initial interview, each case demonstrated an array of sources of information and influence that are drawn upon in the work of cooperating teacher as bricoleur. At the follow-up interview, the cases

were invited to rank these in terms how influential they considered these to be on their practice, or the extent to which they drew on these varying sources, from most to least influential or used. This was a useful way to understand how the cases compared and perceived the influences at play in their practice. These influences are used to structure each of the subsequent sections and provide insight into each of the individual cases. The selection discussed for each case is based on the category within which they participated in the study, and any unique or noteworthy influences on practice that were evident.

To support the reading of the findings, each case has been given a pseudonym. Each pseudonym shares a letter with an element of the specific category to which the case belongs. This idea of using letters to denote belonging to different groups is an identified naming strategy within the research literature (Wang et al. 2024) and one which was considered useful in this context to ensure that cases were easily recognisable during the cross-case analysis phase of the study. Each pseudonym is included below:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Participation Criteria</i>
<u>D</u>eirdre	Cooperating Teacher who is also a <u>D</u>roichead (Induction) Professional Support Team (PST) Member
<u>A</u>lan	Cooperating Teacher who completed his Initial Teacher Education <u>A</u>broad
<u>I</u>sabel	Cooperating Teacher who completed her ITE in <u>I</u>reland
<u>S</u>arah	Cooperating Teacher who has completed <u>S</u>tudy at Postgraduate Level in Education beyond ITE
<u>P</u>eter	Cooperating Teacher who is also a Senior Leader (Teaching <u>P</u>rincipal)
<u>C</u>ora	Cooperating Teacher who is also a <u>C</u>oach

Table 3: Cases with associated pseudonyms. The start of each letter is in bold and underlined to signify the associated word it matches in the categories of participation.

Throughout the remaining chapters, each case will be referred to by name. The above table can be used as a reference point at later stages if required. This supports the development of insight into each case and how they interpret and understand their role, and the influences that shape this as they navigate the complex landscape of their practice. In Table 4 below, some general biographical information is provided, to offer further insight into the cases, including their years of experience as a teacher, and an overview of the various categories of participation they identified with.

<i>Number of Years Teaching Experience</i>	Deirdre	Alan	Isabel	Sarah	Peter	Cora
5-9	✓		✓			
10-14				✓		
15-19					✓	
20+		✓				✓
<i>Identified Categories of Participation</i>						
Droichead Experience	✓*			✓		
ITE Abroad		✓*				
ITE in Ireland	✓		✓*	✓	✓	✓
Study at Postgrad.	✓	✓		✓*	✓	
Principal/ Deputy Principal					✓*	
Coach	✓				✓	✓*

Table 4: *Years of teaching experience and categories that each case identified with during the initial recruitment stage of the study. The asterisk indicates the category which the case represents.*

Each case is introduced individually in the following sections. Data sources are drawn on and reported to varying degrees in each case overview, where appropriate.

4.3 CASE 1: DEIRDRE – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO IS ALSO A DROICHEAD MENTOR

Deirdre opted to participate in the study, as she self-identified as a cooperating teacher who had worked with various student teachers. During the recruitment phase of the study, Deirdre outlined that she was a cooperating teacher who fit within a number of participation criteria, including having completed her ITE in Ireland, having completed postgraduate study and having volunteered as a coach. However, she identified her preferred category of participation as a cooperating teacher who also holds the role of Droichead PST Member. This was certainly central to Deirdre's involvement in the study, and she made strong links with her role as cooperating teacher and her role within Droichead. However, she also harnessed her experience of having completed her ITE in Ireland during the study. Data sources gathered in this case included:

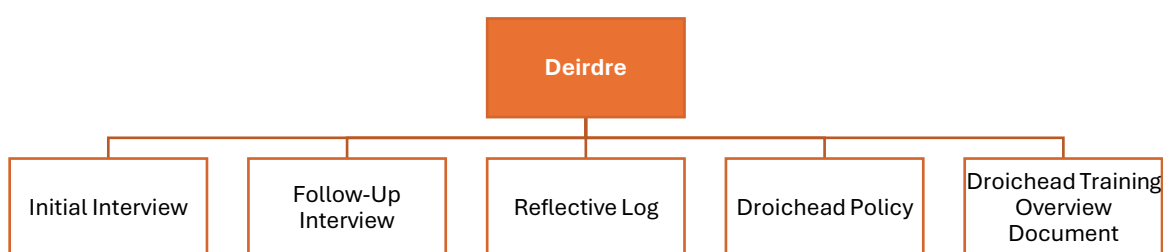


Figure 4.1: *Data sources gathered and used in Deirdre's case.*

During the follow-up interview, when Deirdre was presented with the topics she had discussed and the elements of bricolage she referred to during the first interview and in her reflective log, she ranked these as shown in Figure 4.2 below. A selection

of these will now be explored with reference to Deirdre's use of these influences in her role as cooperating teacher.

Deirdre's Influences	1. Own experience as a Student Teacher
	2. Droichead Training
	3. Own experience of starting to teach/ NQT year
	4. Own experience of the former induction process
	5. Interactions with SP Tutors/ ITE Inspectors
	6. Colleagues & 'Teacher Friends'
	7. Teaching Experience as an Autism Class Teacher
	8. School Culture
	9. The Student Teacher(s)
	10. Principal
	11. Teaching Experience as a Mainstream Class Teacher

Figure 4.2: *Deirdre's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Deirdre)*

4.3.1 Deirdre's Droichead Experience

Deirdre leaned heavily on her experiences of being a Droichead-trained PST member when discussing her role as cooperating teacher. It was evident that she used much of her learning and experience from that role and applied it when working with student teachers on school placement. For example, Deirdre recounted instances of encouraging student teachers to observe in various settings throughout the school during their observation periods, rather than solely in her class:

'If they're in with me in 5th class, I make sure that they get to observe in Juniors or Seniors, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th, do you know? ... because if they're in looking at me, I have a very particular style of teaching than someone else might have. And when they

come back to me, I'll go 'what did you see? What worked well?' And then we can have those conversations of why do you do that, why do you do this? And then I can justify why I do what I do'

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

This excerpt suggests self-awareness on Deirdre's part regarding her own approach to teaching and learning and the necessity of ensuring the student teacher understands the variability of approach between teachers. However, the link between Deirdre's roles here is also evident, in that observations form a central part of the Droichead process, with the Droichead policy stating that 'Observations are also a key feature of Droichead. This includes observations by the NQT of more experienced teachers' practice, as well as observation of the NQT's practice by the PST' (Teaching Council 2017, p.5). Similarly, PST training aims to enable participants to 'conduct and organise classroom observations to enhance teaching and learning' (Oide 2025, p.2). This indicates that Deirdre is drawing on her knowledge of what is involved in the teacher induction phase to directly influence her work as a cooperating teacher and the approaches she utilises in this regard. Although this creative approach is encouraged in the *Guidelines on School Placement*, where cooperating teachers are tasked to 'afford the student teacher opportunities to observe their teaching (and that of their colleagues)' (Teaching Council 2021, p.20), Deirdre did not mention these guidelines while engaged in the study.

The influence of Droichead could also be seen in Deirdre's understanding of her role and how she supports student teachers in her interactions with them. She spoke of engaging in 'professional conversations', a term associated with the observation model within the Droichead process, as well as a team-based approach to supporting student teachers within her context. A particular example of this was evident when Deirdre recounted what she does when she is unsure how best to support a student teacher, or if a student teacher is having difficulty during their placement:

‘I think if I’m a bit unsure about them, I have the support of the Droichead team in school. And we do use this, in the sense that another member of staff might come in and observe, and be their cooperating teacher, just for a couple of days.’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

When asked where this idea came from or why this kind of approach is taken in her setting, she indicated:

‘It is fully ourselves... we’ve had no training in this, you know?... it’s fully ourselves and I suppose it’s because we’ve worked as a Droichead team together since 2019... we know how we gel and we know I look out for certain things, [COLLEAGUE] looks out for certain things, [PRINCIPAL] looks out for certain things. It’s just how we work together as a team.’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

These excerpts suggest that despite the roles being different from a policy perspective, in terms of what is required or expected of those enacting the roles, Deirdre appears to have merged her understanding of what is expected of her in both roles. In doing so, she uses the formal training received as part of her role as a Droichead PST member, as well as the resources available in that regard, like access to a team approach, to enable her to enact the role of cooperating teacher during school placement.

4.3.2 Deirdre’s Own Experiences

Deirdre recounted experiences of her own time as a student teacher, and this was identified as a key influence in the way in which she now enacted her role when working with student teachers. This was exemplified when she explained:

‘I suppose I drew on my own experiences of teaching practice... that was only what three years previous. And with my own teaching practice, I was in a DEIS³ school so it was, you know, I had come up with some challenging classes. So, I kind of went back to what those cooperating teachers did with me... how they supported me, but like... I think that’s what I drew back to was how those cooperating teachers supported me’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

³ Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) is a government funded initiative to support schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage through the provision of funding and supports.

However, she again demonstrated self-awareness of this reliance on experience, as when she submitted her reflective log, she hinted towards the complexities of being a new teacher while supporting a student teacher:

‘I wonder should the experience of the cooperating teacher be considered? Maybe it is in other schools, but I know for me, I was teaching 2 years when I first supported a student teacher.’

(Deirdre, Reflective Log)

However, despite acknowledging her limited experience at the time, she also acknowledged the structural challenges within the system and the demands on cooperating teachers:

‘Do cooperating teachers need at least 4/5 years’ experience before a student teacher can complete placement in their class? But with the high number of student teachers in teacher training at the minute between [ITE INSTITUTION] and [ITE INSTITUTION] etc, the demand may be too high to enforce a condition like this.’

(Deirdre, Reflective Log)

Both positive and negative experiences of being a student teacher were mentioned, particularly in terms of the levels of support offered. This was clear when she referred to:

‘I had two particular teachers stand out for me. I was very fortunate... my infant placement...my multigrade placement, they were just incredible. They could not have done enough for me; they could not have done enough to support me. But in complete contrast to that, on my senior placement, the teacher went off golfing for the week, you know.’

(Deirdre, Follow-Up Interview)

These varied experiences may indicate why Deirdre links in with her colleagues as often as she appears to do, perhaps in order to locate and align her practice in relation to theirs, particularly if she is unsure of situations or how a student teacher might need to be supported. As evident in Figure 4.2, Deirdre considered her experience as a student teacher as the greatest influence on her practice as a cooperating teacher. However, throughout her engagement in the study, she also referred to her experiences

as a teacher more generally, as well as her experience of being an NQT and how that has influenced her current role.

4.3.3 The Influence of Others on Deirdre's Role

Deirdre spoke at length about her interaction with her colleagues when it came to enacting her role and supporting student teachers. She spoke specifically of the colleagues she worked with as PST members, as evident above. However, when it came to identifying the sources she had mentioned as more or less influential on her practice as cooperating teacher, Deirdre did not rank her interaction with her colleagues, her 'teacher friends' or her principal within her top five influences. While she referred to working with them closely when enacting both the roles of cooperating teacher and Droichead PST member, when considering how they influenced her practice, she commented:

‘I had tried to figure a lot out myself at that stage by the time I got to the principal’
(*Deirdre, Follow-Up Interview*)

Yet, despite this critique, she also recognised that her principal and colleagues supported the creation of a school culture where they could try things out as cooperating teachers and engage in innovative and creative approaches, like asking other cooperating teachers to support student teachers in their class when needed, as referenced above.

‘Now it's taken a while for our school culture to develop into that and like I was saying... our principal is retiring now, so it'll be interesting to see will that school culture continue the same or will it be completely different. Because she's [NEW PRINCIPAL] coming from a different school that she was principal of so’
(*Deirdre Follow-Up Interview*)

Deirdre signals that although ranked lower in her list of influences, the contribution of the principal and her colleagues to the school culture which allows her to engage as a

cooperating teacher in the way that she does, is something that may easily change when a change in leadership occurs. Whether this could or would result in adaptations to the ways in which her practice as a cooperating teacher manifests remains to be seen.

4.4 CASE 2: ALAN – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO COMPLETED HIS ITE ABROAD

Alan participated in the study as the cooperating teacher who completed his ITE abroad. He specified that he completed his ITE in England and spent some time working there. He referred to this experience throughout his engagement with the study. Alan acknowledged that he had also completed postgraduate study beyond his ITE course, and he referred to this regularly, despite not participating under this criterion specifically. He referred to his principal at different stages during his engagement with the study and his principal subsequently engaged in an interview during Phase Two of the study, as Alan's identified 'influential other.' Accordingly, the data sources gathered in this case included:

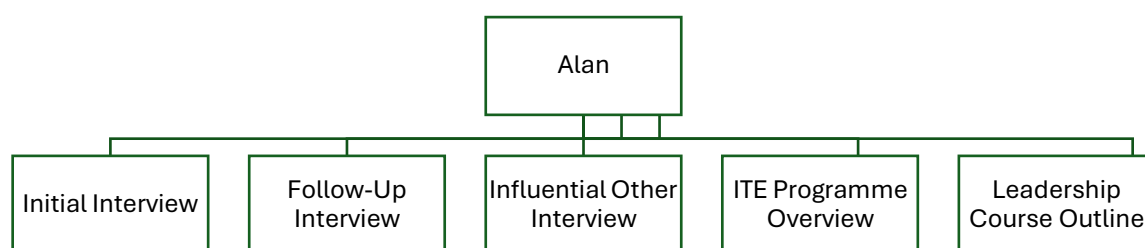


Figure 4.3: *Data sources gathered and used in Alan's case.*

When Alan was presented with the various sources of information, influences and elements of bricolage which he discussed in his initial interview, during Phase Three of the study, he rated their influence on his practice as shown in Figure 4.4. Some insight into a selection of these influences is documented below.

Alan's Influences	1. Further Study
	2. The Principal
	3. Teaching Experience/ Experience with Class Content
	4. Experience as Cooperating Teacher
	5. Own Experiences of Being a Student Teacher in England
	6. The Student Teacher/ Their College Requirements
	7. Interaction with Tutors/ University Inspectors

Figure 4.4: *Alan's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Alan)*

4.4.1 Alan's Experience as a Student Teacher Abroad

Given that Alan participated because of his experience completing his ITE abroad, it was somewhat expected that this would be central to his considerations around the role he now holds as a cooperating teacher. However, it is noteworthy that he ranked it as fifth in order of influence despite his category of participation. He spoke about his own experience of going through ITE and teaching abroad and his transition back to Ireland having done so, and how that now shapes the way he views the competency of the student teachers he now supports:

‘Well, I think, maybe, if I look back on my own experience. I trained in the UK and that was essentially a ten-month course. And then you look at [STUDENTS FROM ITE INSTITUTION NAME] coming out and initially it was three years and now it’s four years and I, I have to say when I started off teaching here first it, it was a struggle to try and get up to speed with what is actually going on over here and what’s expected, and then to watch someone coming in and just, okay, they didn’t breeze through it but everything went very well because they were absolutely, they had their finger on the pulse. I just always felt ill-prepared to be honest, after a ten-month graduate course for teaching.’

(Alan, Initial Interview)

Alan indicated that he was impressed by the student teachers he had supported to date, and recounted how when he was a student teacher, he had been treated differently by one of the cooperating teachers with whom he worked:

‘I had two main experiences...the first teacher wasn’t the friendliest at all... So, she was not a nice person, and she gave me you know a kind of satisfactory thing at the end. Like that, I worked my you-know-what off and there was another student who had failed to bring prepared lesson notes with him on his first day... which is supposed to be an automatic off the course in a different school, but he just got away with it. So, I just thought, there’s a huge inconsistency in how people are being judged around here.’

(Alan, Initial Interview)

Given this somewhat negative experience and coupled with the fact that Alan spoke with such positivity throughout the study about the various student teachers with whom he has worked, it suggests that he did not want to replicate the experience he had had himself as a student teacher. As evident in Figure 4.4 above, Alan did not consider his experience as a student teacher abroad to influence his practice as much as some of the other influences he spoke about, yet it seemed to pervade the ways in which he spoke about the student teachers with whom he now works.

4.4.2 Alan’s Further Study

Alan rated further study as central to his interpretation and enactment of his role as cooperating teacher, indicated in Figure 4.4. While this came up over the course of our interactions throughout this study, the links between the postgraduate courses he mentioned and his role as a cooperating teacher weren’t explicitly clear. He talked

about encountering ‘educational concepts again and again’ and the ‘confidence’ this gave him in his own teaching (*Alan, Initial Interview*). When the course outline for the leadership course he referred to was explored during Phase Two of the study, it was clear that elements of the course would lend themselves to the role of cooperating teacher, like modules focused on mentoring, coaching, leading learning and so on. However, Alan did not explicitly state these modules during our interactions. During Phase Three of the study, when asked about how he felt further study influenced his engagement with the role of cooperating teacher, Alan suggested:

‘...well, I suppose like, the leadership course obviously is preparing you to... start looking at other teachers and the school and that you have agency, you can help to change things. And if you have a student teacher in the classroom, you have that confidence then to look at them, to talk to them and give them some guidance if you feel it’s necessary... whether they take it or then is up to themselves really.’

(Alan, Follow-Up Interview)

This suggests that although the learning on the course focused on school leadership more generally, Alan’s role as a cooperating teacher offered him the opportunity to enact some of the learnings and skills encountered on the course in his day-to-day interactions.

4.4.3 The Influence of Alan’s Principals

Alan spoke about both his current and former principals throughout the study and particularly their place within his experiences as a cooperating teacher during school placement. He commented on how he drew on the principal’s knowledge and input to guide his practice during times when student teachers were experiencing difficulty:

‘Yeah, so I would have just said to them, look, this person is struggling in some subjects... they are really, really lacking in confidence and they seem to be very stressed at the moment... and just asked the principal for advice. ‘What do you think we should do about this?’’

(Alan, Initial Interview)

Alan's principal also engaged in Phase Two of the study and spoke about why they engage in certain practices during aspects of school placement, and what they understand their role to be in supporting cooperating teacher enactment of the role:

'I think if you are asking... a colleague to take a student teacher, then, you know, I have asked them to take this person. So, I think it's very important then that I kind of monitor how the student is doing and make sure that they're... working as best they can and the teaching and learning is good... I wouldn't like a colleague to be upset if they thought I gave them somebody that wasn't really as good as we thought they were going to be.'

(Alan's Principal's Interview)

This suggests that both Alan and his principal engage on an ongoing basis during school placement to problem-solve issues as they arise. This may be indicative of why Alan has included the influence of the principal high on his list of influences above, and as a source he draws on when enacting the role.

4.5 CASE 3: ISABEL – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO COMPLETED HER ITE IN IRELAND

Isabel's case was included as the cooperating teacher who completed her ITE in Ireland. As such, she drew heavily on her own experience of the Irish system, which was typified when she stated:

'I suppose the fact that I was educated both primary, secondary and... third level in the Irish system means that I'm very aware of Irish students and Irish education, so I think... that is quite helpful and you know, I suppose all of our lecturers were very experienced, mostly, within the Irish education system, so you kind of feel like they have a good grasp on classroom life in Ireland.'

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

Along with her own experience as a student teacher in Ireland, Isabel spoke about the influence that the student teachers she works with have on her practice, as well as the influence of her colleagues in school. One of Isabel's colleagues subsequently engaged in Phase Two of the study to provide insight into the case and on their interactions

while engaging as cooperating teachers. The data sources gathered in this case are summarised here:

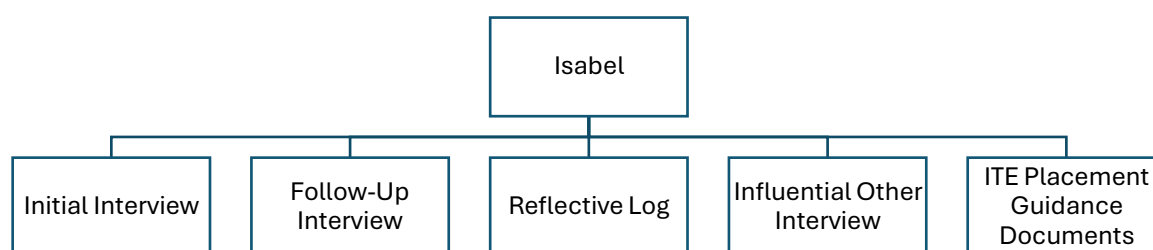


Figure 4.5: *Data sources gathered and used in Isabel's case.*

The way in which Isabel ranked the sources of influence and elements of bricolage that she mentioned in her initial interview is summarised below, and a selection will be explored in more detail.

Isabel's Influences	1. Own Experience as a Student Teacher
	2. Student Teachers
	3. Own Initial Teacher Education
	4. Own Experience as a Class Teacher
	5. Own Experience as a Cooperating Teacher
	6. School Placement Tutors
	7. Droichead Experience as a NQT
	8. Colleagues
	9. Principal and Deputy Principal
	10. University Guidelines

Figure 4.6: *Isabel's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Isabel)*

4.5.1 Isabel's Experience as a Student Teacher

Isabel's experience as a student teacher was central on exploration of this case. It was a significant focus when she conceptualised how she understands her role as cooperating teacher and the way she now interacts with student teachers during school placement. She gave multiple examples of this. When doing so, she tended to refer to the affective dimensions of being a student teacher and the emotions she associated with that time:

‘So yeah... I would have been very nervous on my placements... I enjoyed them once I got into them, but initially starting off, I would have been quite apprehensive and probably uncomfortable in front of the class and uncomfortable with the class teacher at the back of the room. So, bearing that in mind, I would have tried to have been as supportive as possible and let them know that... if they have any questions, I'm there, but also you have to stand back a little bit and leave them off.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

‘...he [STUDENT TEACHER] would have been quite nervous before he started... which I suppose I would have been before I started mine so I... could empathise with him... from that perspective.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

That said, she also seemed to feel as though those experiences were almost too influential on her practice in the ways in which she drew on them in her work, and suggested the need to be able to speak up more for herself or offer feedback to student teachers when it was required:

‘I think for myself, I need to try and be a bit more constructive [LAUGHS]... I just know from speaking, some of my colleagues, and I wouldn't necessarily agree with going too far the other extreme, but I'm probably too nice and... I would find it difficult if a student didn't maybe ask me for feedback and I felt like ‘Oh I didn't think that went great’

(Isabel, Follow-Up Interview)

This mention of colleagues was not unusual for Isabel, and they featured in how she discussed her role as cooperating teacher, despite being ranked outside her top five influences, as documented above. Yet, it seems here that she has compared her

approach and her empathy with the student teachers she works with, with the approaches her colleagues take when enacting the role.

4.5.2 Isabel's Interactions with Colleagues

Not only did Isabel refer to comparing her approaches to being a cooperating teacher to that of her colleagues, but she also mentioned discussing scenarios with colleagues, particularly when she was unsure of a situation with a student teacher. For example, she mentioned:

‘I’ve never gone to management to speak about a student teacher who was struggling massively. So, it would be just my, my colleagues and it would be just more, like not really specific things, but more general things that I would ask them about.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

While she mentioned that her principal might check in on how things were going with student teachers, it is interesting here that Isabel emphasised turning to colleagues for support. When that was further expanded upon in the follow-up interview, Isabel explained:

‘...we have a really big school, and we could have 20 students [STUDENT TEACHERS] in at once so like, I can’t be going to my principal you know three times a week asking for advice on my student. So, just for that alone... if it was a smaller school and maybe you had one student, it might be a different story.’

(Isabel, Follow-Up Interview)

School size may well explain why Isabel relies on discussion with colleagues when she is working with student teachers. This was also echoed by her colleague who signalled that such discussion with colleagues aimed to ensure consistency of approach between teachers in their school, noting:

‘...to make sure that I’m doing the right thing and that we’re all on the same page... so that the students [STUDENT TEACHERS] are on the same page... because we both teach in the same school... that’s probably the main reason really.’

(Isabel's Colleague's Interview)

The temporal dimension of placement, meaning that student teachers are not always onsite, may also contribute to why Isabel and her colleagues discuss situations and cooperating teacher practices together, when one or more of them are working as a cooperating teacher at a given time. Isabel referred to this as prompting an entry into her reflective log during Phase Two of the study, mentioning things like ‘we have a few student teachers in at the moment’ and ‘from a few conversations I’ve had’ and so on (*Isabel, Reflective Log*).

Aside from the emphasis above, Isabel also referred to colleagues in other ways sporadically throughout the study, including how engaging with the Droichead process herself as a NQT and working with colleagues to complete observations, has shaped her understanding of how observing a student teacher might work. Similarly, she referred to collaboration between her and Special Education Teachers (SETs) in her school and the learning that she has taken from those interactions, like the practical benefits of informally observing or working with another teacher and applying those practices to her own class setting.

4.5.3 Isabel and Student Teachers

Expanding on Isabel’s own experiences of being a cooperating teacher herself, and the empathy she identifies as having with the student teachers she works with, she referred to supporting the individual needs of student teachers and her responsiveness to those needs. For example, she acknowledged that on occasion student teachers opened up to her about their previous negative experiences on placement. This influenced how she then proceeded with her own enactment of the role while working with those students:

‘...one of my student teachers had a very bad experience... on a previous placement and they had spoken to me about that. Well, I kind of asked them, ‘Oh where were you the last time?’ and ‘How did you get on?’ and you know... ‘How did you get on with the class teacher?’ and they had a really negative experience, and the teacher was actually quite nasty to them and made like constant comments about the lessons...’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

‘It probably made me... less likely to give negative feedback to that particular student... not negative feedback, but to give constructive feedback because I was very mindful that that had been such a negative experience. But also, I think it made me conscious that I wanted to make a big effort to make it a positive experience.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

Although Isabel suggested that she was ‘too nice’, as documented above, the sensitivity demonstrated in this particular example aligns with the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021), and the notion of encouraging, supporting and facilitating the student teacher, in essence meeting them where they are at and responding to their emergent needs. Isabel did not explicitly mention an awareness of the *Guidelines* at any point during data collection but did briefly refer to specific guidance received from HEIs regarding school placement.

4.6 CASE 4: SARAH – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO HAS COMPLETED STUDY AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL IN EDUCATION

This case was premised on Sarah’s experiences of having completed postgraduate study beyond her ITE, as her inclusion criterion to engage in this research study. While Sarah participated within these criteria, she also harnessed her experience as a trained Professional Support Team member for Droichead throughout her engagement in the study and also met the criterion of having completed her ITE in Ireland. The data gathered and used in this case included the following:

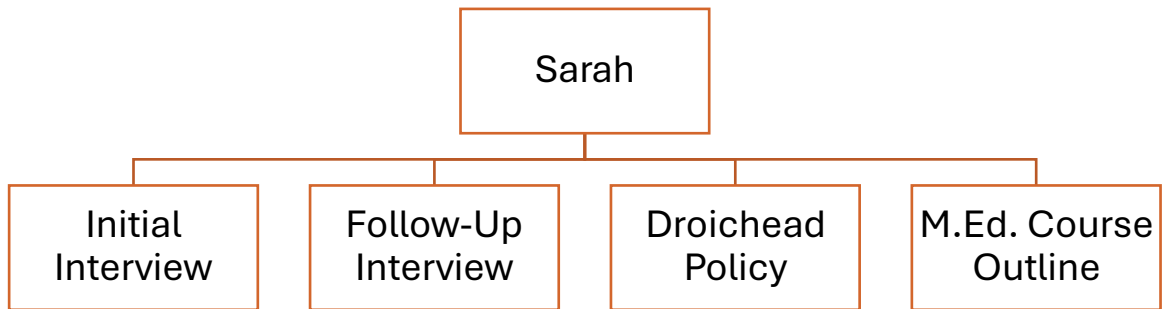


Figure 4.7: *Data sources gathered and used in Sarah's case.*

Sarah's follow-up interview provided much insight into her understanding of the role. She saw some of the influences which she had discussed separately in her initial interview as actually being two facets of the same influence and drawing on them to the same extent in her endeavours as bricoleur. Because of this, Figure 4.8 below contains some dual numbering.

Sarah's Influences	1. Own experience as a Student Teacher
	2. Student Teachers
	3. Droichead Experience
	4. University Materials
	5. Own Experience as a Cooperating Teacher
	5. Own Experience as a Class Teacher
	6. Further Study
	6. Lecturers
	9. School Leaders
	10. Policy Space

Figure 4.8: *Sarah's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Sarah)*

4.6.1 Sarah's Experience of Further Study and the Policy Space

Despite being Sarah's participation category in the study, she did not consider further study as being within the top influences on her practice as cooperating teacher. She also ranked the policy influences on her practice as low, yet this was the only case where explicit reference to school placement policy was made. She spoke at various junctures about the influence further study had on her perception of the role within the wider landscape, referencing things like educational 'theory' and 'policy.' These two influences, further study and the policy space, seemed to overlap at times. For example, she stated:

'Well I suppose, since I haven't actually read the guidelines on like what cooperating teachers are supposed to do, or I never attended training on what cooperating teachers are supposed to do, but I have read all the guidelines on Droichead, because I did my masters in it... like I attended PST training, so those are kind of the principles that I apply when I'm acting as a cooperating teacher, if that makes sense?'

(Sarah, Follow-Up Interview)

The intersection between these two influences is less surprising when some of the features of Sarah's Masters programme are explored. For example, modules included a focus on education policy and practice, as well trends and issues in education, suggesting that Sarah considers her awareness of policy as stemming from her further study, and thus draws on this knowledge and experience interchangeably in her practice as cooperating teacher. When asked where she came across the policy concepts she had referred to, like the Continuum of Teacher Education (Teaching Council 2011), she stated:

'...it's mentioned in loads of policies. So, I would have come across it when I was studying for my masters... I definitely would have been aware of it then. It was brought up at Professional Support Team training then as well... those were the places really, I would have heard of it...'

'It wouldn't have been in the context of my staffroom or anything like that.'

(Sarah, Follow-Up Interview)

This demonstrates Sarah's association between policy and formal learning experiences, like further study and professional training, distancing it from the school, as evidenced in the second excerpt above. Despite her knowledge of and awareness of policy within the field of teacher education in the Irish context however, Sarah still reverted to her own experience as a student teacher, as a key influence in how she engages in her role as cooperating teacher.

4.6.2 Sarah's Experiences as a Student Teacher

Sarah identified her own experience as a student teacher as being the most influential element guiding her practice as a cooperating teacher. She spoke about the feelings and the challenges she associated with school placement, as well as the support she received from her cooperating teachers. This resulted in her desire to replicate that experience for another student teacher:

'I was so excited! I couldn't wait!... I found teaching practice really hard when I was on teaching practice. So, I couldn't wait to have someone and help them like. Especially... the infant one. It wasn't my worst one, but I found it really, really hard. It wasn't my worst grade or anything like that, but I just found it so unbelievably challenging... I just couldn't like fathom how to teach these small, small children. And the cooperating teacher that time was really nice... but I couldn't wait to get a student teacher so I could actually help them.'

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

This sense of wanting to support others, while also trying to interpret what the student teachers might want or need from the placement, influenced how Sarah now enacted her own role. She summarised this when she remarked:

'I suppose I was trying to think of... what kind of help would I have liked when I was on teaching practice, or school placement... so I was kind of being led by that.'

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

This is significant in demonstrating that despite Sarah's knowledge of theory, policy and approaches to mentoring based on her Droichead knowledge and experience, she

continued to revert to her own experiences as student teacher when enacting the role of cooperating teacher during school placement. As evident thus far, she is not alone in identifying this experience as central to her understanding of her current role.

4.7 CASE 5: PETER – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO IS A TEACHING PRINCIPAL

Identifying a case for this category was a challenge and took repeated calls for participants; however, when Peter opted to participate, he did so as a cooperating teacher who was also a senior leader within a school, and in his case, his role was that of teaching principal. He also identified that he had completed postgraduate study in education beyond his ITE. The data sources utilised in this case are summarised here:

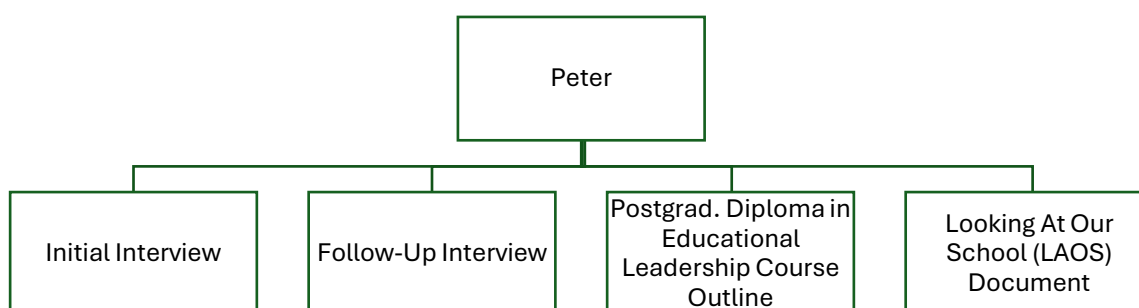


Figure 4.9: *Data sources gathered and used in Peter’s case.*

As in all other cases, Peter was presented with his list of influences and the elements of bricolage during Phase Three of the study. These are summarised below, with subsequent reference to specific nuances encountered within this case.

Peter's Influences	1. Reflection on Practice and Engaging in the Role
	2. Experience as a Cooperating Teacher to date
	3. General Experiences as a Teacher
	4. Further Study
	5. Own Experience as a Student Teacher
	6. Interaction with Student Teachers
	7. Experience as a Teaching Principal
	8. Other Teachers
	9. Interaction with the DE Inspectorate

Figure 4.10: *Peter's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Peter)*

4.7.1 Peter's Experience as a Teaching Principal

Despite Peter's case being explicitly associated with the duality of being a cooperating teacher and a teaching principal, he did not rank this highly in the broader context of influences he identified as having an impact on his practice as cooperating teacher. That said, throughout the study, he identified many similarities between the two roles, particularly in terms of the soft skills required in working with people and evidently how he draws on this knowledge and practice as a cooperating teacher. For example, he indicated the commonalities in communication efforts as a principal and as a cooperating teacher:

'I suppose with both roles you're using all the skills... you have really... in dealing with people as regards, I suppose with communication... Because a lot of the time, when you're communicating with staff and you're communicating with a student teacher...

it's one thing, like you might deliver a message, but it might not be received. They may receive a completely different message and you're trying to keep it as clear and concise. And you learn that over the years and especially... between the first time I had a student teacher and the second time I had it, that like, keep things clear and concise and don't be rambling too much. You know... give them one or two pointers. And you do that with staff, with teachers, staff meetings the whole time, you know?'
(Peter, Initial Interview)

Peter evidently understands that there are skills that overlap in the practices of both of the roles he possesses within the school in which he works. He also briefly mentioned the 'domains' in teaching and learning and having an awareness of those in his practice as cooperating teacher. This reference stems from the Looking at Our School⁴ (DE 2022) framework, a key document to support the leading of effective teaching and learning within schools, particularly by senior leadership teams. However, rather than attributing the skills and knowledge he uses in his role as cooperating teacher to his role as principal, he tended to discuss them in the context of the learning he gleaned from further study and its application to his role as cooperating teacher. This is discussed in the next section.

4.7.2 Peter's Further Study

As indicated, Peter referred extensively to his engagement with postgraduate study, and particularly the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership he completed. He stated that particular elements of the course were useful when working with student teachers, especially those with a focus on coaching:

'...the [POSTGRAD. LEADERSHIP] course... there's a module there. There's a coaching module and that was interesting enough from the point of view... as teachers like, we're always so eager to jump in with an answer... then if you're chatting then to your, your co-teacher or student teacher that, like from that module I suppose, I learned like that you kind of do a lot more so listening if you can and you're kind of pre-empting an answer but maybe leading them down the right path... of an answer. Asking a

⁴ Looking at Our School is a 'framework that provides a shared understanding of what effective and highly effective learning, teaching, leadership and management practices look like in the Irish school system' (DE 2022, p.5), devised by the Department of Education's Inspectorate.

question, listening again, so that they're doing the talking rather than you unloading... information on them...'

(Peter, Initial Interview)

On exploration of the course outline for the programme, coaching and mentoring appear as key components of the course, verifying Peter's application of those concepts to his role as cooperating teacher. However, he acknowledged too that he would benefit from a more explicit focus on the 'skillset' required to be a cooperating teacher and felt that if he had access to Droichead training to support NQTs, it might support him with those skills.

Despite Peter's reference to the various sources and practices he draws on in preparation for and during his engagement with his role as cooperating teacher, he also identified that his own experience played a key part in engaging with the role for the first time. He reflected:

'...one of the first questions you asked me was... when a student teacher came into... where did you start like, you know? And immediately I was just thinking back, well it was my own experience as a student teacher... you're just going on your own experiences, any courses you did... even chatting to other teachers. It's just an area that like, we're kind of, I suppose, a bit unfamiliar with.'

(Peter, Follow-Up Interview)

This self-awareness is something Peter highlighted throughout his engagement with the study, and stems from a place of reflection on his roles as a teacher, cooperating teacher and teaching principal. This will now be examined on a closer level.

4.7.3 Peter's Use of Reflection

As indicated above, reflection formed a key part of Peter's interpretation and enactment of his role as cooperating teacher. It was something that came up at various points during his engagement with this study. He also emphasised its importance by ranking it as the most influential element in his role. He discussed reflecting on his

role as he engaged with it, particularly in terms of releasing responsibility to the student teacher and learning when and when not to intervene:

‘...when I did interject or say if... I might have initially at the start. It’s just I’d be thinking like... you’d be reflecting on it yourself like. You’d be thinking ‘well, I probably shouldn’t have done it really’ because if I am handing over the class to the teacher... I should just let it off and the make note of it.’

(Peter, Initial Interview)

This suggests that Peter has used reflection to consider the ways in which he has engaged as a cooperating teacher to amend his practice going forward. This is echoed when he mentioned things like learning from mistakes and adjusting his practice. His value of reflection can be seen when he suggests that it underpins other facets of and influences on the role of cooperating teacher:

‘Like reflection on practice and engaging with the role, I’d put that at number one... that kind of summarises the whole lot like... it’s nearly an umbrella for, well I’d see it as you know, your, your experience as a cooperating teacher to date, your own experience... because I would be reflecting on... my practice, my own experience...’

(Peter, Follow-Up Interview)

Given the centrality of reflective practice in teaching and teacher education, Peter appears to engage with this on various levels, supporting his work as a cooperating teacher.

4.8 CASE 6: CORA – THE COOPERATING TEACHER WHO IS A COACH

Cora participated as the cooperating teacher who has experience of being a coach. In her case, her experience was linked to volunteering as a sports coach specifically. She has worked with many students over her years as a cooperating teacher and drew on many of these experiences when engaging in the study. She also completed her ITE in Ireland but did not participate under that participation category. The sources used for Cora’s case include:

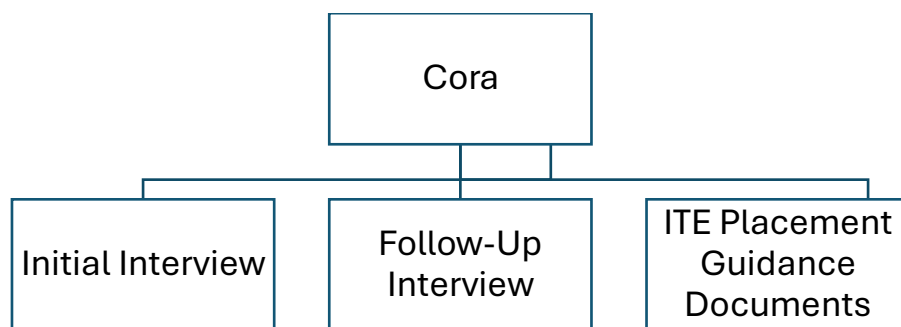


Figure 4.11: *Data sources gathered and used in Cora's case.*

Cora engaged with the ranking task based on the sources and elements of bricolage she had identified in Phase One of the study. This is summarised in Figure 4.12.

Cora's Influences	1. Own Experience as a Student Teacher
	2. First Principal
	3. Experience as a Cooperating Teacher Over Time
	4. Student Teachers
	5. Experience as a Class Teacher
	6. Experience as a Coach
	7. Colleagues
	8. Deputy Principal
	9. Placement Supervisor/ Tutor
	10. Materials from the University

Figure 4.12: *Cora's Influences and Elements of Bricolage (as ranked by Cora)*

4.8.1 Cora's Experience as a Coach

Although this was the category within which Cora participated in the study, as evident in Figure 4.12 above, she did not rank this as being within the top five

influences on her practice as a cooperating teacher. Instead, she referred to her own experiences as a student teacher, her experiences as a class and cooperating teacher over the years and the influence of others on her understanding of and enactment of the role. That said, Cora identified similarities between the skills involved in being a coach and in being a cooperating teacher, and acknowledged the complementary nature of the roles:

‘... the overall or the overarching theme is... you want the best... you want to get the best out of them. You want to get the best out of your team... you want to get the best out of your student teacher... it’s how you do that and how you communicate that... if it’s in a match and things aren’t going great and if we’re losing, how you motivate them and how you... try and give them a positive outlook on things, you know? And it’s, I suppose, similar with a student teacher... if they’ve had a bad day, bad inspection, a bad lesson... how you get the best out of them, how you motivate them and how you help them.’

(Cora, Initial Interview)

Throughout the study, Cora tended to discuss the importance of being a positive influence on student teachers, when one is working as a cooperating teacher. Therefore, the fact that she focused on motivating and encouraging her students and the student teachers with whom she works is unsurprising. This may be linked to her own experiences as a student teacher, which she remembers clearly:

‘Like, I clearly remember all those experiences and the different schools and the different teachers I had and what I gained from each of those and it’s more how you felt.’

(Cora, Follow-Up Interview)

Cora hints here to the influence of the cooperating teachers she had when she was a student teacher. However, over the course of the study, she also emphasised the influence of a myriad of other individuals on her current role as cooperating teacher.

4.8.2 The Influence of Others on Cora's Role

As indicated, Cora noted the influence of others on her practice as cooperating teacher. In some cases, this manifested as a desire to replicate how she had been treated by others in the early years of her career. At other junctures, it was more the advice received by others while enacting the role of cooperating teacher and the ways in which that influenced her subsequent interactions within her role.

Cora referred to her time as an NQT and the influence of her first principal on her practice. She praised him as being 'proactive' and commended his creation of a 'culture' within the school, which promoted mentoring:

'... my principal at the time in that school... was very proactive... most of us would have taken students [STUDENT TEACHERS]. Nearly every teacher in the school would have taken a student nearly every year.'

(Cora, Initial Interview)

'... he appointed me a mentor teacher on the staff. You know, a more experienced member of staff and she was my go-to person, and you know, always checked in with me... I felt supported and it was good to have that, I suppose, level of support around me... that has I suppose, always stayed with me... you try to bring that forward and... have that level of support then for, for your own, when you have student teachers coming to you...'

(Cora, Follow-Up Interview)

The idea of wanting to support student teachers in the way that she had felt supported is discernibly central in Cora's practice. However, she also referred to how she now continues to be supported by colleagues if she encounters uncertainty in her role. She discussed asking her 'partner teacher', the teacher who taught at the same class level as her, and her 'vice principal' for advice and sought their support when and as required:

'Partner teacher also had a student teacher, so I just checked in with her and see was she experiencing any of the same issues or difficulties or challenges... she gave me a couple of pointers as to what she might do.'

(Cora, Initial Interview)

'I mentioned, vice-principal... sort of mentioned it in broad terms... with her. Just one or two things and she you know, gave me one or two pieces of advice as well.'

(Cora, Initial Interview)

This again emphasises the extent to which Cora identified other people as influencing the ways in which she enacts the role of cooperating teacher, despite the fact that she rated these two particular influences below some of her other identified influences, as outlined above.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the six cases and some of the notable considerations arising from each case. Evidently, there are commonalities and differences among and between the cases, and while there are some similarities across the cases, unique perspectives and considerations have also been demonstrated in all six. What is abundantly clear as this chapter draws to a close, is that in their navigation of the landscape of practice in their role as cooperating teacher, the cases demonstrated a variety of sources of influence and elements of bricolage at play in supporting their understanding of their role. The extent to which the cases drew on particular elements of practice within the broader landscape depended on the scenarios they encountered and what was readily available and accessible to them within the landscape. For some, it was past experience, for others, it was the individuals who were available to support them when needed, and for more, it was learning or knowledge they had previously encountered on their journey. To glean a deeper understanding of how cooperating teachers navigate the landscape of practice as bricoleurs, exploring the central emerging themes from the data across the six cases is warranted. As such, the next chapter explores the thematic, cross-case analysis, delving further into the key findings arising from this study.

Chapter Five

Findings Part II:

Thematic Cross-Case Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Having explored the individual case overview in Part One of the findings, Part Two thematically presents the cross-case analysis aspect of the study. The cross-case analysis was a complex endeavour, given the nuances associated with each case. However, through the iterative inductive approach to data analysis, emergent commonalities were identified. These were subsequently explored relevant to one another, to interpret how these commonalities were conceptualised in each case and whether comparable or diverging perspectives were evident. This resulted in the gradual development and emergence of three key findings, which act as lenses through which to discuss the cases in relation to one another. This allows for the aforementioned exploration of the commonalities between and idiosyncrasies within the cases in a meaningful way. Therefore, the three key findings around which this chapter is structured, are:

1. The Influence of Induction: How one stage on the Continuum of Teacher Education impacts on engagement with another
2. The Enigma of Experience: How what has gone before shapes the here and now
3. The Role of Relationships: How interaction with others influences individual interpretation of the role of cooperating teacher

The thematic discussion herein also allows for exploration of the differences between what were considered key influences by participants, as evident in Part One of this chapter, and what was actually emergent from the data during data analysis. This is important, as there were discrepancies between what ranked as influential in some cases, versus what was emergent from the case during analysis. Similarly, there were emerging findings that did not necessarily relate to the participation criteria set out during the recruitment phase of the study. This is summarised on the comparative table in Table 5 below for ease of reference.

	Deirdre's Influences	Alan's Influences	Isabel's Influences	Sarah's Influences	Peter's Influences	Cora's Influences
1.	Own experience as ST	Further Study	Own experience as ST	Own experience as ST	Reflection on practice and engagement	Own experience as ST
2.	Droichead Training	Principal	Student Teachers	Student Teachers	Experience as a CT	First Principal
3.	Own experience as NQT	Teaching Experience	Own ITE experience	Droichead experience	General experience as a Teacher	Experience as CT
4.	Own experience of former induction process	Experience as a CT	Own experience as Class Teacher	University Materials	Further Study	Student Teachers
5.	Interaction with Tutors/ ITE Inspectors	Experience of being a ST in England	Own experience as CT	Own experience as CT Own experience as Class Teacher	Own experience as ST	Experience as Class Teacher
6.	Colleagues and Friends	Student Teachers/ College Requirements	School Placement Tutors	Further Study Lecturers	Student Teachers	Experience as a Coach
7.	Experience as Autism Class Teacher	Interactions with Tutors/ University Inspectors	Droichead Experience as NQT		Experience as Teaching Principal	Colleagues
8.	School Culture		Colleagues		Other Teachers	Deputy Principal
9.	Student Teachers		Principal and Deputy	School Leaders	Interaction with DE Inspectorate	Placement Supervisor/ Tutor
10.	Principal		University Guidelines	Policy Space		Materials from the University
11.	Experience as Mainstream Teacher					
- CT: cooperating teacher - ST: student teacher						
Participation Criterion						

Table 5: *Cross-case view of participant-ranked influences on practice and elements of bricolage identified in their practice.*

Some cases referred minimally to their specific participation criterion as influential to their practice as cooperating teacher and instead emphasised unexpected elements of bricolage in their work. The forthcoming discussion aims to provide insight into the three most significant emergent findings in the data, and how cooperating teachers use these practices in enacting their role as they navigate the landscape of practice of being a cooperating teacher.

5.2 FINDING ONE – THE INFLUENCE OF INDUCTION: HOW ONE STAGE ON THE CONTINUUM OF TEACHER EDUCATION IMPACTS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH ANOTHER

Induction was an aspect of the data that featured in all cases, in some more heavily than others, but a feature of all, nonetheless. Droichead was mentioned specifically in many instances. However, the term induction is used here, as in some cases, the focus was on participants' own experiences of induction into the profession, and their early experiences of beginning to teach. As such, the term signals a broader conception of induction, beyond Droichead. Given that one of the categories of participation in the study specifically required experience as a Droichead Professional Support Team member in order to be eligible to participate, it was somewhat anticipated that Droichead would be a feature of cooperating teacher role interpretation and an element of bricolage in that case. However, the extent to which induction more generally featured in the data across cases, as a key element of bricolage in cooperating teacher role interpretation for school placement, was unexpected. The generally accepted assertion is that induction is a distinct phase on the Continuum of Teacher Education (Teaching Council 2011). However, school placement operates in that interactive space between the ITE phase and in-career development phase of teacher

education, given that school placement involves the interaction between student teachers and qualified teachers in order to ensure a successful placement experience. Given the extent to which experiences of Droichead, and induction more generally, were evident across the cases, the influence of this distinct phase on the interpretation of the role of cooperating teacher within school placement is notable. As such, this underpins the first key finding of the study.

The ways in which reference to induction manifested across the cases varied. In some cases, reference was made to experience of the induction process, and namely the Droichead process specifically, from the perspective of being a mentor. However, in other instances, the focus was on being a mentee during the Droichead process, and the experiences encountered through that lens as shaping the ways in which the role of cooperating teacher is now interpreted. In some cases, attention was drawn to or comparison made between current practices as a cooperating teacher and one's own experience of probationary models of induction into the profession. This offered an alternative viewpoint to that outlined from the perspective of Droichead, given the conceptual differences between the two models (Teaching Council 2013b). In some instances, Droichead was alluded to as an aspirational approach to supporting cooperating teachers in their enactment of the role. This again is noteworthy, given the distinct differences between ITE and induction but is worthy of appraisal in the context of this study. As such, this finding explores each of these perspectives to determine the influence of induction on interpretation of the role of the cooperating teacher. This is summarised in Figure 5.1 below.

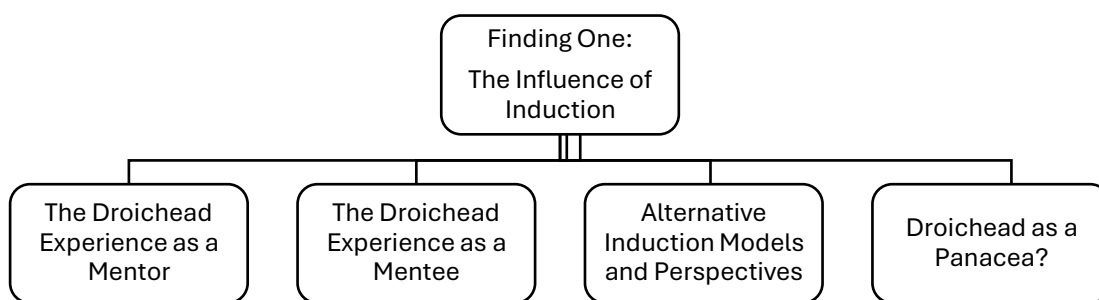


Figure 5.1: *Overview of Finding One and related sub-themes.*

5.2.1 The Droichead Experience as a Mentor

Given the clearly defined participation criteria and categories of participation for the study, as documented in Chapter Three, it was unsurprising that Deirdre drew heavily on her experience as a trained Professional Support Team (PST) member for the purposes of the Droichead process in her discussion of her role as cooperating teacher and the connections that she could identify between the two. This is evident from Deirdre’s case overview, in Chapter Four. However, this was not the only case where connections between the role of Droichead PST member and the role of cooperating teacher were explicitly made. Some similarities are evident between Deirdre and Sarah in terms of conceptualisations of the role of cooperating teacher, stemming from experience of being a mentor within Droichead, and the overlaps in practice that were identifiable. This was particularly evident when the cooperating teachers were required to engage in second-order practice tasks, like supporting student teachers to prioritise areas for development in their practice, and in interactions like giving feedback. Specific reference was made to Droichead mentor experience to guide these encounters:

‘Well, I suppose, classroom management is... you can’t do anything unless you have good classroom management and I know whenever I do... mentoring in Droichead and

you ask them you know, ‘What area do you want to focus on?’ and it’s always classroom management. And, and I always say to them like it’s so broad, classroom management like. It’s barely even a focus but they’re right. They can’t really improve on anything unless the classroom is managed well. But in the context of that girl [STUDENT TEACHER], she was only going to be there for three weeks. How was she going to like... she might only learn how to get them to be quiet and have not learned how to teach science, have not learned how to organise a PE lesson, have not learned any of the other things, because classroom management can take a while’

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

‘... there are some teachers who don’t see any problem with what they’re doing, which is really frustrating. And it’s very hard to be constantly having those challenging conversations. And I’ve had it with both student teachers and Droichead [MENTEES], where you would give the feedback. They might not request the feedback, but you feel responsible to give the feedback.’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

This is an example of how Deirdre and Sarah intertwined their conceptualisations of the role of cooperating teacher and that of Droichead mentor, while also acknowledging the nuances of each role and how some considerations may be phase specific. For example, in Sarah’s excerpt above, she highlighted a key consideration in her expectations of the student teacher and their ability to develop relationships with pupils in sporadic placement settings, while expectations might be adjusted had that individual been engaged in the sustained Droichead model over a longer period of time. This was articulated when she described applying Droichead principles, rather than specific Droichead knowledge or practices, to her work with student teachers:

‘... I never attended training on what cooperating teachers are supposed to do, but I have read all the guidelines on Droichead, because I did my masters in it... I attended PST training, so those are kind of the principles that I apply when I’m acting as a cooperating teacher, if that makes sense? So, everything that’s good for a NQT, has to be good for... a student teacher. So that’s kind of what I would use as a guide.’

(Sarah, Follow-Up Interview)

Sarah’s mention of further study is notable here. It suggests that her ability to interpret the principles underpinning one process and apply them to another may stem from engaging in policy critique through research. However, although Deirdre did not explicitly discuss the transfer of principles from her Droichead training to her work as

a cooperating teacher, such interpretation and application could also be seen in her references to observation, giving feedback and developing a collegial, team approach to supporting student teachers, all of which are features of the Droichead process (Teaching Council 2017). The similarities of approach here demonstrate the influence of practising as a Droichead mentor on cooperating teacher role enactment. Both cases exemplified cooperating teachers working as bricoleurs, in drawing on knowledge and experience from another practice accessible to them within the landscape of practice and using these creatively to enable their work as cooperating teachers.

5.2.2 The Droichead Experience as a Mentee

In contrast to the two cases above, Isabel's case offered an alternative perspective on Droichead – that of having completed the process as a newly qualified teacher herself. Isabel made explicit reference on occasion to the act of verbalising her thinking and decision-making to a student teacher when working with them in her classroom. She described oscillating between class teacher and cooperating teacher during the student teachers' observation weeks:

‘So, for observations, I suppose I would have... introduced my lesson... then set a task for the children... I would come in between-, in during the lesson to kind of speak to the student. They would have been maybe asking particular questions about certain subject areas more so than others. So maybe particularly during those subjects I'd have said ‘okay well look, this is why I did what I did here. This is why the seating arrangement is like this’...just because... especially as, as a teacher who hasn't a pile of experience, sometimes they might not understand or realise why we have things done a certain way.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

When tasked with considering why she moved between class teacher and cooperating teacher in this way, or in other words, why she transitioned from first- to second-order practice momentarily, she mentioned perhaps encountering this from the cooperating

teachers she worked with. However, an experience she drew on explicitly was that of being a Droichead mentee:

‘...when I did Droichead, I suppose how my Droichead mentor would have... guided me during lesson observations... when they came in to observe me and also when I observed... Although I wasn’t a student teacher, it was only my first year, so how the class teacher would have interacted with me when I was observing and it would have been kind of a thing of, whether it was PE or Irish... they would have said ‘Oh have you any questions?’ you know, or ‘Oh look, I usually do this’ or ‘this didn’t go as well today’.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

This momentary move between first and second-order practice is complex, and something that Isabel has modelled her practice on based on what she indicated she had experienced during her own Droichead process.

Sarah also recounted her experiences of having gone through Droichead as a mentee. However, in her case, its influence on her conceptualisation of the role was different to Isabel’s. For Sarah, she drew on her experiences of having gone through the Droichead process to develop a sympathetic stance toward the student teachers she worked with. She noted that having completed Droichead, she didn’t ‘have many experiences of being inspected’ (*Sarah, Initial Interview*). She used this to relate to the student teacher with whom she worked, sharing examples of her own vulnerabilities during an inspection, suggesting ‘...like if someone... came in to inspect me, I would have been nervous and I would have been stumbling over my words’ (*Sarah, Initial Interview*). When Sarah’s case was revisited and she was asked why she thought Droichead featured in relation to her current role as cooperating teacher, she highlighted the need for continuity between one’s experience as a student teacher and one’s experience as a Droichead mentee, drawing on her own experience to do so:

‘... school placement is kind of one step on that continuum... there should be a link between that and the Droichead process. So, between your experiences in initial teacher education and the Droichead process. In my experience, there isn’t... but there should be. But that could possibly be because like, cooperating teachers aren’t fully aware of

the connection between the two, aren't fully aware of their role and how it links to the Droichead process later on.'

(Sarah, Follow-Up Interview)

This notion of continuity is in an interesting one, as evidently both Isabel and Sarah are making connections between their experiences of being a mentee and their current role as a cooperating teacher. There is a sense that Isabel is trying to develop relationships and interactions in her role, similar to those she experienced during her induction process. Meanwhile, Sarah appears to want to support her student teachers in the manner that she envisions they will be supported during their Droichead processes, endeavouring to make clear those links between school placement and Droichead, as outlined clearly in policy, but which Sarah suggests may manifest less clearly in practice. In essence, the experience of being a Droichead mentee is considered and drawn upon in these cases, as they navigate the landscape of practice in their role as cooperating teachers.

5.2.3 Alternative Induction Models and Perspectives

Although there was significant reference to Droichead in some of the cases analysed within the study, two of the cases highlighted alternative experiences, models and perspectives on teacher induction, which subsequently influenced how the role of cooperating teacher was understood and enacted in each case.

While Deirdre's case drew on her knowledge and experiences of being a Droichead mentor, she emphasised that she was in fact, a product of the probationary model of teacher induction, the predecessor to the Droichead process. She made explicit links between her sense of feeling unsupported during her probation period and having to find a colleague whom she could turn to when experiencing that lack of

support. As such, she signalled her desire to now be that support for student teachers in her role as cooperating teacher, in advance of their transition to NQT status:

‘...when I go back to when I did the dip⁵, it was, you had two visits. You’re expected to put on a show for whatever time of day this person is coming in. There was very little support... especially with the dip process because the inspector is coming in and they’re going ‘Yeah’, tick a box, happy out, off you go. But for the rest of the year, you’re kind of swimming along, hoping that you’re doing the right things. So again, that year, and it just so happens she’s on the Droichead team with me now this year, she was my go-to person. You know, that I went to her... your silly questions that you have to ask. There is always one person that you can ask... she was as such, a mentor to me...’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

Deirdre emphasised the idea of wanting to prepare the student teachers she worked with for the ‘real world’ during their placements, because she had experienced feeling overwhelmed during her NQT year and through reflection, had identified opportunities where she could have learned more about the realities of being a teacher during school placement:

‘...this NQT year for me, that was me completely thrown into the deep end, which was fine but if I look back at my final year placement, I should have probably sought more responsibility, looked at the bigger picture.’

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

This manifests in her approach to the role of cooperating teacher, where she now has the mindset of ‘hang on a second, this time next year, you’re me... you’re going to be the one standing up there’ and suggesting that the realities of classroom life are ‘... the things you need to be finding out in your final year placement’ (*Deirdre, Initial Interview*). This demonstrates that sense of responsibility she now feels towards the student teachers with whom she works, because of her own experience of feeling unsupported during her NQT year.

⁵ The Probationary Model for NQTs, often referred to colloquially as the ‘dip’, short for diploma, involved inspections of the NQT’s practice by external agents, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education. This model ceased on the completion of the Droichead Growth Phase in 2020, when Droichead became the sole model of teacher induction into the profession.

Arguably, that sense of duty and responsibility was also evident in Cora's case, but here, it stemmed from her positive experiences of a school-specific induction model which offered support as she began to teach, a stark contrast to Deirdre's induction year. As highlighted earlier, Cora emphasised the role of her first principal, and the value of 'mentoring' that was embedded within their school, which she indicated was 'very kind of, early stages' as an initiative within the education system in Ireland. She noted how she has been teaching for 20 years but remembers how she was assigned a 'mentor teacher on the staff. You know, a more experienced... member of staff and she was my go-to person, and you know, always checked on me' (*Cora, Follow-Up Interview*). The influence that this experience continues to have on Cora's practice as cooperating teacher is made explicit throughout her case. However, she articulated it succinctly when she verbalised the notion of wanting to share what had been supportive for her with the student teachers with whom she now works:

'...I felt supported and it was good to have that, I suppose, level of support around me... that has I suppose, always stayed with me... you try to bring that forward and... have that level of support then for, for your own, when you have student teachers coming to you...'

(Cora, Follow-Up Interview)

The sense of responsibility to the student teacher is evident here in both Deirdre and Cora's cases. While their experiences were irrefutably different, based on the types of probationary or induction models that they encountered when they began to teach, their sense of duty to support student teachers to feel equipped and supported while on school placement or as they transition from student teacher to NQT is clear. It is evident that they have reflected on their experiences, and in doing so, have developed these experiences into second-order knowledge in order to teach first-order practice. As a result, this then supports how they navigate their current role within the landscape of practice.

5.2.4 Droichead as a Panacea?

While in the cases of Deirdre, Sarah and Isabel above, Droichead was referred to from the perspective of experience of or with the process and the subsequent influence that could be identified on their practice as cooperating teacher, Droichead also featured in three of the cases in a different manner. In these cases, an idealised view of the Droichead model as supporting cooperating teacher practice fully and effectively was evident. This occurred through emphasis on the training provided as part of Droichead, as equipping teachers with the necessary skills to engage in the role of cooperating teacher. It also manifested in discussion about the structural approaches and support used in implementing Droichead. Given the distinct differences between and nuances in both ITE and induction, this needs to be explored in more depth.

Peter appeared to be a strong advocate for Droichead as being a possible solution to the challenges he faced in managing his dual role as teaching principal and cooperating teacher when hosting a student teacher on school placement. As evident in his case overview, he is an experienced teacher who has engaged in further study and demonstrated ways he applied concepts like coaching to his work with student teachers. Yet, he felt he was underprepared to support student teachers in certain regards. As such, he suggested that undergoing Droichead ‘upskilling’ would support his understanding of cooperating teacher role enactment. He commented on the link between the two:

‘...I suppose looking down the lines as regard Droichead... upskilling, I suppose, how beneficial that would be... that I’d know exactly then... where to steer them. I suppose I’d feel more better prepared. Even something to come as regards looking at plans... Should I be looking at their plans?’

(Peter, Initial Interview)

Here Peter demonstrates what appears to be a synonymous understanding of the role of cooperating teacher for school placement and the role of PST member for the

purposes of Droichead, despite distinctions between the two in the policy landscape. It signals a lack of clarity about the specific tasks or responsibilities expected of cooperating teachers in practice, whereas such responsibilities seem to be more clearly defined for PST members. Such synonymity likely stems from the absence of formalised professional learning for cooperating teachers, but the Department of Education-approved professional learning for PST members. Yet, Peter highlighted an important insight, namely the systemic barriers within the education system to small schools and access to Droichead. One such barrier is that professional learning for those willing to become members of a PST to support NQTs with Droichead is typically only available to staff in a school where and when an NQT is present. When questioned about whether he had engaged in the training to become a Droichead PST member, Peter noted:

‘No, I applied for it alright but didn’t get it because we don’t have anyone... applying for Droichead in the school. And we won’t have either, because there won’t be much movement in the school, but we’d applied for it alright.’

(Peter, Initial Interview)

This suggests a dichotomy in this case between the perspective at school level about the usefulness of Droichead training and the barriers then faced in accessing such training, regardless of the fact that such training is not outwardly intended to equip teachers for their role as cooperating teacher for the purposes of school placement.

Peter’s case was not the only case where an aspirational view of Droichead as being beneficial to cooperating teacher role understanding and conceptualisation was evident. Alan and Deirdre also emphasised their perspective on Droichead as influencing cooperating teacher practice and school placement. In both cases, it was referred to it in terms of the transferability of the Droichead process to school placement and the role of the cooperating teacher within it:

‘...in the Droichead system, you’ve gone away obviously completely from the inspector knocking on the door and terrifying the life out of you [LAUGHS] to a... much, much better system now... it’s even better than the system they had in the UK... but in terms of, that was for teachers say on their probation year, whereas the student teachers coming in, I think they could go somewhere along that line... the [COOPERATING] teacher would have a much bigger influence I think, in the class that they’re in.

(Alan, Follow-Up Interview)

‘I think because I have been through the Droichead process... you can see that the majority of the time, it works. There is a system in place there that is good. Yes, there’s room for improvement, but it is good, and it is being practised all over the country... there’s a system to follow. It’s fairly straightforward... So, if you could transfer that over to cooperating teachers and student teachers... they might have to break it down a bit because obviously the Droichead training... it’s four days... and there’s some... follow-up training, etc., but the system is there. Everyone is aware. You have your indicators; you’ve your standards of good quality practice. It’s very clear what’s there.’

(Deirdre, Follow-Up Interview)

While the adjustments that may be required are alluded to, particularly by Deirdre, the view of the Droichead model as being transferable is complex, given the structural supports, barriers and differences evident in the system between the operationalisation of Droichead and the operationalisation of school placement on the ground in schools. This will be considered further in Chapter Six. Lack of recognition of these complexities in the above cases contributes to the idealised view of Droichead presented here.

5.2.5 Finding One Conclusion

Finding One has demonstrated the influence of induction within the six cases through presentation of the cross-case analysis. What is evident, is that despite the nuances of each case, and the varied experiences drawn on as the cooperating teachers worked as bricoleurs, each case conceptualised induction as an influence on their practice in school placement. In some cases, this was an outward influence that was prevalent throughout the study, while in other cases, it was a more implicit reference to how induction shapes interpretation of the cooperating teacher role. While ITE and

induction both sit along the continuum of teacher education, the two are considered distinct phases within it. This indicates that while elements of induction may informally support school placement as a facet of ITE, the unique aspects of each phase must also be recognised.

The insights provided in this finding suggest that in some cases, cooperating teachers have not considered the nuances of both phases of the continuum of teacher education, and how practice may need to be adapted or adjusted in the borrowing of skills, knowledge or experience from the practice of teacher induction to the practice of school placement. There are evident boundaries and peripheries between the two practices, and the cases encounter these to different extents. This is particularly evident in Peter's case, where this finding speaks to an unevenness within the system, where some schools can access Droichead training and others cannot, due to school size or the unlikelihood of employing an NQT. Therefore, when peripheries between the practices of induction and ITE are encountered, and cooperating teachers can borrow from one practice to another, those schools who cannot avail of professional learning for Droichead are disadvantaged, as one phase of the continuum of teacher education is missing from the experiences of the staff of those schools. This then has ramifications for student teachers who go to those schools on placement. Ultimately, these considerations demonstrate the complexity in the interaction between induction and ITE in the work of the cooperating teacher.

5.3 FINDING TWO – THE ENIGMA OF EXPERIENCE: HOW WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE SHAPES THE HERE AND NOW

As evident in Finding One, experiences of induction were significant in how the role of cooperating teacher was conceptualised and enacted across the six cases. However, experience more broadly, as formative in the role of cooperating teacher, was an extensive feature of all cases analysed within the study. All six cases demonstrated the influence that their personal experiences of school placement had on their enactment of their role as cooperating teacher. This experience can be divided into experience as a student teacher and experience of having been a cooperating teacher over time. This is summarised in Figure 5.2 below.

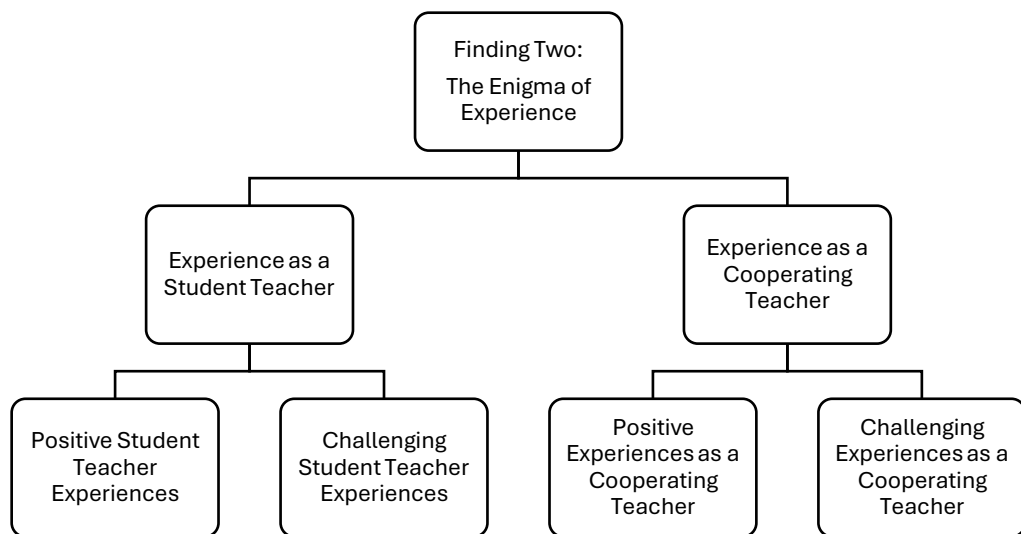


Figure 5.2: *Overview of Finding Two and related sub-themes.*

As visually evident, these two key experiences can be further categorised, as in some cases, these experiences were discussed as influences arising from a positive experience or those arising from a challenging experience. In some instances, there was reference to both positive and challenging experiences and how they shaped subsequent conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher. These will be explored

below across the cases, to examine the ways in which experience of school placement influences cooperating teacher engagement with the role.

5.3.1 Experience as a Student Teacher

All six cases included reference to the cooperating teachers' experiences of being student teachers themselves. This varied between cases, where some experiences were recounted vividly, while others were alluded to, but not expanded upon. In all instances, these experiences acted as a springboard to current practice as a cooperating teacher. In some cases, this manifested as a desire to replicate the type of experience they had had as a student teacher, where they felt supported and understood by their cooperating teacher. However, in other cases, their current practice derived from having encountered a challenging experience as a student teacher. In some instances, these challenges acted as stimuli for professional growth, but in others, they resulted in a desire to prevent the student teachers with whom they now worked going through something similar, due to their negative impact.

5.3.1.1 Positive Student Teacher Experiences

Positive experiences of being a student teacher were identifiable in all six cases, and the cooperating teachers referred to drawing on these experiences at different intervals in terms of how they now enacted their role when working with student teachers. This positivity was explicitly emphasised in these cases in terms of the interactions they as student teachers had had with the cooperating teachers who hosted them on placement. Alan used terms like 'helpful', 'kind' and 'supportive' when discussing a cooperating teacher he worked with during his ITE in England, and

the notion that he would ‘try to model that’ when ‘dealing with a student teacher’ himself (*Alan, Initial Interview*). Similarly, Deirdre spoke of two particular cooperating teachers who offered her ‘support’ and who ‘could not have done enough’ to support her throughout two of her placements. She signalled wanting to emulate that through considering ‘okay, how can I do a similar job to what they did for me...’ in her own practice as cooperating teacher (*Deirdre, Follow-Up Interview*). Cora delved further into this idea, recounting her initial experiences of hosting a student teacher on placement:

‘...I suppose I drew on... the class teachers, the cooperating teachers... that I had had as a student teacher and I suppose how they helped me and how they guided me and what support they were to me and I used that knowledge I suppose... to inform me and to, to how I helped those first couple of student teachers those first couple of years.’

(*Cora, Initial Interview*)

When asked whether those experiences of being a student teacher and interacting with cooperating teachers was something Cora still drew on (twenty years on from being a student, and having worked with multiple student teachers since), Cora emphasised:

‘Oh yeah. I find it very easy, even though it’s quite a long time ago... I find it easy to still, I can put myself in their shoes... you know, you want to find out something, well when I was... at that stage, there was so much I wanted to find out and just, you would glean as much as you can from... your cooperating teacher and the class teacher at the time... I remember that so clearly...’

(*Cora, Follow-Up Interview*)

This is indicative of the power and longevity of those experiences and interactions as a student teacher, typified by Cora’s acknowledgement of the influence of that experience on her current practice. This is despite the fact she has enacted the role of cooperating teacher on multiple occasions since then. Peter’s case also demonstrated a similar sense of the lasting impact of being a student teacher. He drew on the interactions he had with the cooperating teachers he worked with, and how he used this experience in his practice. In fact, Peter identified his experience as a student

teacher as still being a key influence in his enactment of the role of cooperating teacher to date, as evident in Figure 4.10 in Chapter Four. He gave a particular example of how influential his experience as a student teacher had been when he initially became a cooperating teacher:

‘I would have had that...if you asked me that after the first one, my first experience, that might have been in my top four because, say when the first teacher I did have, like, that’s what I was relying on... because I was just thinking back to... my own experience as a student teacher and... what the class teacher did for me... how they made me feel or what their role was. Where were they sitting? What kind of questions they asked. I think the biggest thing is you know, did I feel supported and that you know?... which I did.’

(Peter, Follow-Up Interview)

This is notable because both Peter and Cora are experienced teachers. Yet they both recounted memories of the affective dimensions of the cooperating teacher’s role, like how they felt and whether they were supported, as well as the practical dimensions of the role, based on how they experienced them. Cora has many years of experience working as a teacher and cooperating teacher, while Peter has engaged in postgraduate study, with coaching and mentoring components. Yet, both continue to draw on their experience of being a student teacher, despite the varied experiences they have both had since their own time as students. In their cases, they both spoke of positive encounters. However, in some cases, more challenging experiences of being a student teacher were uncovered.

5.3.1.2 Challenging Student Teacher Experiences

In four of the six cases, attention was drawn to more challenging experiences or memories of being a student teacher. Although Alan and Deirdre’s examples of feeling supported by some cooperating teachers were highlighted previously in Part One of the findings, there were also examples of how challenging experiences as

student teachers shaped current interpretation of the role in these cases. For Alan and Sarah, their cases provided examples of how difficulties in relationships, developing rapport or contrasting perspectives impacted on their student teacher experience:

‘I had two main experiences... the first teacher, ahm, wasn’t the friendliest at all [LAUGHS]... I observed her for a while and then I taught in the class... I came in one Monday morning, and I was very much under the weather. It was genuinely a heavy head cold and I wasn’t feeling great. But she more or less accused me of hanging of a hangover and I was extremely unimpressed with that... she was not a nice person...’

(Alan, Initial Interview)

‘Yeah, there was definitely one. And it’s funny, because I actually worked with that teacher later in my career and we were great buddies. But when I was a student teacher, there was no rapport. There was no rapport built, between me and the other student teacher that was there. And I remember struggling.... That was my first teaching practice, and I remember struggling big time anyway, because it was my first teaching practice, or school placement as it’s called now... I didn’t think that I could ask her for help... I didn’t think that I could approach her.’

(Sarah, Follow-Up Interview)

These excerpts suggest that both Alan and Sarah experienced cooperating teachers who did not recognise the need for or value in relationship development with them as student teachers. In both cases, it appears they, as student teachers, were treated very much as ‘student’, with the cooperating teacher giving little regard to the fact that they might be colleagues in the future, as was the case in Sarah’s experience. When asked about why these examples were drawn upon, Alan referred to reflecting on his experience as described above but emphasising that he tries to ‘take the good experiences’, as alluded to earlier, and model those with the student teachers whom he supports. Similarly, Sarah used the above example to highlight why she focuses on rapport building as a key feature of her work and interaction with student teachers, because this was something that she did not experience in the scenario above, but something that she considers central to an effective relationship with student teachers:

‘I suppose if you’re going to be working with someone, like you have to have a rapport. You have to have a good working relationship with them...’

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

In this instance, Sarah seems to have developed a different conceptualisation of the relationship between student teacher and cooperating teacher from the interaction she herself experienced as a student, particularly as she refers to the idea of ‘working with’ student teachers. These examples are indicative of the notion that in these cases, cooperating teachers try to ensure that the challenging experiences they encountered during their time as a student teacher are not replicated for the students with whom they now work. This is a clear demonstration of how these experiences influence their current role interpretation and enactment.

Isabel’s case shed light on an alternative perspective on experience of being a student teacher, arguably a perspective showing more vulnerability than the examples above from Alan’s and Sarah’s cases. As documented in section 4.5.1 in the previous chapter, the student teacher experience was central to conceptualisations of the role of cooperating teacher for Isabel and particularly the affective elements of that experience. Words like ‘nervous’, ‘apprehensive’ and ‘uncomfortable’ could be found in the data, and when asked why this kind of language might have been used in relation to her experience as a student teacher, and now as a cooperating teacher, Isabel commented:

‘... I think for me, if I think back to... my own placements, I think it challengingly impacted my teaching, because I nearly held back out of embarrassment, or I might not have thrown myself fully into it.... in my head I thought ‘oh, they’re watching me... sure that was awful. They probably think I’m dreadf-’ you know, all those types of things.’

(Isabel, Follow-Up Interview)

How this now influences her current practice is evident when she indicates that...

‘...I’d be conscious that I wouldn’t want to knock somebody’s spirits. And I might think to myself ‘well, they’re probably actually very nervous.’ If I wasn’t in the room, would they be a little bit more relaxed? You know, for a short period. I know in one sense, it’s a bit of security for the student as well, but yeah. Because I was so conscious of ‘oh God, the teacher probably thinks I’m awful’ or ‘that was a dreadful lesson’ or ‘I have no control here’ you know, that I would be very conscious of it when I have a student [TEACHER] in my room.... I would say to them... ‘I’m in the room; I’m not watching everything you’re doing or listening to everything you’re saying. If you need me, I’m here’”

(Isabel, Follow-Up Interview)

In the data, Isabel acknowledges that not all her placement experiences were challenging, and that her cooperating teachers were supportive for the most-part. However, the way in which her negative view of her own practice on placement has influenced the way she now engages is irrefutable. It signals Isabel’s astuteness to relate closely with the student teachers whom she now supports. This is evident in her case overview, where her awareness of how challenging experiences on placement could impact on a student teacher’s confidence is alluded to and her desire to then use her position as cooperating teacher to give those students a ‘positive experience’ is emphasised. There are similarities here between Isabel and Deirdre, as Deirdre also referenced the emotive elements of being a student teacher. She acknowledged that ‘my final year placement was survival, it wasn’t me thriving’, but at the same time recognised that she ‘should have probably sought more responsibility, looked at the bigger picture’ (*Deirdre, Initial Interview*). The difference between Isabel and Deirdre’s cases, however, is how these experiences have shaped their interpretation of their role within school placement. It is evident that Isabel displays a sensitivity in her actions, cognisant of how previous experiences might impact student teacher practice, sometimes holding back some of the feedback that may be required. Meanwhile Deirdre displays a more action-orientated approach, aiming to give student teachers more ‘responsibility now, when they have you as that little like, back-up’ (*Deirdre,*

Initial Interview), before they become an NQT. While the approaches may differ, how they are shaped by experience as a student teacher is visible.

5.3.2 Experience as a Cooperating Teacher

Like experience as a student teacher, personal experience as a cooperating teacher was evident across all six cases. This was also referenced in positive and challenging ways and highlighted how having engaged in the role previously shaped how cooperating teachers in the six cases interpreted and enacted their role when working with student teachers. In most instances, this was a key influence in how the role was conceptualised and something that was regularly drawn upon by the cooperating teachers in learning how to do what they do in their role within school placement.

5.3.2.1 Positive Experiences as a Cooperating Teacher

Instances of having had positive experiences as a cooperating teacher were identifiable in all six cases. In most of these scenarios, the positive experiences were centred around well-developed relationships with the student teachers, opportunities for cooperating teachers to encourage student teachers to expand their learning and take initiative, and student teachers seeking or being responsive to support as needed throughout the placement. These experiences were visible in different ways in each case but tended to focus on these key aspects, as summarised in Figure 5.3.

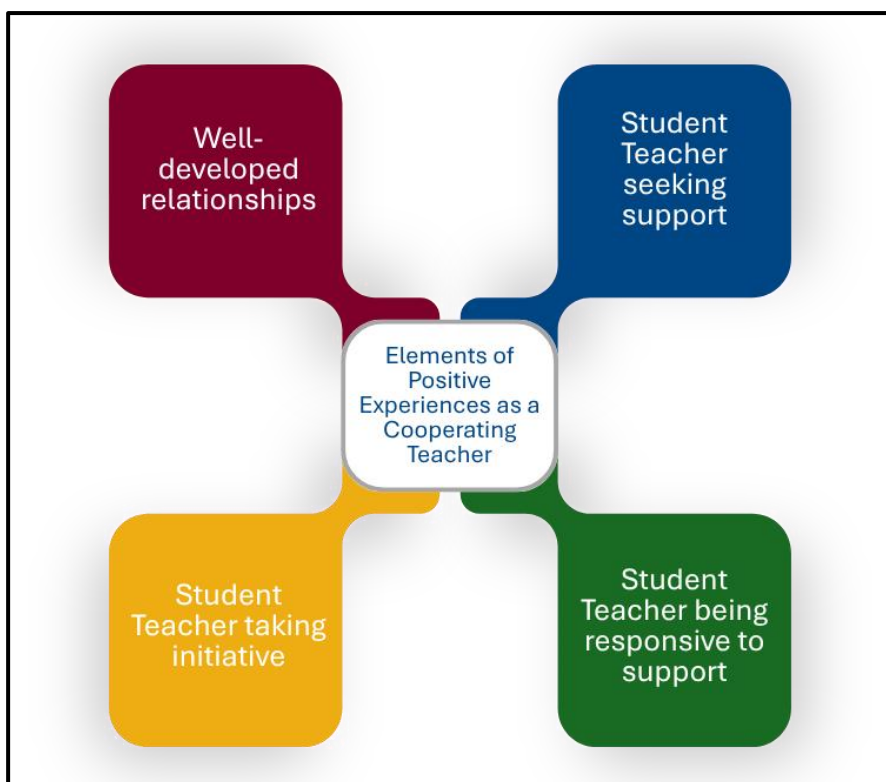


Figure 5.3: *Emergent aspects associated with positive experiences of school placement as a cooperating teacher.*

While relationships will be explored in more detail in Finding Three below, well-developed and positive relationships contributed to positive experiences of school placement for cooperating teachers and influenced the ways in which they engaged in their role as a result. This is exemplified in the cases of Sarah and Deirdre, where similarities were evident in how they enacted the role with a student teacher whom they felt they had developed a strong relationship with:

‘...so yeah, after a little while... we got really close. We got on really, really well... we kind of bonded after the, her first inspection I don’t think went very well and obviously most people can relate to that, not going very well and the stress of that... we used to just chat when the kids went home... she’d be telling me about the lessons she was teaching the next day...’

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

‘...that experience was lovely because it was a two-way process... we were both learning from each other, but she was willing to accept all of the help but also willing

to come with new ideas and try new things and not be afraid to throw things out there... That was probably my favourite experience.'

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

The notion of getting on with one another, and what that then enabled Deirdre and Sarah to do with the student teacher during the placement evidently shaped how they perceived their experience and what they wanted to get from it. The idea that they could collaborate with the student teacher and tease things out with them through open discussion, is indicative of what is aspired to in the responsibilities outlined in the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021). From the way this experience is discussed, it would suggest that both Sarah and Deirdre were comfortable in their role as cooperating teacher and what they would expect the role to be like in an ideal situation.

Deirdre's reference to student teacher willingness to accept support and guidance is something that came up in some of the other cases. Such willingness provided opportunities for cooperating teachers to engage in the supportive, encouragement and feedback aspects of their role and contribute positively to their experience of the process. For example, Cora highlighted her role in supporting student teachers to be open to feedback and enhance their willingness to accept guidance from the cooperating teacher:

'They need to hear the positives. They need to see what they're doing well... everybody does... you learn and grow from that and then I suppose, they're more open to the discussion then and the feedback... constructive kind of feedback then...'

(Cora, Initial Interview)

Cora was not alone in stressing the importance of recognising what was going well for student teachers and encouraging them to show initiative during their placement. Similar sentiments were evident in Alan's case, where he recounted instances of student teachers being highly prepared and having 'everything under control', while

also taking initiative by trying new methodologies and classroom management strategies. This contributed to his positive experience of being a cooperating teacher and being ‘relaxed’, without the worry of having to intervene constantly.

Peter recounted a somewhat different perspective, particularly in his initial experience of being a cooperating teacher. He stated his hesitancy to engage as a cooperating teacher:

‘I’d never had a, a student teacher. It was probably, maybe ten years into actually teaching and up to that point, ten years, I would have been saying ‘No I’m grand, I want to hold onto my class.’

(Peter, Initial Interview)

When encouraged to further expand on why this hesitancy was present, Peter elaborated:

‘... I suppose a lot of it like rested on... the time of year... Usually, say the few times I was asked, it was... maybe September, October... November kind of time and I, I don’t know, just as regards... getting to grips with your class and actually... doing a bit of groundwork and setting in a good foundation... having a student teacher in, if it is for three or four weeks like... that’s a month gone out of the calendar, where I just felt like God, I’d be, I’d be chasing my tail. Whereas if I had them myself for September, October, November, December... I’d have them in a good place, till say up to Christmas.’

(Peter, Follow-Up Interview)

While acknowledging these organisational and temporal considerations, he also spoke about the challenges he faced during that initial experience, like ‘releasing that responsibility to the student teacher’ and ‘knowing when to interject or not’ (*Peter, Initial Interview*). However, that said, Peter reflected on the experience as positive and as influencing his subsequent enactment of the role when he next engaged as a cooperating teacher:

‘I’m glad I did it the first time because... you learn from I suppose the mistakes you might have made and you have some idea ahm, of what to expect... you really think about it from the perspective of the, the student teacher... Like straight away, I said to

myself 'Right, the first few lessons or the first few days, mistakes will be made... just let it happen, and you have to kind of release that control.'

(Peter, Initial Interview)

Despite the initial uncertainty Peter experienced when first enacting the role, he harnessed this as a positive learning experience. This is indicative of the myriad ways in which positive experiences of being a cooperating teacher were identified across the cases and how these experiences shaped how the role of cooperating teacher was and is enacted as a result. However, in some cases, challenging experiences in the role of cooperating teacher were also identified, and these too contributed to how the role was interpreted and enacted subsequently.

5.3.2.2 Challenging Experiences as a Cooperating Teacher

Across the six cases, there was evidence of instances where cooperating teachers were challenged in their role or their practice as a cooperating teacher. This sometimes influenced how they then viewed or enacted their role. Some of the more challenging experiences included difficulty in engaging in certain aspects of the role, like supporting a student teacher or giving feedback, due to student teacher resistance to such support. Challenging experiences stemming from uncertainty in the role and trying to determine what one should or should not do in particular situations also featured.

In Isabel's case, a challenge encountered was knowing exactly what to do in certain circumstances, like when faced with a student teacher who required significant cooperating teacher support or when trying to ascertain what was expected of the role within the context of her own school. She highlighted her interaction with colleagues as helping to support this:

‘ ‘They’re finding this particular thing difficult... do you have any ahm advice?’ Probably that’s what I’ve done so far... I’ve never gone to management to speak about a student teacher who was struggling massively. So, it would be just... my colleagues...’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

However, this case also demonstrated that such interaction with colleagues was not solely a one-way process and in her reflective log, Isabel reflected on a conversation she had had with colleagues who were enacting the role at that time. The discussion focused on knowing how much support to give to a student teacher, without over-guiding their practice. She reflected on the need for clearer guidance in the role, in order to support role interpretation at school level:

‘...the teacher wasn’t really quite sure like, she was very happy to help, but she wasn’t sure how much direction she should be giving or... should they be trying to decide and come with some of that on your own. Or is it okay to completely kind of give them the whole topic?... that was just one thing that I thought... maybe would be an area that’s a little bit unclear for teachers and for students [STUDENT TEACHERS].’

(Isabel, Reflective Log)

‘I think maybe if we did have a bit more guidance or training... it might avoid that happening a little bit more.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

While in Isabel’s case, challenging experiences were identified in the form of uncertainty in the role, Cora and Deirdre’s cases documented how challenging encounters with student teachers can require specific skills and strategies for approaching such situations. For example, Cora recounted a particular scenario where there was limited communication between her and a student teacher and the complexity that such a scenario added to her role:

‘I found there were a few more challenges this year maybe than other years... in terms of the communication... finding time I suppose for communication and... the student teacher being more willing and open... I suppose not having much questions or you know like when a, when a student doesn’t want to communicate with you or is gone kind of at the end of every day straight away, it doesn’t leave you a lot of time. Or they didn’t, they didn’t sort of want a whole lot of support or guidance or help... and it has happened you know, but that was a bigger challenge to me, as to how I suppose to deal with that... how to help them, yeah, in a positive way...’

(Cora, Initial Interview)

Dealing with this complex situation proved challenging for Cora and led her to making adaptations to her previous interpretations of the role, in attempts to scaffold interactions with the student teacher, like suggesting ‘will we team teach?’, offering ‘strategies’ and creation of a ‘lesson plan together’ (*Cora, Initial Interview*). While Cora acknowledged that these strategies did not necessarily always work, their use suggests innovation in the role, and the igniting of creative ideas and approaches when faced with challenge.

Deirdre had similar experiences and encounters in her role, again emphasising the challenge of trying to support a student who was experiencing difficulty. Like Cora however, this case framed the challenge as a springboard for innovation of approach to the role of cooperating teacher. For Deirdre, this innovation came through the collaborative approach she adopted with her principal, where they ‘kind of came up with a bit of a plan’ as to how to approach the complexity of the situation, while supporting both the student teacher and the students in Deirdre’s class. She acknowledged that she felt somewhat overwhelmed in dealing with the complexities and realities of being a cooperating teacher, particularly on her first occasion of doing so, but noted that ‘I also asked my principal for support at the time because I said ‘Look, I’m feeling a little out of my depth here....’” (*Deirdre, Initial Interview*). Deirdre worked through a process to move from challenge to innovation, which involved consultation with her principal and colleagues and regular structured meetings with the student teacher to support their emergent needs. Although being initially faced with a challenge, this difficulty led to a collaborative, problem-solving approach, which ultimately resulted in innovation in the role in order to address the challenge in a creative and collaborative manner.

Despite facing challenges in the role of cooperating teacher, none of the six cases indicated that such challenges negatively impacted their interpretation or enactment of the role. In fact, in some instances, like in the cases of Isabel, Cora and Deirdre above, the challenges that presented stimulated discussion and collaboration with colleagues, a deep engagement with or reconceptualisation of the role, or the development of innovative approaches to and in the role, drawing on a variety of experiences and practices available to them, with the aim of ultimately enhancing student teacher practice.

5.3.3 Finding Two Conclusion

Finding Two has demonstrated the influence that experience plays in conceptualisation of the role of the cooperating teacher in practice. Evidently, across the six cases, experience was used in multiple ways to shape how the role was interpreted, understood and/or enacted. Experience is a key influence on cooperating teacher practice in the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, and as such forms a strong component of cooperating teacher bricolage in the cases explored. In each case, the cooperating teacher draws on this experience at different junctures as they navigate the landscape of practice. However, with experience can come assumptions, misunderstandings, misinterpretations and negative associations. Caution must be heeded to the extent that experience is relied upon in a role with clearly defined responsibilities from the policy perspective. Consideration of the complexities associated with reliance on experience as a key influence in professional learning for one's role will be explored further in the discussion.

5.4 FINDING THREE – THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS: HOW INTERACTION WITH OTHERS INFLUENCES INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE OF COOPERATING TEACHER

The place of the other was a feature evident across all six cases. There were many instances where all six cases referred to others as shaping their interpretation or enactment of their role as cooperating teacher during school placement. This is evident in the myriad of ‘others’ visible in the influences on practice and elements of bricolage in each of the six individual case overviews. However, the ways in which these others were referred to or influential on practice varied, some being explicitly evident within the case, while others were alluded to. Three of the most significant ‘others’ identifiable in the cases were student teachers, colleagues and school leaders. This finding explores the ways in which relationships with these influential others impacted cooperating teacher practice across the six cases. The sub-themes are summarised in Figure 5.4 below.

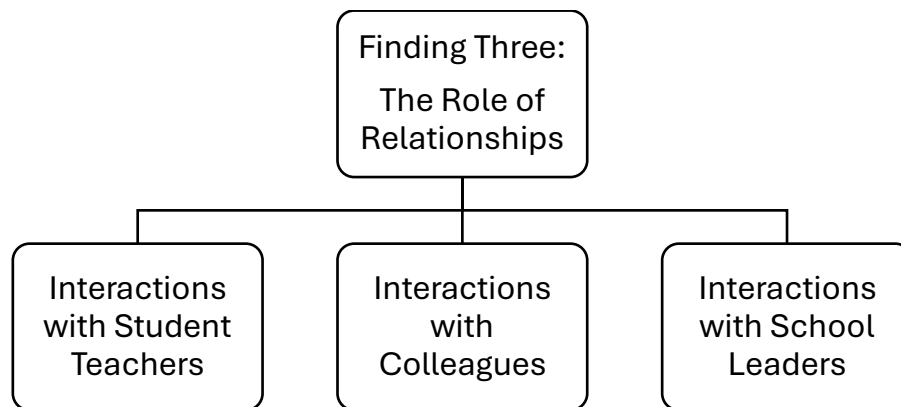


Figure 5.4: *Overview of Finding Three and related sub-themes.*

5.4.1 Interactions with Student Teachers

Examples were evident in all cases of how interactions with student teachers influenced the ways in which cooperating teachers enacted their role. Many of the

cases demonstrated how interaction with student teachers caused a shift from first- to second-order practice for the cooperating teachers, and the onus on them to then step into this space in response. This was acknowledged in the cases in different ways:

‘...with a student teacher like, they do sit down and say ‘...can you give me feedback on this lesson?’ or ‘What can I do?’ and I’m thinking to myself ‘well, right... how do I approach this like?’ As regards, I am going to keep it positive, because I’m thinking of... my own experiences as well...’

(Peter, Initial Interview)

‘I would have chatted with him a lot during the observation week and obviously he might have been watching lessons and things and asking me questions about how I approached certain things.’

(Isabel, Initial Interview)

‘...obviously week 1... there’s more input. You’re, I suppose I keep saying scaffolding but... there’s more of that. And as you realise okay... they have confidence but also, they’ll still, they’ll come to you, ask you... you can pull back that little bit. You’re there.’

(Cora, Initial Interview)

While the cooperating teachers didn’t explicitly discuss their movement between teacher of students and cooperating teacher for student teachers, it is evident here that their interaction with student teachers demanded that transition from first- to second-order practice. Through student teachers posing questions and through their seeking of feedback, it was clear across the cases that the cooperating teachers had to engage in their role in a meaningful manner, to articulate their decisions and communicate this to the student teacher with whom they worked. In the above excerpts, it is evident that the cooperating teachers created space to do this. Sarah expanded on the instances described in Peter, Isabel and Cora’s cases above, but demonstrated an added awareness of a complex but central facet of the role of cooperating teacher – the making of tacit knowledge explicit. She shared the following encounter, which is symbolic of her understanding:

‘...we’d be talking in general terms, and they’d be like ‘Yeah so when you get their attention... show me again what you do.’ And I was like ‘I have no idea what you’re

talking about. Like, how do I get their attention?’ And they’re like ‘Oh no, you just kind of clap or something.’ And I was like ‘Do I?’... I had no idea I was doing that. So, it was kind of them, that conversation that brought to my attention that there are so many things that you do as a teacher when you’re teaching a long time that seem so easy to you, that they’re... not even important because they’re so blatantly obvious. But to someone who’s not a teacher quite yet... that’s invaluable... And that’s just one example. There’s probably so many other things that I do during the day that I don’t have to think about, that are automatic, that someone who’s a first year [STUDENT TEACHER] hasn’t a clue how to do... There are so many things that they don’t know, and we do, but we don’t even consider that knowledge. We just consider it teaching.’

(Sarah, Initial Interview)

This exemplifies the impact of the interaction between student teacher and cooperating teacher in how the role of cooperating teacher is conceptualised across the six cases. While there were differences between how the cooperating teachers identified their interaction with student teachers, in all cases, scenarios were present where cooperating teachers were prompted into the second-order practice space through the interaction, which hence influenced their conceptualisation of the role in practice.

5.4.2 Interactions with Colleagues

Interactions with colleagues were another key influence evident in how cooperating teachers learned about and conceptualised their roles in certain cases. This occurred in various ways but demonstrated a visible influence on practice. Deirdre spoke about drawing on her Droichead experience as a mentor extensively, as evident in section 5.2 above. However, given that a collaborative team approach is central to the Droichead process (Teaching Council 2017), there was evidence that Deirdre applied this approach to her work as a cooperating teacher. She liaised with colleagues to support her engagement with the role and accordingly, to better support the student teachers whom she hosted:

‘...that’s one of the other things I forgot to mention a while ago, is that I do encourage my student teachers to do... if they’re in with me in 5th class, I make sure that they get to observe in Juniors or Seniors, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th, do you know?... because if

they're in looking at me, I have a very particular style of teaching than someone else might have. And when they come back to me, I'll go 'what did you see? What worked well?' And then we can have those conversations of why do you do that, why do you do this? And then I can justify why I do what I do.'

(Deirdre, Initial Interview)

This innovative approach signifies the value Deirdre places on a collegial approach in her work and how she interprets her role within the broader context of the school. It also suggests a whole-school approach to supporting observation as a learning process, where teachers are open to being observed, knowing that this will subsequently form part of a professional conversation on teaching and learning. As such, this approach supports Deirdre in engaging in reflective, second-order discussions with student teachers following observation, in order to deepen their understanding of particular ideas, strategies or decisions.

Cora also emphasised interactions with colleagues as influencing her practice, albeit, in a less intentionally collaborative manner than that recounted by Deirdre. However, the emphasis on collegial interaction in Cora's case arose from encountering difficulty. As evident in Cora's case overview and in section 5.3.2 above, such difficulty was highlighted in terms of challenging experiences with student teachers. She commented on how she reached out to her 'partner teacher', the teacher who was teaching the same class level as her, who also happened to have a student teacher, to see 'was she experiencing any of the same issues' and who shared some 'pointers' with her around team-teaching and co-planning (*Cora, Initial Interview*).

Again, in a similar vein, Isabel's case also demonstrated interaction with colleagues as influencing her practice. However, it was referenced in relation to ascertaining whether one's practice as cooperating teacher aligned with that of other cooperating teachers in the school for the purposes of consistency. This is evident in Isabel's case overview, however the comments by Isabel's influential other in her

interview encapsulate the influence of colleagues on cooperating teacher practice, when she refers to checking in with others in order to ‘...make sure that I’m doing the right thing and that we’re all on the same page...’ (*Isabel’s Colleague’s Interview*).

While the interaction with colleagues differed in approach or purpose between Deirdre, Cora and Isabel’s cases, the notion that these interactions shaped interpretation of the role of cooperating teacher is clear. For Deirdre, it manifested as a collaborative approach to supporting student teachers with her colleagues, while for Cora and Isabel it consisted of discussion and sharing of practice to situate and locate personal experience or issues in the practice of others. This resulted in learning and reflection for them, through enhancing their awareness of cooperating teacher practice in the classroom.

In contrast to the cases above, Alan, Sarah and Peter placed less emphasis on their colleagues as influential in their interpretation of their role as cooperating teacher. Instead, the influence of school leaders featured more prevalently in these cases. Although technically falling within the same realm as ‘colleague’, the nuances associated with how the school leadership aspect of the case studies appeared, warrants specific, individualised consideration.

5.4.3 Interactions with School Leadership

In all cases, reference was made to school leadership. This presented in different ways in each case. For example, the role of principal and/or deputy principal was mentioned somewhat fleetingly in the cases of Isabel, Cora and Sarah. While they indicated that their school leaders impacted on their role as cooperating teacher in some way, none of these three cases leaned explicitly into this. Isabel acknowledged

that her deputy principal was her ‘mentor’ and ‘would have come in and watched’ during the Droichead process (*Isabel, Follow-Up Interview*) but did not elaborate on this extensively. In parallel, while she mentioned her principal in terms of how he would ‘check in to see how a student’ was getting on, she acknowledged that she works in a busy school, and he would not have the time to deal with individual student teachers on a regular basis. In Cora’s case, it differed slightly, where the deputy principal was another source of support, similar to her ‘partner teacher’, where she went to receive ‘one or two pieces of advice’ when experiencing a challenging situation with a student teacher (*Cora, Initial Interview*). Like Cora and Isabel, Sarah mentioned the senior leadership team in her school, but with specific regard to their impact on the school placement process by requesting student teachers supervise during their observation periods, rather than observe their cooperating teacher:

‘...that would be the principal and the deputy principal that would have been responsible for taking her and putting her in her classroom or whatever else for supervision.’

(*Sarah, Initial Interview*)

She outlined her sense of frustration with this. However, while the three cases didn’t delve into the influences of these interactions on their role in great detail, it is evident that each of the above scenarios impacted their role interpretation or enactment, or both. In the cases of Isabel and Cora, the interactions arguably shaped how they problem-solved particular situations in their roles. For Sarah, the interaction with school leadership led her to question not only her role as a cooperating teacher, but the value of school placement more widely within her school:

‘...it kind of annoyed me as well in the sense like it just showed that... they don’t take it very seriously. Maybe they do, but it felt like the administration in my school don’t take that observation week very seriously and maybe then do they not take school placement that seriously?’

(*Sarah, Initial Interview*)

This suggests that the influence of school leadership on role enactment in this case, although seemingly minimal at the outset, had deeper implications for Sarah's conceptualisation of the role.

The influence of the principal on cooperating teacher role interpretation and enactment was visible in Deirdre's case. Although she did not rank the principal as a significant influence on her practice or as influencing her role to as great an extent as some of her other key influences, there was reference to the principal at various points within the data. This included reference to working together to create a 'plan' to support a student teacher who was experiencing difficulty, as mentioned above, and reference to working together as PST members for Droichead and knowing that each member of the team looks 'out for certain things' (*Deirdre, Initial Interview*). The influence of the principal on Deirdre's practice was particularly visible in her discussion of imminent change through the retirement of her current principal and the appointment of someone new, questioning 'will that school culture continue the same or will it be completely different? Because she's [NEW PRINCIPAL] coming from a different school that she was principal of...' (*Deirdre, Follow-Up Interview*). This signals uncertainty in Deirdre's practice going forward and creates the sense that she wonders whether the innovative approaches she takes to her cooperating teacher role enactment will continue when her current principal is no longer there to facilitate such innovations. It also suggests that perhaps the ways in which the school has embraced the role and the value of school placement more generally, has resulted from the school leader's approach, rather than a whole school commitment to supporting ITE. This implies some similarities to Sarah's context, and the impact a school leader's view can have on school placement.

Like Deirdre's case, Alan's case contained multiple references to the influence of the principal on his interpretation and enactment of the role of cooperating teacher.

When asked why he thought this was so, he indicated:

‘...I suppose I see the principal as... the linchpin in the entire organisation maybe [LAUGHS]... they have a lot of experience of this kind of thing as well... If I needed any kind of advice, I know that I will definitely get it or support or help or anything at all. I know that that person is there to do what they can.’

(Alan, Follow-Up Interview)

These sentiments were echoed by the principal, who initially demonstrated surprise by being considered influential in cooperating teacher role interpretation by a member of their staff:

‘...I wasn't really aware of the influence I had [LAUGHS].’

(Alan's Principal's Interview)

Yet, when discussing the support provided to staff when they are engaged in the role, Alan's principal indicated the importance of emphasising appreciation for staff undertaking the role of cooperating teacher, and her responsibility to check in with them during that process to ensure they were content:

‘...I think it's very important then that I kind of monitor how the student is doing and make sure that they're... working as best they can and the teaching and learning is good... I wouldn't like a colleague to be upset...’

(Alan's Principal's Interview)

In piecing together Alan's perspectives and the considerations of his principal, it suggests that Alan's interpretation of the role is grounded in the understanding within his school that the role of cooperating teacher is supported by senior leadership, and not something that is done in isolation. Rather, a role where support and advice are available if and as required, and as such, can be drawn on as necessary when navigating school placement.

In contrast to all the other cases, Peter currently holds the role of principal, which offered a different perspective on cooperating teacher role enactment and the interaction with school leadership. Peter initially spoke about his experience of being a cooperating teacher and the requests made of him by his then principal, before he had taken on his current role as teaching principal. However, he did not dwell on this and instead focused on the ways in which he manages his multifaceted role as teacher, principal and intermittently, cooperating teacher. Across the other cases, it could be identified that in times of uncertainty or challenge, the cooperating teachers knew they could escalate their concerns to senior leadership within their school if required, in line with what is advocated in the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021). Peter did not have that option, given his leadership role. Instead, in his case, the sense of drawing on a variety of other practices and skillsets and adapting his practice as a cooperating teacher to meet the needs of the student teacher were evident. He applied tools from coaching and mentoring programmes he had engaged with to overcome challenges and outlined a myriad of steps to try and overcome difficulties. He eventually commented that if the difficulties persisted, after having explored all avenues he could, the school placement tutor would have to determine what would happen next: ‘if it’s still not working, at some point it will be left up to the inspector⁶...’ (*Peter, Initial Interview*). It raises the question of the supporting structures in place for teaching principals who enact the role of cooperating teacher but also highlights the way in which this multifaceted role impacts on interpretation of the role in practice during school placement.

⁶ ‘Inspector’ is the colloquial term used by some teachers and school leaders to denote the role of School Placement Tutor, the member of staff from the ITE institution who visits and assesses the student teacher while on school placement.

5.4.4 Finding Three Conclusion

Finding Three has shed light the role of the other in informing and influencing cooperating teacher interpretation and understanding of their role within school placement. Through interacting and developing relationships with student teachers, colleagues and school leaders, cooperating teachers are prompted to discuss, adapt and interrogate their practice, and move from first- to second-order practice and back. The ways in which relationships with other people influenced practice in each case were unique, yet similarities and comparisons could be identified in how cooperating teacher role interpretation was impacted as a result. As such, drawing on other people that are accessible to them is a key feature of the cooperating teacher's work as bricoleur. These ideas will be further considered and explored in the discussion chapter.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the thematic cross-case analysis arising from analysis of the six cases featured in this study. The three key findings arising from this analysis were explored, namely: The Influence of Induction; The Enigma of Experience; and The Role of Relationships. While there was variability in how these themes featured across the six cases, examples of the centrality of these themes to the ways in which the cooperating teachers learned what to do in their enactment of their role within school placement were visible. As such, exploration of these themes provided insight into how they are used as elements of bricolage in the cooperating teachers work as bricoleur, in the absence of formalised and standardised professional learning for their role. The boundaries and peripheries between these central elements and practices, and

the developing practice of the cooperating teacher within the broader landscape are evident. However, exploring these findings and their implications in the broader context of the theoretical, conceptual and research literature is important to understand their contribution to the field. As such, the following chapter brings these findings into discussion with broader discourse.

Chapter Six

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The findings and analysis have demonstrated some of the complexities associated with the ways in which cooperating teachers conceptualise their learning and preparation for their role within school placement, as they navigate the landscape of being a cooperating teacher in the Irish context. Accordingly, this shapes how cooperating teachers understand and engage with the role. Evidently, a variety of sources are used by those enacting the role to inform them of the expectations on them in the role in the six cases explored, supporting the theorisation that cooperating teachers can be bricoleurs in practice. However, contextualising these findings with regard to the broader considerations associated with cooperating teacher preparation for the role is essential in understanding the location of this study within the broader field of teacher education. In the following discussion, a number of considerations are explored to contextualise the findings further, namely: the building of the bricoleur; the intertwining stages of the continuum of teacher education; the cooperating teacher as second-order practitioner; cooperating teachers' experience; cooperating teachers' learning spaces; and working with and learning from others. In doing so, this chapter locates the study in relation to policy, research and theory in the field, to develop an understanding of how cooperating teachers learn to do what they do during school placement.

6.2 Building the Bricoleur: Complexities in Navigating the Landscape

The findings, as presented in the previous chapters, paint the complexity of the landscape and landscapes occupied and visited by the cases as cooperating teachers, navigating their role within school placement. They indeed demonstrate Wenger-

Trayner and Wenger-Trayer's (2015) argument that landscapes of practice are political and diverse, given the complex ways in which the cases navigated their practice. Understanding the nature of the landscape in this way supports an understanding of how the disposition of cooperating teacher as bricoleur can emerge to learn about and develop in one's role.

The political nature of the landscape was evident across the six cases. This manifested in different ways, consistent with the notion of tension between policy and practice, the formal and the informal (Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025; Sloan and Dolan 2025). The presence of published and identified responsibilities for those undertaking the role of cooperating teacher (Teaching Council 2021) has been mentioned heretofore. However, reference to the *Guidelines on School Placement* was sparse within the findings, and where the Guidelines were specifically mentioned, knowledge of them was vague rather than explicit. This demonstrates that in these cases, the cooperating teachers knowingly or unknowingly, avoided engaging with the policy document outlining their role and responsibilities. Although policy may strive to govern the role and the practice of those enacting it, the practice of being a cooperating teacher ultimately belongs to those enacting the role – the cooperating teachers themselves. This will be explored further later in this discussion.

That said, the findings also indicate the diverse nature of the landscapes navigated by the cooperating teachers. This is particularly evident in the varying influences on practice and elements of bricolage drawn upon by cooperating teachers across the six cases. These symbolise the diverse practices, boundaries and peripheries encountered and visited by the cooperating teachers as they learn about and engage in their role. Because of the nature of this landscape as complex and winding, evidence

of informal workplace learning was visible throughout, with the cases demonstrating instances of learning from colleagues, expanding knowledge of their role in response to issues as they arose, and learning on the job in response to student teacher needs, mirroring many of the informal learning practices evident in the literature (*inter alia* Eraut 2004; Eraut 2007; Cunningham and Hillier 2013; Watkins et al. 2018; Holmgren and Sjöberg 2022). However, the ways in which these informal activities and additional influences on practice were used varied across the cases. This resulted in their building of a bricoleur disposition to different extents.

As discussed previously, Hatton (1988) identified six foci in theorising the parallels between the work of the teacher and the work of the bricoleur, which arguably can be similarly considered in the work of the cooperating teacher: conservatism; limited creativity; repertoire enlargement; teacher's use of theory; devious means; and *ad hocism*. Importantly, this work was not considered negatively but rather acknowledged the constraints within which teachers work. The findings demonstrate that there was evidence of bricolage at work in how the cooperating teachers learned about and prepared for their role in school placement, with innovation and creativity evident. However, Hatton's (1988) foci were also evident in more constraining ways in some cases, resulting in more limited actions, and thus more limited innovation and creativity. An array of these examples, some of which aligned with Hatton's (1988) contentions, and some of which deviated from them, were identifiable across the cases. Examples from the findings are summarised below:

Focus	Example from the Findings
Conservativism	• CTs used different sources, influences and practices available in the landscape. • No evidence of seeking out any new or specific professional learning for the role.
Limited Creativity	• In some cases, CTs liaised with and relied on colleagues and school leaders to seek out advice or information on practice. • In other cases, CTs were very creative in applying practice from a different context to their role as CT.
Repertoire Enlargement	• Significant reliance on previous experiences across all cases. • Some evidence of reflective practice and adjusting practice based on reflection in certain cases.
Teachers' Use of Theory	• Strong reliance on practice and experience evident, which outweighed use of theory in most cases.
Devious Means	• Instances where trial and error were used by CTs in order to enact their role.
Ad Hocism	• No structured approach to CT learning described by CTs or evident in the findings, and CTs tended to resort to what was available to them through accessible practices and experiences in the landscape they navigated.

Table 6: *Application of Hatton's (1988, p.340-342) six foci to examples from the findings.*

The above examples demonstrate that these foci in some instances were constraints to cooperating teachers' practice and how they learned what to do, while in other instances, cooperating teachers embraced these foci differently. Examples of innovative and creative practices were particularly evident in two of the six cases. Deirdre referenced at length, the application of approaches from Droichead, the induction phase, to her role as cooperating teacher for school placement. The innovation described demonstrated the identification of approaches within Droichead which would be beneficial to support student teacher learning, and working collaboratively with colleagues to develop an approach to school placement tailored to Deirdre's school. This was beyond the expectations of the role envisaged in the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021). Similarly, Peter demonstrated bricolage through innovative and creative approaches to problem-

solving in his role as teaching principal and cooperating teacher. This was particularly evident in the ways in which he applied principles from coaching, which he had gleaned from postgraduate study to his work as a cooperating teacher supporting student teachers, despite the course not focusing specifically on this role. Peter identified similarities between the utilisation of coaching in a leadership role, and its use as a cooperating teacher, yet also acknowledged the nuances of such an approach when engaged in school placement, indicating effective bricolage and the use of one skill and toolkit, to meet the needs of an alternative situation. Other examples of working as a bricoleur but with less extensive references to innovation and creativity were evident in the other cases. For example, where applying Droichead principles were used or mentioned but not to the same extent as evident above, or where skills from another practice or experience were drawn upon. This included being a sports coach or drawing on experience as a student teacher. While harnessing these practices prompted cooperating teachers to encourage student teachers, they did not necessarily prompt innovation or creativity to consider how best to support and enhance student teacher learning at deeper levels through novel approaches.

The above analysis leads to consideration of the presence of a continuum of bricolage for cooperating teacher practice. For example, while cooperating teachers in all six cases demonstrated ways in which they learned about or prepared for their role, the levels of innovation and creativity expected in order to demonstrate bricolage as described by Levi-Strauss (1962) and Johnson (2012) were more visible in some cases than in others as evident above. As such, some cases demonstrated more limited attempts at bricolage, perhaps due to constraints on practice, as suggested by Hatton (1988), while others transcended these constraints to demonstrate real creativity and resourcefulness in approach to learning about and subsequently enacting the role.

Therefore, while the case overviews presented in Chapter Four offer insight into the potential ways cooperating teachers prepare for their role, they too provide insight into the complexities of building a bricolage disposition. For some, these complexities may have been structural and systemic constraints, for others, they may have resulted from their motivation or confidence to engage in the role. This continuum can be summarised as below:

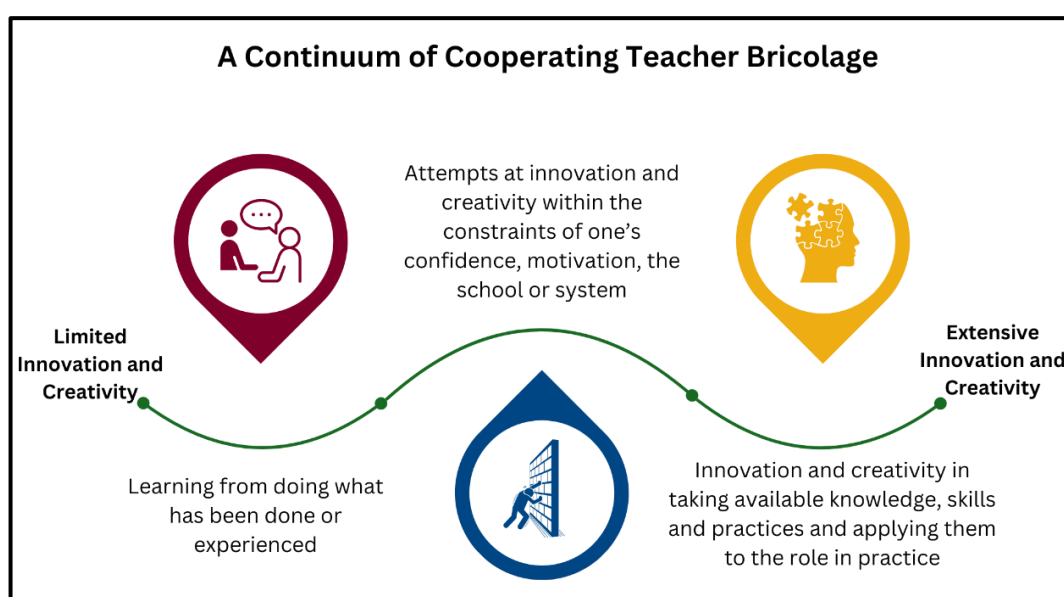


Figure 6.1: *A Continuum of Cooperating Teacher Bricolage based on the findings of this study.*

This continuum acknowledges that cooperating teachers learn about their role in different ways and to different extents from the sources of information, knowledge, experience and practices they interact with and draw upon. As such, this influences how the role is then enacted in practice. This continuum of bricolage will be revisited and considered further below, when analysing the cooperating teacher as second-order practitioner, based on the study's findings.

Being a bricoleur as a cooperating teacher navigating the landscape is complex. For some, it appears to come easily and naturally, due to their motivation for enacting

the role or the school or setting in which they find themselves. For others, it is more difficult to achieve, and these difficulties can result in resorting to the familiar and using that to guide practice within the constraints in which they find themselves. As such, navigating the landscape of practice for cooperating teachers requires the building of their bricoleur disposition, in order to allow for creative, resourceful and innovative approaches to their learning, and the critique, adjustment and application of their skills and knowledge from one practice to another. This can support their role within school placement, a role distinct from that of others within the continuum of teacher education.

6.3 The Blurring of Boundaries and The Intertwining of the Stages of the Continuum of Teacher Education

The extent to which the induction phase of the continuum of teacher education featured within the findings was somewhat unexpected. While it was hypothesised that cooperating teachers who had experience as a trained Droichead Professional Support Team member may draw on that experience in their work as a cooperating teacher during the school placement process, it was not expected that induction would feature across all six cases explored. This raises the question as to why the intertwining of these distinct phases of the continuum of teacher education occurred in these cases.

The Teaching Council conceptualises the continuum of teacher education across three distinct phases, from ITE to induction and finally to in-career development (Teaching Council 2011). However, the findings demonstrate that in some cases, clear distinctions between the ITE and induction phases were not discernible when the role of cooperating teacher was explored. The use of experience as a Droichead mentor

was particularly evident in two of the cases, including the explicit mention of applying Droichead principles to school placement and taking structured and collaborative team approaches to student teacher observation and support, as referred to above. While the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021) recommend a whole-school approach to supporting the process, they do not explicitly refer to this idea of a team approach to supporting student teachers through observation.

The literature suggests an increase in cooperating teacher confidence and identifiable changes in their practice through engagement in formalised professional learning opportunities specific to the role of cooperating teacher (Ambrosetti 2014; Erbilgin 2014; Childre and Van Rie 2015). However, such opportunities are not widely available in Ireland. Therefore, given the absence of a formalised, standardised model of professional learning for cooperating teachers in Ireland, this finding suggests that cooperating teachers who have undergone the formalised training programme for Droichead have approximated their role as a cooperating teacher to the requirements of them in the Droichead process. In their navigation of the landscape of practice, they have strongly identified with their practice as a Droichead PST member, and accordingly, this has opened a periphery at the boundary of these two practices to allow the borrowing of skills and experience from one to another. This is a significant finding in this study, as it suggests that despite the absence of formalised professional learning for their role, cooperating teachers identified changes in their practice due to their formalised learning in a similar, yet distinct role. Although this displays an innovative and creative bricolage approach to understanding the role of cooperating teacher, it too can be problematic.

In three of the cases, an idealised view of Droichead training as a solution or aid to the learning required for the role of cooperating teacher was evident, where

cooperating teachers posited that school placement ‘could go somewhere along that line’ (*Alan, Follow-Up Interview*). At this juncture, it is important to note that teachers undertaking Droichead are fully qualified teachers, although new to the profession. While they are not fully registered with the Teaching Council until the Droichead condition is removed from their registration, they are fully qualified. Meanwhile, student teachers may be at various stages within their ITE programme and so may require specific and explicit support to develop their skills. This is where the problematic nature of intertwining these distinct phases of the continuum becomes clear. Direct application of learning from one’s role within one stage of the continuum to another should be cautioned and critiqued in light of the nuances of each particular phase. While similarities can be identified in the expectations on those who enact the role of Professional Support Team member for Droichead in *Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework* (Teaching Council 2017) and the role of cooperating teacher for school placement in the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021), the Cosán Framework for Teachers’ Learning (Teaching Council 2016) nods to the differences between the two roles. It suggests that engagement with either or both roles can be considered a learning process for the teacher, as part of a mentoring or coaching approach to supporting colleagues, but clearly and visually separates them from one another, as demonstrated in Figure 6.2. This suggests an acknowledgement of the distinct differences between the two roles. Such distinction was less evident in the cases explored.

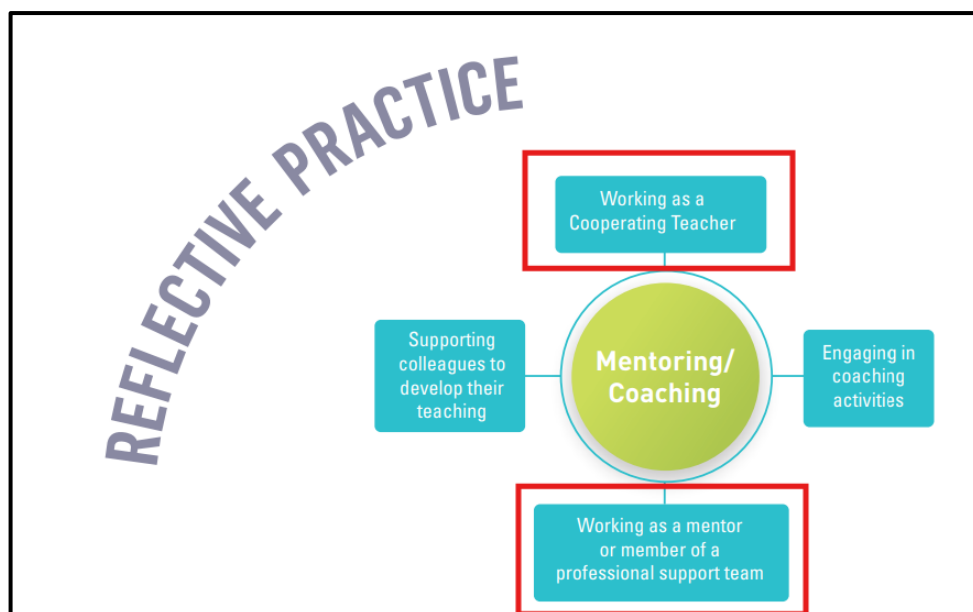


Figure 6.2: *The visual separation of the roles of cooperating teacher and PST member in the Cosán Framework (Teaching Council 2016).*

Theorising as to why this coalescing of ITE and induction occurred in the context of these cases is worthwhile. It suggests that for cooperating teachers, their boundaries of practice are permeable in some instances. The distinction between supporting an NQT and supporting a student teacher was not necessarily as bounded in the cases explored, as might be perceived from the policy perspective. For example, Deirdre moved fluidly between the two stages and the two roles when discussing how she supports student teachers. She articulated her school's application of a team-based approach to supporting student teachers, specifically mentioning that she had '...the support of the Droichead team' (*Deirdre, Initial Interview*) even though this was in reference to supporting a student teacher. Arguably, the boundary of practice between one's role as a PST member and as a cooperating teacher, is less evident in the context of the cases explored than in the policy space, because the boundary of practice most visible for these cooperating teachers is that between first- and second-order practice (Murray 2002; Murray and Male 2005).

The manoeuvring between the dual roles of teacher and teacher educator and harnessing the associated skills required in the second-order practice space, are complex in nature, as highlighted in Chapter Two. The literature is clear on the potential tensions arising in such role transitions (*inter alia* Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Grimmer et al. 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020; Czerniawski et al. 2024). These manoeuvres are encountered by teachers working as either PST members or cooperating teachers when they are working with NQTs and student teachers alike. Therefore, the boundary between induction and ITE may not be the most blatant or tangible boundary of practice for these teachers, as both spaces demand second-order practice considerations. However, the boundary that may well be more challenging to cross, and accordingly, become the focus of the teachers' attention is this glaring change in role (White and Forgasz 2017; White 2019b), which in the context of these cases, is from a teacher of students to PST member or cooperating teacher, supporting NQTs or student teachers. This is visually represented in Figure 6.3.

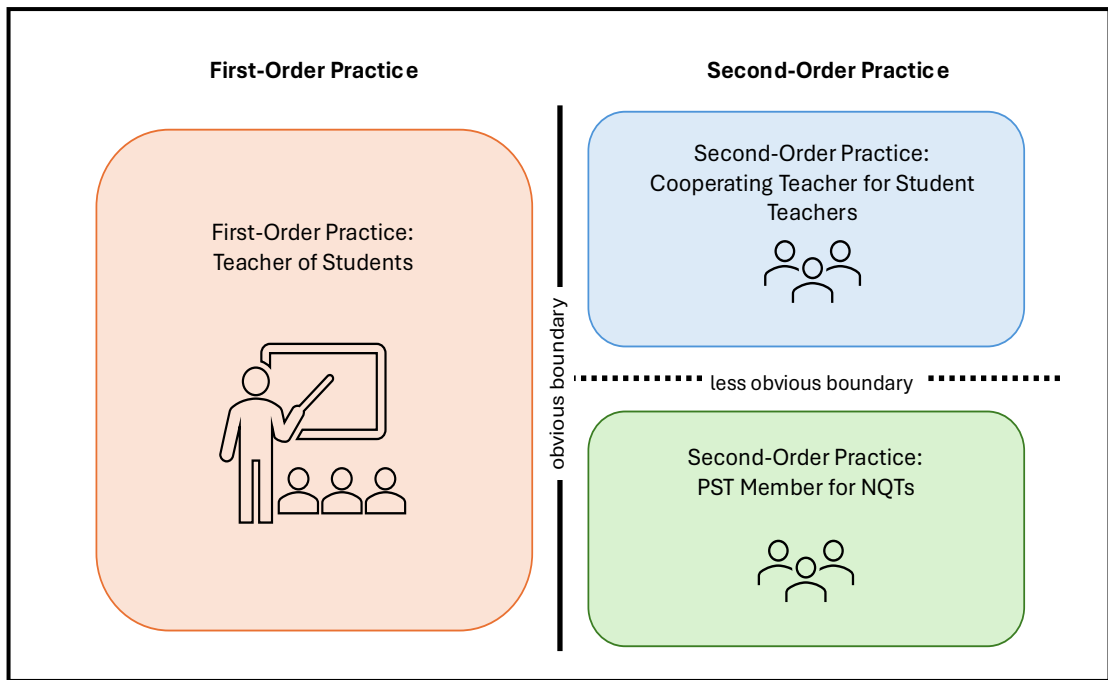


Figure 6.3: *The boundary of practice between first- and second-order practice spaces and the boundary of practice between ITE and induction as suggested from the case studies.*

Peter referred to this boundary encounter and crossing, as knowing when to ‘release that control’ of the teaching and learning and step into the role of supporting the student teacher to support the students in the class. Because of this, it is evident that across the six cases, there was frequent reference to this move between first- and second-order practice and clear examples of considerations that were required in that regard. Given that operating within this second-order practice space is a feature of one’s work with NQTs or student teachers, the identifiable boundary of practice for these cooperating teachers was between their first- and second-order practice roles, rather than the less blatant boundary between ITE and induction. In light of this, when one considers the factors at play here, it appears that incidental learning has taken place for these cooperating teachers (Marsick and Watkins 1990), where engagement with one phase of the continuum has resulted in the by-product understanding of another phase. This then affords the cooperating teacher, as bricoleur, the opportunity

to draw on this knowledge and experience in their work, which, as highlighted above, is done to varying extents along a continuum of cooperating teacher bricolage.

Applying the notion of incidental learning from Marsick and Watkins (1990) in this context suggests that engagement with or awareness of the Droichead process has impacted on how the cases conceptualise the role of cooperating teacher within school placement. This blurs the defined boundary between the roles of PST members and cooperating teachers as defined in the policy space, and as a result, the boundary between ITE and induction more generally, is also blurred. This leads to questions regarding what such a boundary blurring might mean for the distinct differences between the two roles. For example, Droichead includes formal aspects of PST member engagement in the role, such as the signing of a joint declaration with the NQT and fellow PST members, to state that the NQT has ‘participated in a quality teaching and learning process’ (Teaching Council 2017, p.3). This is not an aspect of cooperating teacher practice. As such, a blurring of boundaries can result in a blurring of expectations and responsibilities between the practices of being a PST member and being a cooperating teacher. This has the potential to then shape the ways in which cooperating teachers engage in their role, and how they conceptualise their responsibilities in practice, as opposed to how those responsibilities are envisioned in policy. This demonstrates the nature of the landscape of practice that cooperating teachers navigate, as it is political, in the sense that clear policy expectations are evident, however, ultimately interpretation and enactment of the role belongs to the cooperating teachers themselves, regardless of the aspirations of policy.

6.4 The Cooperating Teacher as Second-Order Practitioner and the Three Rs of Engagement

The role of second-order practice in the work of cooperating teachers is obvious thus far. The findings indicate that there were commonalities and differences between the cases in terms of how second-order practice was understood and enacted in each individual case. While second-order practice activities and actions could be identified in all cases, whether such actions stemmed from a critical engagement with second-order practice is questionable. This links with the variation in resourcefulness, creativity and innovation discussed when considering the continuum of cooperating bricolage, as introduced in section 6.2. In order to explore this notion further, three Rs of engagement are introduced and considered – the desire to *replicate*, the need to *react*, and the ability to *respond*, summarised in Figure 6.4 below.

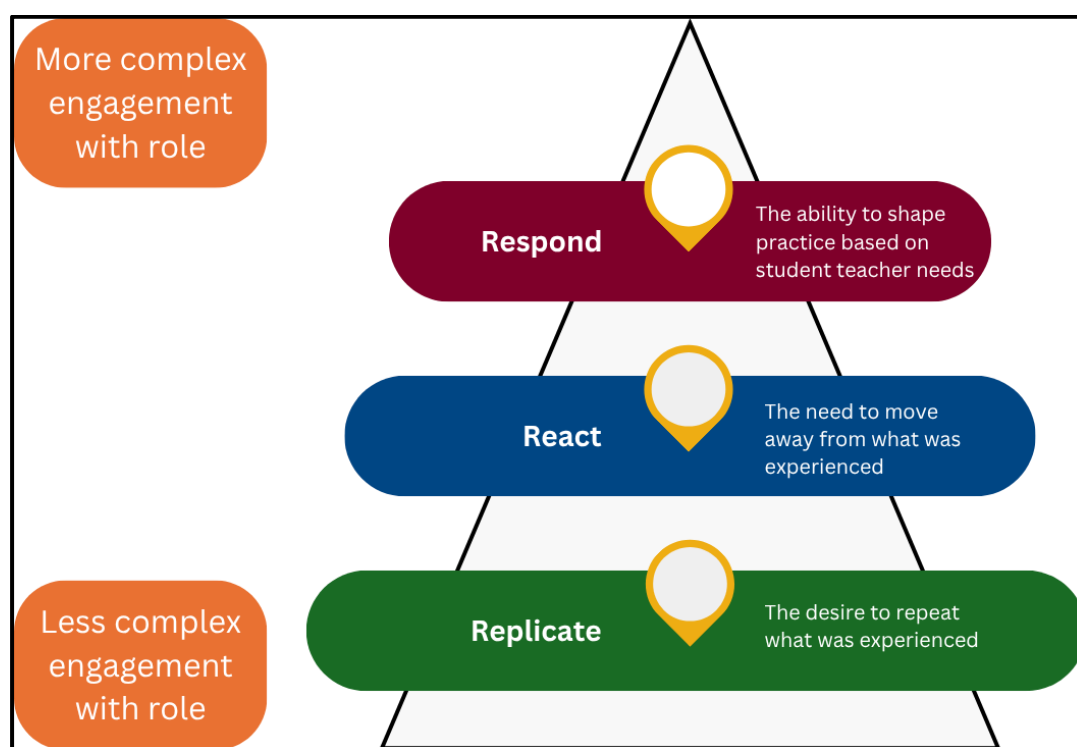


Figure 6.4: *The three Rs – how the cases engaged with second-order practice in the role of cooperating teacher.*

In some cases, it can be argued that cooperating teachers operated at a replication level. In essence, these cases replicated practices that were experienced by them when they began teaching or practices they observed others engaging in as school-based teacher educators working with NQTs or student teachers. Cora and Peter explicitly mentioned drawing on the positive experiences they had had as student teachers and their memories of the cooperating teachers who had worked with and supported them. Accordingly, they sought to replicate this with the student teachers they supported. This is to be expected, given the notion that those enacting the role of cooperating teacher or mentor are somewhat shaped by their experiences of being a student teacher or mentee themselves (Lunsmann et al. 2019; White 2019b; Mitchell et al., 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025). In these instances, interactions with student teachers tended to be pedagogically driven, where the focus was on classroom practice, rather than deeper level reflection and more critical engagement with the role of the cooperating teacher. When considering this in tandem with the continuum of cooperating teacher bricolage, it suggests a lesser degree of innovation, as the focus is on the replication of positive experiences.

In contrast, some of the cases revealed evidence that cooperating teachers did not want to replicate the experiences that they had encountered in the early years of their career. In fact, for Sarah, Alan and Isabel, they identified more challenging experiences of being a student teacher. Rather than wanting to replicate those scenarios for the student teachers with whom they now worked, they operated at a reactive level. In this context, the term reactive has been chosen, as the cooperating teachers have reacted to their experiences and reenvisioned their practice towards what they would have preferred to have experienced as student teachers themselves. In Sarah's and Isabel's cases, building relationships and being cognisant of the student teachers'

feelings were central to how they understood their role, which was evidently rooted in a reaction to their past experiences. This extends Eraut's (2004) argument that informal learning can happen in reaction or response to an action, which in these cases, stemmed from the challenges the cooperating teachers had previously experienced. Furthermore, Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014) argue that being a 'convener of relation' is an identifiable conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher, and this seems to align with how these cases have interpreted their role in reaction to their experiences. Where examples of poor relationships or difficult interactions were drawn upon in these cases, they strived to avoid the same happening between them and the student teachers they now supported. However, conceptualising the role of cooperating teacher in response to one's own experience can be problematic as it poses a threat to critical engagement with second-order practice. Instead, it affords cooperating teachers an opportunity to right a perceived wrong and work in a manner that is clouded by experience rather than shaped by responding to the needs of the student teacher.

Considering both the desire to replicate and the need to react in relation to one another, both levels of engagement are evidently problematic. Both are indicative of Hatton's (1988) foci of bricolage, particularly the notions of repertoire enlargement through a reliance on experience and the tendency to rely on practice rather than theory. These symbolise the challenges associated with the place of experience in the cooperating teacher's endeavours as bricoleur whilst navigating the landscape of practice. For the most-part, the cases who drew heavily on experience in replicative and reactive levels of engagement did not critique their experiences to the extent that these experiences led to innovative and creative approaches to the role. Instead, a borrowing of practice from one space to another occurred. While this is problematic

on both levels, those who worked at a reactive level in their second-order practice did imply a degree of reflection on their experience. However, those who replicated practice that they had been exposed to appeared to take practice from one space and directly apply it to their current practice as cooperating teacher indiscriminately. This means there was little room to critique the practice in light of the particular student teacher they were working with at a given time.

Instances of responding to the emerging needs of student teachers were visible in various cases. This was the most complex second-order practice work identifiable across the cases. For example, while Sarah worked at a reactive level on occasion, as referenced above, she also shared examples of responding to student teacher needs. This was clear when she recalled being questioned by a student teacher about particular practices she engaged in as classroom teacher. She was subsequently provoked to reflect on the tacit knowledge she demonstrated in this role and make it explicit for this student teacher. This was echoed across cases, with student teacher questioning being a clear prompt to move from first- to second-order practice on a deeper, more intentional level. This is consonant with the notion that student teacher questioning can be catalytic to cooperating teacher reflection (Carmi and Tamir 2023), through the need for cooperating teachers to effectively articulate their practice. Such prompting moved the teachers from their pedagogy-centred discussion rooted in their first-order practice, to a more reflective and responsive discussion with student teachers, within a second-order practice space. This can be difficult to achieve, particularly in light of Burn's (2007) consideration of the potential threat to one's professional identity when asked to analyse or explicitly explain one's practice. However, there were no indications of this in the cases explored, and instead the

cooperating teachers demonstrated a willingness to articulate the nuances of their practice when prompted by student teacher questioning.

The literature indicates that cooperating teachers have been found to revert to their own experiences and the security of their first-order practice knowledge in their interactions with student teachers (Trevethan 2017; Neilsen, Tindall-Ford and Sheridan 2022), despite specific and explicit professional learning for the role. It is unsurprising then that the cases in this study reverted to their experience and first-order practice knowledge at various stages, given that they had not engaged in formalised preparation for their role in school placement. As such, experience and first-order practice became elements of bricolage in the work of the cooperating teachers as they navigated their role.

However, as highlighted, the security of experience and first-order practice knowledge can be detrimental to second-order practice engagement. For some, practices from one space or experience were directly applied to their practice as cooperating teacher, while for others, they critiqued these practices and experiences in the context of the scenario they found themselves in, similar to Deirdre's Droichead example referred to in section 6.3 above. For those who critiqued and could then apply this understanding to their role as cooperating teacher, it demonstrates the resourcefulness, innovation and creativity expected of a bricoleur (Johnson 2012; Mateus and Sarkar 2024) navigating a landscape of practice. For those who did not engage as critically with their experiences, it is questionable whether these cases worked as bricoleurs in this instance. Although they drew on what they had available to them, on this occasion their experience, their innovation and creativity to respond to the needs of the student teacher in novel ways are less identifiable. This explains

why the cases engaged in second-order practice at varying levels and to varying degrees in their enactment of the role.

6.5 Considering the Potential and the Problems with Experience

Experience as a key influence on cooperating teacher role conceptualisation was evident in the findings, as referred to heretofore in this chapter, with all cases demonstrating examples of how experience shaped their current role enactment when engaged in school placement. As the findings suggest, this stemmed particularly from experiences of being a student teacher themselves, to having worked as a cooperating teacher over time and developing a familiarity with the role over the course of previous enactments. As such, the cooperating teachers acted as bricoleurs in drawing on experience in different ways and to varying degrees.

The cases demonstrated a variety of potential associated with learning from experience. For example, Cora and Isabel indicated how they found it relatively easy to place themselves in the shoes of the student teachers whom they supported. They recounted their experiences and signalled an obvious empathy towards student teachers. This finding is consonant with the literature, which indicates that experiences of being a student teacher shape cooperating teacher perception and enactment of the role (Lunsmann et al. 2019; White 2019b; Mitchell et al. 2024; Furlong and Gorman 2025). There are undoubtedly benefits to being able to locate oneself close to the practice of the student teacher in terms of ensuring authenticity in one's interactions with them. However, this can lead to a reliance on pedagogical knowledge and cooperating teachers' first-order practice (Nielsen, Tindall-Ford and Sheridan 2022), as previously highlighted, which can limit opportunities to promote student teacher

reflection on practice. While some instances of engagement with the more reflective aspects of the role of cooperating teacher were visible in the data, the cooperating teachers within this study referred to a greater extent to the pedagogical aspects of their interactions with student teachers, like what content to teach and classroom management considerations to name but a few.

The potential of learning from past experiences as a cooperating teacher to date was also referred to across cases. Peter's examples of comparing his first and subsequent experiences of being a cooperating teacher demonstrated the idea of learning through reflection. Such reflection has been documented in the literature as necessary to support engagement with complex questions arising from being a cooperating teacher, like how one wants to interpret the role and how one identifies themselves when in the role (Amaral-da-Cuhna et al. 2020). This could be seen when Peter recounted reflecting on how he responded to particular scenarios that arose during the placements, and his realisation about 'releasing' control within the classroom when working with a student teacher. However, after this realisation and key learning moment, it is unclear whether a shift occurred in how Peter viewed himself in his role as cooperating teacher. Whether he saw himself as being a second-order practitioner, or whether he still considered himself as a teacher hosting a student teacher, just with a new perspective on 'control' when sharing a classroom space with a student, is uncertain.

Similar ambiguity arose in all six cases, despite indications that all cases learned from their previous engagements as a cooperating teacher. Given that a growing confidence among mentor teachers has been identified the longer they engaged in the role (Chu 2019), this confidence might account for Peter's developing sense of self as cooperating teacher. However, Chu (2019) also found that mentor teachers struggled

to see themselves as teacher educators, despite prolonged engagement with the role. This was evident in the cases explored, where teachers tended to refer to the pedagogical elements of their role, and only occasionally stepped into the more complex and deeper elements of the second-order practice space, to challenge student teachers to reflect and think critically. For the most-part, they tended to refer to their role as one of support. This links back to the boundary between their first- and second-order practice and the sometimes-fleeting engagement with the second-order space.

It is clear that when engaging in the role of cooperating teacher, the cases identify and dis-identify with practices to different extents in navigating the landscape. For some, their past experiences of being a cooperating teacher supports identifying with that practice and using it when working with student teachers. For others, the process of identifying and dis-identifying between their first-order and second-order practice roles is more challenging. This suggests that drawing on experience requires cooperating teachers to determine where ‘accountability’ within their practice and their role lies (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), and for some, accountability to the second-order practice role of being a cooperating teacher is overshadowed by their accountability to their first-order practice. This may stem from cooperating teachers’ limited opportunities to engage in second-order practice discussions more broadly in the school context, given that the school is ultimately a first-order practice space. If cooperating teachers do not have opportunities to engage in discussions beyond the first-order aspects of their role in their day-to-day work, then naturally engaging in the types of second-order practice conversations expected of them in their role as cooperating teacher may prove challenging.

While the cumulative experience of being a cooperating teacher shapes how the role is interpreted and has prompted reflection in some of the cases explored, it can

also lead to a repetition of what has gone before, in the absence of self-critique and reflection on current practice to create a greater depth of understanding to reshape their knowledge. This notion of an absence of critique in one's practice is a worthy point at which to consider the problems posed by a general reliance on experience in cooperating teacher practice. Firstly, section 6.4 highlights how a reliance on one's experience as a student teacher can hinder engagement with second-order practice, due to replicative and reactive actions on the part of cooperating teachers, without careful critique of these practices in light of the needs of the student teacher being supported. However, in this section, particular consideration must be given to the possible problems arising from a reliance on experience as a cooperating teacher to date.

Managing the role duality of being a teacher and a cooperating teacher is complex and has been well documented (*inter alia* Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Grimmer et al. 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020; Czerniawski et al. 2024). However, the complexity of this duality is sometimes not realised until the role is explored more formally, and the complexities are unveiled for those enacting the role (Leshem 2014). Therefore, a reliance on experience alone suggests a simplification of the role. This can be identified on occasion when the cases revert to what was done for them or repeating the things they do every time they have a student. For example, there was mention of deciding on topics to be taught, issues with managing the time of year of the placement and so on. These, while necessary considerations when hosting a student teacher, can subvert the more complex aspects of the role, where the practicum can be used to provide feedback on practice and promote and facilitate critical reflection on practice for student teachers (Teaching Council 2021, p.20).

Added complexity comes to the fore when one considers what happens if challenging experiences are encountered in one's role as a cooperating teacher. Challenges or unexpected scenarios when working with student teachers were identified in all cases within the study, with cooperating teachers responding to and learning from these in different ways. Eraut (2004) argues that experience can be cumulative, or it can be a single occurrence, and that both understandings of experience can impact future practice. This is where a reliance on experience can be problematic. Given that all cases indicated challenging scenarios in their role as cooperating teacher to varying degrees, the possibility for a negative experience to shape role interpretation is clear. This depends however on how a cooperating teacher reacts to a negative experience.

Within the literature, it is evident that challenges in one's role can prompt informal learning (Cunningham and Hillier 2013; Watkins et al. 2018; Armstrong 2021; Holmgren and Sjöberg 2022). Therefore, in some instances, such an experience has the potential to impact positively, if a cooperating teacher uses it as a learning opportunity for their practice. While none of the cases necessarily signalled how a single negative experience impacted on their overall practice in a detrimental way, it does raise a query regarding an over-reliance on experience. This is particularly pertinent when formalised professional learning opportunities to problematise and contextualise such experiences in broader policy and theoretical framings are limited. In instances like Cora's and Deirdre's cases, where they experienced student teachers who were having ongoing difficulties and displayed limited responsiveness to the support being offered, this consideration is essential. While both Cora and Deirdre acted as bricoleurs and were creative in their approaches to dealing with such challenges, broader questions about how scenarios like this could shape cooperating

teacher role interpretation remain, especially when there is an absence of formalised professional learning on how to manage scenarios of this nature.

6.6 Locating Cooperating Teachers' Learning Spaces

While Chapter Two presents differing perspective on learning and preparation for the role of cooperating teacher, various constructs of learning spaces are also identifiable in the literature, in attempts to demonstrate where cooperating teachers learn to do what they do in their role within the landscape of practice. These range from shared spaces with those enacting similar roles to analyse and problematise practice (Ambrosetti 2014; Hudson 2014; Wexler 2023), to online and digital spaces to access information about the role (Caudle 2013; Erbilgin 2014; Childre and Van Rie 2015; Black, Olmsted and Mottonen 2016). Typically, these tend to be governed by structures and approaches in place within the jurisdiction in which the research was completed. However, the findings suggest that less clear-cut approaches are evident in the cases explored within the Irish context of this study, stemming from the lack of formalised supports available to cooperating teachers. While a variety of HEIs have begun to develop and roll-out individualised offerings of professional learning for cooperating teachers, the lack of a standardised and formalised national approach to cooperating teacher professional learning, has led to the development of idiosyncratic approaches to where cooperating teachers learn about their role, as evidenced in the cases explored.

When locating where learning happens for cooperating teachers within the landscape, and the sources of information that they draw on in their work, the findings indicate the centrality of the school as a site for learning. Whether this featured heavily

due to the limited availability of professional learning associated with the role, or because cooperating teachers relied significantly on experience as an influence on their learning and preparation, or possibly a combination both, is unclear. However, it does suggest a marked divergence from much of the literature in how learning spaces for cooperating teachers are conceptualised more broadly. Of particular influence were the colleagues and school leaders within the cooperating teachers' schools and the ways in which they were used as sources of influence in the cooperating teachers' work to support their conceptualisations of their role. The influence of the school environment and its impact on cooperating teacher role enactment is evident in the literature but has been seen to prove detrimental to effective engagement with the role on occasion (Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen 2018; Ó Gallchóir, O'Flaherty and Hinchion 2019). That said, the findings in these cases tended to paint the influence of the school environment and climate in a more complimentary light. The influence of colleagues and school leaders were mentioned across the six cases, with references to drawing from others in these environments to ascertain expectations of those enacting the role in the context of one's school, collaboratively problem-solving issues faced in the role as they arose, and to develop consistency of approach with others in the school. This is congruent with the theoretical underpinnings of the study, in signalling that the school is a social learning space, where situated learning about practice takes place (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2020), and where the cases can hone their practice as a cooperating teacher in interaction with others, within the school environment.

The findings augment Marsick and Watkins' (1990) theorising of the divergence between the informal and the incidental in workplace learning, where both can occur but as a result of disparate reasons. Alan's and Isabel's cases were clear examples of

informal workplace learning in action, where they learned from their colleagues and school leaders through asking questions or clarifying situations in a deliberative manner (Eraut 2004), but where the other parties were not necessarily aware that these interactions were influential on Alan's and Isabel's interpretations of their roles. Alan's principal explicitly acknowledged this, when admitting they were unaware of the influence they had had. This is significant when considered in light of the literature on formal learning spaces and the role of an 'external other' (Ambrosetti 2014; Erbilgin 2014) in shaping cooperating teacher role conceptualisation. It indicates that learning for the role happens in different ways and in different environments. Although the cases tended to refer to the informal learning that occurred within the school environment as a key driver in their understanding of the role, this does not negate the place or value of the external other completely. The cases explored tended to focus on informal workplace learning examples that were positive in nature for the most-part. Yet the literature signals instances where the school environment and its climate may undermine the value placed on the role of the cooperating teacher (Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen 2018; Ó Gallchóir, O'Flaherty and Hinchion 2019). In instances like this, the introduction of an 'external' other, who is outside the sphere of the school environment or climate, may be able to influence the level of understanding of the role, and by extension, the ways in which the role may be enacted. Therefore, while the school can be identified as a learning space for cooperating teachers, it is not without its potential obstacles. This will be explored further below.

Further expanding on Marsick and Watkins' (1990) concept, instances of incidental learning within the environs of the school, where learning was a by-product of engaging in another activity, were also visible across the cases. This was identifiable in how learning in the practice of being a Droichead mentor impacted on the ways in

which Deirdre and Sarah considered their role in school placement. While not directly connected, their learning was a by-product of their engagement with the role of PST member. Similarly, Alan indicated how he could apply concepts he had encountered through his engagement with postgraduate study and specifically a school leadership course, even though this course did not specifically target the role of the cooperating teacher. His application of key concepts to the school in which he worked helped him identify how this could support him further in his role when working with student teachers. Again, such learning is rooted within the context of the school, but a by-product of engaging in a different task or activity.

While learning on the job within the school setting is useful to the cooperating teacher as bricoleur, in harnessing what is available and accessible to them to respond to scenarios in innovative ways, it requires caution regarding the potential issues it presents. Hatton's (1988) suggestion of limited creativity in the work of the bricoleur due to the influence of institutional constraints must be considered. By aligning one's practice to that of the colleagues and school leaders with whom one works, the potential for a narrowing of understanding of the role of cooperating teacher presents. As such, the cooperating teachers' frame of reference in their role enactment can be limited to their immediate environment. This can cause cooperating teachers challenges in the ways in which they identify and dis-identify with practice at multiple levels within the landscape. What manifests is engagement with practice in the role and alignment of that practice to the context in which they work, but with little room for imagination about how that practice sits within the broader landscape of practice of being a cooperating teacher, and how they view themselves in that regard (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Given that Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) emphasise the importance of balancing all three of these modes of

identification (engagement, alignment and imagination) in order to support navigation of the landscape, an overreliance on the immediate environment as a social learning space is problematic.

Interestingly, while much informal and incidental learning could be seen across the cases in terms of how learning activities were identified within the school environment, there was an indication that sometimes the school did not lend itself to particular types of cooperating teacher learning. Sarah alluded to the notion that the focus of learning that might be required to support understanding the role of cooperating teacher might not be something readily available or accessible in school. For example, she remarked that she knew about the continuum of teacher education and the concepts within it but when asked where she encountered these, she referred to the more formal learning spaces of postgraduate study and PST training and pointedly noted ‘not in the context of my staffroom or anything like that’ (*Sarah, Follow-Up Interview*). This is noteworthy in considering the types of learning that may happen in the school as a learning space for cooperating teachers.

While Sarah did refer to instances of how her understanding of the role was shaped in interaction with others in the context of her school, she pointed out this distinction between where policy was explored and discussed and where practice was explored and discussed. The former appeared to be in the more formal learning spaces, while the latter was in the informal interactions shared with others in the school. When this is considered across the cases, the same rings true. Critiquing policy and theorising the work of the cooperating teacher tended not to be evident in the school environment but did seem to be more evident in the formal spaces of postgraduate study in particular, where it could be seen in the cases of Sarah, Alan and Peter. Given that Eraut (2004) recommends conceptualising learning actions on a continuum of

informal to formal, rather than solely categorising activities as informal or formal, where the terms are considered converse to one another, the divergence between the type of learning that happened in the school environment and that which happened away from the school is noteworthy.

Eraut's (2004) notion of both the formal and informal are evident in the ways in which Alan and Peter discuss applying the learning from their formal modes of study to their interactions in their role as cooperating teacher. They took learning from one space and applied it to the context of their school environment, and more specifically, to their interpretation of their role as cooperating teacher. However, a bigger consideration is why some things are considered key learning activities for cooperating teachers within the school environment, and why others are not. Much of the influence on cooperating teacher practice across the cases stemmed from a place of practice – informal and incidental learning from interaction with others and as key situations or scenarios arose. However, if what is discussed in the school environment centres on practice and tends not to explore policy or theory, as indicated in Sarah's case above, key learning associated with the role can be overlooked, resulting in a narrowing of understanding, as indicated above.

For Sarah, Alan and Peter, they recognised the usefulness of information that was available to them in another space, and accordingly, identified peripheries between their practice in school as cooperating teachers, and their learning through postgraduate study, which enabled them to align these practices and learnings with one another. In doing so, it provided them with an opportunity to look beyond the immediacy of their practice within the school environment and consider that practice in light of other practices available for them to draw on in the broader landscape. Thus, they could identify at multiple levels of identification (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-

Trayner 2015) and interpret their role accordingly. Therefore, while the school as a social learning space (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2020) for cooperating teachers is apparent in the cases explored, given the complexities associated with the role, the potential limitations associated with an overreliance on the immediate environment of the school are clear, due to the practice-based focus of this learning site and the interactions during which this learning occurs.

6.7 *Working with Others or Learning from Others? Exploring the Rhetoric of ‘Working Collaboratively’ as a Cooperating Teacher during School Placement*

The *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021) explicitly refer to the notion that cooperating teachers should work collaboratively with other stakeholders throughout the school placement process. Reference to working with student teachers, school placement tutors, colleagues and school leaders is clear. However, exploration of this idea in light of the findings of this study is warranted. The *Guidelines* suggest that working collaboratively is a necessity to ensure the effectiveness of school placement for student teacher learning. However, in doing so, many considerations are assumed. For example, there is an assumption that cooperating teachers have adequate opportunity to engage with other key stakeholders, that they have the knowledge of school placement requirements and processes to be adequately prepared for such conversations, and that they are valued in their contributions with others.

In terms of opportunity and value in interacting with other key stakeholders, the literature indicates that limited structural supports to enable this in the Irish context persist (Young and McPhail 2016), and even when these supports are put in place,

literature from other jurisdictions suggests that the outcomes of such shared spaces to develop collaborative practice are mixed, with some beneficial and some challenging elements (Escalié and Chaliès 2016; Chen, Daniels and Ochanji 2017; Mauri et al. 2019). However, the findings in this study suggest limited engagement between cooperating teachers and school placement tutors. Although all cases mentioned these key stakeholders in some capacity during data collection, none of the cases ranked school placement tutors within their top three influences on their learning and practice as a cooperating teacher. This is important given the policy contentions above regarding ‘working collaboratively.’ There seemed to be a disconnect between the cases and school placement tutors in some instances, where the cooperating teachers saw themselves as distanced from tutors. For example, Peter referred to decisions being ‘left up to the inspector’ (*Peter, Initial Interview*) if challenges persisted when working with a student teacher. While interaction may be limited between the cooperating teacher and the tutor, one can argue that this in fact can contribute to cooperating teacher role perception. If they are not asked to contribute and share their insights in a meaningful way with school placement tutors, their value in the process of school placement is questionable, hence solidifying the separation between the cooperating teacher as school-based teacher educator and their HEI-based counterpart.

The *Guidelines* suggest that interaction between cooperating teachers and student teachers should also be collaborative in nature, with ‘team teaching’ being one such example of a collaborative interaction. This is referred to as co-teaching more broadly in the literature, with team teaching being a subset of the broader approach. Internationally, this is seen as an effective model of engagement between cooperating teachers and student teachers, and one which is identified as often being mutually beneficial for both parties (Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury 2016; Tschida, Smith and

Fogarty 2016; Chang 2018; Kim 2019; Rickard and Walsh 2019; Zach 2020; Walsh 2022). However, this was not identified as an approach to cooperating teacher practice in the cases explored, with only Cora mentioning it as a possible strategy which was suggested, to support a student teacher who was struggling during placement. This indicates that the approach was not seen as a mainstream process within Cora's conceptualisation of school placement, but instead, a strategy to be employed when remediation was required. Again, this is an example of a recommended approach in policy not necessarily being enacted in practice in the cases explored. The literature tends to report that this approach to collaborative interaction between cooperating teachers and student teachers focuses on identifiable changes in cooperating teacher first-order practice skills, rather than their skillset for second-order practice (Murphy, Scantlebury and Milne 2015; Smith and Nandelson 2016; Carmi and Tamir 2023). However, while the initiative itself may not contribute to second-order practice knowledge or skills, Cora's awareness of and willingness to engage in co-teaching as a possible approach to support student teacher challenges, demonstrates responsive second-order practice knowledge in aiming to support the emerging needs of the student teacher as they arose in practice. She exemplified this when referring to the notion that she '...was trying to think about how, how could I help?' (*Cora, Initial Interview*). This suggests that while such an initiative itself may not benefit second-order practice skillsets, an openness to engage with such an endeavour may result in meaningful interaction between the cooperating teacher and student teacher.

The literature indicates that executing the role of cooperating teacher can be challenging when one has a limited understanding of the placement requirements for student teachers (Nielsen et al. 2017), yet when such requirements are understood by cooperating teachers, increased confidence in their practice has been documented

(Childre and Van Rie 2015). These are notable contentions when considering the idea of ‘working collaboratively’ as advocated by policy. The cases in this study demonstrated a limited awareness of the requirements of school placement and tended to draw on their experiences as student teachers themselves to provide insight into the expectations on the student teachers they now supported. This led, in some cases, to ambiguity in what was then expected of them as cooperating teachers during school placement, with Peter exemplifying this by questioning ‘...as regards looking at plans like. Should I be looking at their plans?’ (*Peter, Initial Interview*). Similarly, Deirdre and Isabel offered suggestions for what clearer guidance or upskilling might look like for cooperating teachers, signalling that they felt guidance on their role and the requirements for student teachers were ambiguous and not clearly communicated to them. This is troublesome when one considers the assertion that cooperating teachers should ‘work collaboratively’ with other stakeholders, as the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021), although prescriptive in their description of cooperating teacher roles and responsibilities, appear not to address the well-documented informality of the role in practice, which has historically been recorded in discourse in the Irish context (OECD 1991; Kellaghan 2002; Coolahan 2003; DES Inspectorate 2006). Again, this reiterates the assumptions and aspirations inherent in policy, but the evident discontinuity between these aspirations and the realities as evident in the six cases explored.

While the cases evidenced limited opportunities for cooperating teachers to ‘work collaboratively’ with the HEIs and school placement tutors, what was particularly obvious throughout the study, was the reliance on colleagues when working with student teachers during school placement. As documented heretofore, instances of authentic interaction and collaboration between cooperating teachers and their school

leaders and colleagues could be identified, strengthening the above argument that the school as a site of learning for cooperating teachers is central to their understanding of the role. However, this discussion proffers that working with others is more meaningful and more complex than policy may suggest. The cases demonstrated that they worked with others in response to challenges in their first- to second-order practice and in order to enact the role to the best of their ability in the absence of what they considered to be sufficient guidance for the role. This is indicative of an innovative and creative approach to solve local problems as a bricoleur. As the cooperating teacher navigates their landscape of practice, they draw on those around them when needed, or as available. Evidently, those most accessible, school leaders and colleagues, are drawn on most extensively, while those encountered more sporadically or intermittently in the landscape, like school placement tutors, are drawn upon only when required, like in times of difficulty with supporting a student teacher. This is unsurprising, given the relational challenge of building rapport in sporadic encounters. Ultimately, the notion of ‘working collaboratively’ simplifies the many complexities that are long associated with the role of cooperating teacher in balancing the dual nature of being a first- and second-order practitioner (Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen 2014; Grimmer et al. 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen 2020; Czerniawski et al. 2024) and the supports that are required to enact the role in that regard.

6.8 Conclusion

This discussion has married the findings of the study, and the insights gleaned from the cases explored with theory, policy and literature in order to contextualise the study within the broader landscape of teacher education. The findings were considered

in light of current thinking, and in doing so, consistencies with contemporary research in the field have been identified. However, so too have divergences between this study and research from other jurisdictions. The nuances of the Irish context and the informal approach to and recognition of the cooperating teacher's role in practice have been identified. The impact of this on the ways in which cooperating teachers learn about and prepare for their role within school placement have been considered. As such, it is clear that the cooperating teacher can be identified as a bricoleur, engaging in resourceful, innovative and creative practices drawing on accessible and available resources in the landscape to support them. The various influences and sources that were identified as supporting the cooperating teacher's work as bricoleur are summarised in Figure 6.5 below.

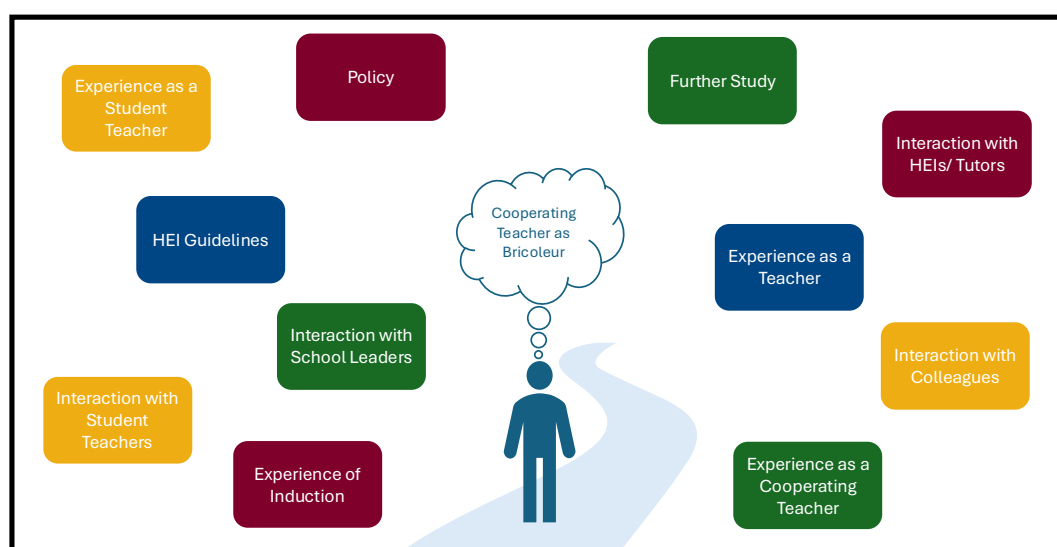


Figure 6.5: *A visual representation of the cooperating teacher as bricoleur, drawing from a variety of influences on practice as they navigate the landscape, as identified across the cases.*

However, this is done to varying degrees, resulting from a variety of reasons, and as such, gives rise to the conceptualisation of a continuum of cooperating teacher bricolage. Instances of conservatism and limited use of theory (Hatton 1988) were

evident across the cases, as the cooperating teachers utilised their practice to support their understanding of their role and the bounds within which they operated at school level. This was particularly clear where interactions with student teachers proved influential in encouraging cooperating teachers to engage in second-order practice, rather than reference the theoretical underpinnings of such practice, and its necessity when engaging with student teachers. The separation by the cooperating teachers of the types of learning activities that took place in the school versus those that took place in more ‘formal’ settings also supported this idea of limited use of theory and working within the bounds of the immediate environment. In some instances, cooperating teachers did look outward into the landscape to identify with practices beyond those available at school level, like drawing on key learning from postgraduate study, or similar practices. For the most-part however, cooperating teacher repertoire enlargement tended to be driven by local practice, with the findings demonstrating an evident shaping of role interpretation by previous experience as a student teacher and as a cooperating teacher over time. Ad hoc approaches to engaging with the role could be seen in the idiosyncratic interpretations of the role, which stemmed from encountering and responding to challenging situations, and from interactions with colleagues to determine what the role looked like and consisted of in the context of one’s own school.

This evidently supports the notion that cooperating teachers can be conceptualised as bricoleurs, but within a broad landscape of practice. As such, they identify and dis-identify with practices and encounters to varying degrees, depending on their context and the situations that arise in their work. This discussion of the findings has pointed towards some key conclusions stemming from the study, leading to the proposal of key recommendations for future practice and considerations

regarding preparation for the role of cooperating teacher. These will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

As this thesis draws to a conclusion, irrefutably, the role of the cooperating teacher has been shown to be one of complexity, particularly in instances where learning for and about the role is at the discretion of the individual enacting the role, as is the case in Ireland. The study has demonstrated thus far that in navigating the landscape of practice, cooperating teachers draw on a range of sources of information and learning to enable them to engage with the role in a way they find beneficial for their practice. However, the findings and discussion explored in the previous chapters cannot sit in isolation and demand that consideration is given to how this study can contribute to and inform current thinking about cooperating teacher learning and preparation. As such, this final chapter considers the research study as a whole, revisiting the key questions, approaches and findings to contextualise the implications of the study going forward. The scholarly, theoretical and practice-based contributions are considered and discussed. The chapter concludes by focusing on the recommendations arising from the findings and conclusions, and exploring potential avenues for future consideration in practice, policy and research contexts.

7.2 Research Synopsis

The aim of the study was to explore the ways in which cooperating primary school teachers learn how to enact their role in school placement in the absence of formalised and standardised national professional learning for the role. The trajectory of the cooperating teacher's role within the Irish education system to date was explored. In doing so, it highlighted the significance of this study in the current and

evolving policy context of the role of the cooperating teacher and the proposed professional learning for this role.

Models and modes of professional learning and preparation for cooperating teachers were considered in the literature review, demonstrating the complexities associated with learning about and preparing for this role. This illuminated the centrality of informal workplace learning (Marsick and Watkins 1990; Eraut 2004) and first- to second-order practice (Murray 2002; Murray and Male 2005) as central concepts underpinning this research. This led to the contention that the cooperating teacher can be conceptualised as a bricoleur as they navigate the landscape of practice of being a cooperating teacher and all that it entails, in the absence of formalised professional learning. The theoretical underpinnings were explored, to locate the study in a social theory of learning through use of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) contributions on landscapes of practice.

Through employing a qualitative multi-case approach within an interpretivist paradigm, six cases were explored and analysed to examine the nuances of learning and preparation for the role of cooperating primary school teacher within school placement. These nuances were demonstrated in the individual case overviews. However, the cross-case analysis brought the cases into discussion with one another, which highlighted the significance of three emergent key findings, namely: The Influence of Induction; The Enigma of Experience; and The Role of Relationships.

Analysis and discussion of the findings indicated that cooperating teachers can be bricoleurs in practice, however, the building of this disposition is complex and influenced by a variety of factors. This led to the introduction of the continuum of cooperating teacher bricolage. This supported consideration of how cooperating

teachers in the study blurred the boundaries between ITE and induction, and the significance of this in their understanding of and enactment of their role as second-order practitioners during school placement. Similarly, the ways in which experience was drawn upon to support role enactment were considered, leading to the notion that cooperating teachers replicate or react to their own experiences, and on some occasions, respond to the needs of the student teachers with whom they work through allowing the current and immediate experience to guide their practice. This led to a discussion about the possibilities and problems arising from the use of experience as a central source of role conceptualisation for cooperating teachers and the need for this to be critiqued and considered. Finally, where, with whom, and from whom cooperating teachers learn was considered and the divergence between policy and practice in the Irish context was explored. This suggests that a number of conclusions, implications and recommendations arise from this study, and these will now be considered below.

7.3 Revisiting the Research Question and Aims

As set out in the introductory and methodology chapters, the study was guided by its overarching research question:

- In the absence of formalised professional learning for the role, what informs primary teachers' practice for their role as cooperating teacher in the school placement process in Ireland?

To support the in-depth exploration and answering of the research question, three key aims and objectives of the study were outlined. These were:

- To explore the sources of information and learning which cooperating primary teachers draw on in their discussion and enactment of the role.
- To uncover how cooperating teachers discuss the movement from class teacher to cooperating teacher when working with student teachers and the skills required in this change of role.
- To explore how these sources of learning, discussions with others, and/or engagements with others, inform their conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher.

The conclusions arising from the study are considered with this overarching question and the three research aims in mind.

7.3.1 Revisiting the First Research Aim: *To explore the sources of information and learning which cooperating primary teachers draw on in their discussion and enactment of the role.*

The literature suggests that cooperating teachers learn about and develop their role in a variety of ways, ranging from cultural influences within the school (*inter alia* Ó Gallchóir, O’Flaherty and Hinchion 2019; Mahomed and Singh 2022; Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn 2022) to interaction with others in structured and less structured ways (*inter alia* Minott and Willet 2011; Ambrosetti 2014; Hudson 2014; Mauri et al. 2019; Wexler 2023; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). As evident throughout this study, cooperating teachers do in fact draw on a range of sources of information in their work as a cooperating teacher, particularly in the absence of formalised professional learning for the role within the Irish context. The findings and discussion have demonstrated that as cooperating teachers navigate the landscape of practice, they cross and encounter boundaries and peripheries of and between practices

(Wenger 1998), and thus, these form the sources of information and knowledge that support them in their enactment of their role.

This study identified that knowledge of teacher induction was a key influence on cooperating teacher practice. This featured heavily in the data. It indicates that in the absence of formalised professional learning, cooperating teachers approximated their practice to a formalised role they could identify with at school level – that of Professional Support Team member, supporting NQTs for Droichead. This was particularly noteworthy in cases where the cooperating teachers who had not undergone the national programme of professional learning for Droichead mentors could still identify similarities and approaches within that formalised mentoring role that were beneficial to the role of cooperating teacher. In some instances, the ways in which knowledge of induction was used, were practical and beneficial to the cooperating teachers' work. However, on occasion, the use of Droichead as a key influence on cooperating teacher practice was problematic, given the distinct differences between ITE and induction as stages on the continuum of teacher education.

The influence of experience on cooperating teacher practice was evident, as was the extent to which it was used across the cases, particularly in the absence of formalised professional learning. Experience in a variety of forms was drawn on across cases, as cooperating teachers evidently visited practices that they had encountered in the past to support their enactment of their current role. Particularly prominent experiences referenced across the cases included cooperating teachers' own experiences of being student teachers themselves, as well as their experiences as a cooperating teacher over time. While this was beneficial in some cases, potential problems associated with an overreliance on experience were clear. Experience in the

absence of critique and reflection can prove detrimental to effective cooperating teacher practice, as it can limit one's innovation and creativity based on subjective interpretations. As such, past experience requires careful consideration and appraisal in terms of how it is used. In some cases, the depth of engagement with this critique was questionable. While experience supported empathy for the student teacher, which was evident in the ways cooperating teachers discussed their practice, it occasionally limited engagement in effective second-order practice due to limited ability to separate current practice from previous experience.

7.3.2 Revisiting the Second Research Aim: *To uncover how cooperating teachers discuss the movement from class teacher to cooperating teacher when working with student teachers and the skills required in this change of role.*

The study has demonstrated that cooperating teachers were aware of the duality of their role as class teacher and cooperating teacher when enacting the latter for the purposes of school placement. This was consistent with the literature which refers to such duality and its associated complexities (White and Berry 2022; Czerniawski et al. 2023; Kennedy and Bell 2023). For some cooperating teachers, their awareness of this duality was prompted through interaction with others. Student teachers were identified as one source of such prompting, where questioning by student teachers required cooperating teachers to reflect on their first-order practice as teacher in order to be able to engage in second-order practice discussions with the student teacher. In other cases, cooperating teachers referenced activities they engage in with student teachers and the differences between these activities and tasks compared to those in their day-to-day work as teachers. Challenging situations were also identified within the study, as prompting a noticeable transition between class teacher and cooperating teacher, as cooperating teachers strived to balance their

responsibilities to the student teachers with their position within school placement, and the informal role they play in relation to the HEI and school placement tutor. As such, these situations tended to spark interaction between cooperating teachers and their colleagues at school level, in terms of supporting them in their navigation of their role and the required skills to deal with challenging scenarios.

The study has used the conceptualisation of cooperating teacher as bricoleur (Levi-Strauss 1962; Johnson 2012) in an attempt to understand how exactly cooperating teachers learn to do what they do in their role. This has been useful in understanding how cooperating teachers work when supporting student teachers. However, based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that not all cooperating teachers necessarily work as bricoleurs. This is evident in the argument that cooperating teachers' work can be considered along a continuum of bricolage, ranging from limited innovation and creativity to extensive innovation and creativity, as a result of various factors. While some of the actions described across the cases appeared as actions of second-order practice, it is questionable whether these stemmed from a second-order practice knowledge, or whether they were actions based on reactions to or replications of past experiences. As such, the resourcefulness, innovation and creativity expected of a cooperating teacher working as bricoleur were not always present across the cases.

Some cooperating teachers draw on their experiences to shape their practice. Yet, others innovate and create by visiting the various practices they have access to within their broader landscape of practice, to support them in responding to and meeting the needs of the individual student teacher they are working with, in novel ways, at a given time. This signifies the complexity of the role, as mentioned heretofore, and the variability of practice between cooperating teachers from one

classroom and context to the next. It also demonstrates the dispositional nature of bricolage as a ‘mindset’ rather than just a practicality (Mateus and Sarkar 2024). It is more about how the cooperating teacher goes about their work in the absence of formalised professional learning, and with the student teachers’ needs in mind, rather than merely the actions they demonstrate in their work. Examples of this were evident in the ways in which principles of induction were applied to school placement, but cognisant of the differing and unique needs of the student teacher, and similarly in ways in which coaching approaches used in leadership were adapted to support student teacher practice.

7.3.3 Revisiting the Third Research Aim: *To explore how these sources of learning, discussions with others, and/or engagements with others, inform their conceptualisation of the role of cooperating teacher.*

Evidently, relationships and interactions with others are formative and influential in the role of the cooperating teacher (Czerniawski et al. 2023; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). This study demonstrated that as cooperating teachers navigate the landscape of practice, they encounter and interact with various parties throughout their enactment of the role and the extent to which these others influence practice varies. This is down to the complexity of the landscape, the different boundaries and peripheries encountered in each case, and the extent of innovation and creativity endeavoured in each case in the work of the cooperating teacher as bricoleur.

The school as a site of learning and influence for cooperating teachers was identifiable, and particularly the colleagues and school leaders whom cooperating teachers engaged with on an informal basis in the course of their work. Across the cases, multiple instances of cooperating teachers drawing on colleagues and school

leaders to support their understanding of their role or their conceptualisation of their role in practice were evident. This was particularly visible in instances where cooperating teachers were trying to align their practice to that of their colleagues, or where they sought to contextualise their practice in relation to school approaches. Informal discussion and conversation proved useful in this regard. Challenging scenarios instigated this in some cases, where cooperating teachers felt they required the support of others to ensure their practice was in line with what was expected of them. This is understandable, given that the practices of colleagues and school leaders are often readily accessible practices within the cooperating teacher's landscape and can be visited with relative ease to support understanding. This is notable, as while the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021), advocate for a whole-school approach to support placements, they do not offer commentary on the role of staff and school leadership in developing the role of cooperating teachers as school-based teacher educators within the school. The *Guidelines* refer to the role of the principal in facilitating school placement but lack reference to their role as teacher educator in the second-order practice space, and the influence they have on the ways in which cooperating teachers in their schools conceptualise and enact the role of cooperating teacher. The findings herein indicate that in practice, school leaders are key influences on practice within the landscape which cooperating teachers navigate.

Given that the school was identified as a significant location of learning for cooperating teachers, and those within the school as influential on cooperating teacher practice, it can be concluded that case study, and particularly the phased case study design utilised herein, was valuable to explore how cooperating teachers are informed about their role in the absence of formalised professional learning. The case study design allowed for prolonged engagement with the cases and potential access to

influential others that cooperating teachers identified as influential in their practice. Similarly, it supported exploration of the various sources of information that cooperating teachers mentioned and harnessed in their work. This provided a richer understanding of how cooperating teachers conceptualised their role and subsequently, how the role is enacted in practice during school placement. This is one of the key contributions arising from this study. As such, this will be considered further in the following section.

7.4 The Study's Contributions

The study discussed herein contributes to the field in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this discussion, these contributions have been categorised as methodological, theoretical and conceptual, and as those relating to practice. Each of these categories of contribution are considered below.

7.4.1 Methodological Contribution

Stemming directly from the final conclusion above, the first key contribution of the study is methodological in nature. The use of case study offered insight into how cooperating teachers learn about their role in school placement and how this was understood by the teachers themselves. The need for qualitative research in this space in the Irish context was warranted, particularly given recent quantitative and mixed-method studies on this topic (*inter alia* Czerniawski et al. 2023; Ó Gallchóir, Young and MacPhail 2024). This methodological approach supported this. The way in which the study was configured, with its phased design, allowed for prolonged engagement with the cases, through an initial and final interview, exploring sources of learning and

information they engaged with, engaging with influential others identified as influencing their cooperating teacher practice, and providing space for cooperating teachers to reflect on the study and their thoughts after the interviews. This approach supported the development of a sense of the individualised nature of the cases, as evident in the findings. By harnessing case study in this way, where focus was on the individual and their sources of learning, rather than case study on an organisational level, the development of a rounded understanding of how each case considered and enacted their role was achieved. The resultant case overviews now afford the opportunity for professionals and those in HEIs to consider these cases as vignettes of practice, which may be used to further develop the role of cooperating teacher in the future. This is pertinent to support those enacting the role and is explored further below in section 7.5.

7.4.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Contribution

This study offers a different way of thinking about the complex actions and interactions cooperating teachers engage with through preparation for and enactment of their second-order practice, by marrying of the key concepts and the theoretical lens underpinning the study. The synthesis of informal workplace learning (Marsick and Watkins 1990; Eraut 2004), first- to second-order practice (Murray 2002; Murray and Male 2005) and bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1962) contribute to how the informal learning of cooperating teachers can be conceptualised, acknowledging its complexity as a process. This allows for consideration of the myriad actions and experiences cooperating teachers engage with when enacting the role, which requires them to manage their dual role as teacher and school-based teacher educator (White 2014; White 2019a; Czerniawski et al. 2023). However, framing these central concepts and

constructs within Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) theoretical work on landscapes of practice enables the realisation of the spaces, experiences and influential others that cooperating teachers draw on in their understanding and enactment of this role. This study demonstrates that these practices are not only school-based but form a complex web of social spaces that cooperating teachers visit and harness in their work, ranging from past experiences to learning from other roles and positions, and visiting different practices in different phases of the continuum of teacher education. The visiting, encountering or avoiding of these spaces and practices allow opportunities for creativity and innovation in the work of cooperating teachers, when conditions are suitable for this to occur. However, this conceptual and theoretical framing also offers scope for consideration of other roles on the teacher education continuum in which individuals rely on the informal elements of and interactions in their practice to inform their role conceptualisation. This is particularly relevant for those who operate in second-order practice spaces in education, where they are expected to think about, talk about and teach about their first-order practice, without formal support to do so.

7.4.3 Contribution to Practice

There are a number of practical contributions of this study to the field of teacher education. Firstly, the study offers practical insight for practitioners and HEI staff responsible for ITE, into the nuances associated with cooperating teacher learning in practice. It is important that the voices of cooperating teachers are heard, particularly in the current era of proposed developments in programmes of learning for cooperating teachers, as mooted in policy in recent years (Teaching Council 2019; Department of Education 2023). The implications and recommendations associated

with this will be discussed below. Secondly, the insights gleaned from this study contribute to how cooperating teachers think about their learning for, preparation for and engagement in their role. Through the case studies provided, practitioners can identify elements of practice that resonate with their own practice. As such, the study has potential to act as a stimulus for reflection on the practice of being a cooperating teacher, what that means and how one enacts and develops the role when navigating school placement.

7.5 Recommendations and Implications

Based on the findings, discussion, conclusions and contributions presented thus far, there are a number of recommendations and implications which must be considered. While some of the findings point towards recommendations that have already been called for in the field, the recommendations and implications outlined are aligned more specifically to this study's contribution. For the purpose of this discussion, these are categorised into various contexts, namely, the practice context of schools, the practice context of HEIs, the macro-level policy context and the research context. Each of these contexts is explored below.

7.5.1 Recommendations and Implications in the Practice Context of Schools

Schools are central to school placement, and particularly in the context of the voluntary system of engagement with school placement which persists in Ireland to date (Long et al. 2012; Hall et al. 2018; Sloan and Dolan 2025). As such, there are school-level implications and recommendations, which can be considered and

implemented within the confines of the current model and system of school placement presently in operation in Ireland:

- Understanding how to think and work as a bricoleur can support cooperating teachers in their enactment of their role, particularly in the absence of formalised and standardised professional learning for the role. As such, consideration of the practices and approaches that might support cooperating teachers in their work with student teachers would be beneficial, cognisant of the needs of the particular student teacher they are working with at a given time. While experience supports familiarisation with the role, and empathy with the student teacher, it cannot be relied upon in isolation. Thinking creatively about how a student teacher can be supported with particular areas of need can ensure an innovative approach to the role of cooperating teacher, harnessing the array of skills, knowledge and experiences that come with being an experienced teacher.
- Given the centrality of the influence of induction on cooperating teacher role conceptualisation and the extent to which cooperating teachers draw on this knowledge of Droichead in their work with student teachers, developing approaches to support teachers in the transfer of skills from one role to another would be worthwhile. This would facilitate boundary encounters and boundary crossings between the two practices where appropriate. Prioritising the placement of student teachers with trained PST members for the Droichead process would support this, ensuring that PST members' skillsets are utilised for supporting school placements as effectively as possible. However, clarity from school leaders would be required to ensure that there is an awareness that Droichead and school placement are not directly comparable, nor are

approaches to supporting those in induction and ITE directly transferable. Cooperating teachers who have completed professional learning for Droichead can use their professional judgement and the needs of the student teacher to govern the supports that a particular student teacher might require at a given time or based on their stage of ITE.

7.5.2 Recommendations and Implications in the Practice Context of HEIs

Given that ultimate responsibility for school placement rests with the HEIs who offer ITE programmes across Ireland, there is a clear recommendation and implication arising from this study:

- The methodology used provides opportunities for HEI staff and university-based teacher educators to develop vignettes of practice for cooperating teachers. As evident, the cases explored herein had various experiences and engaged with the role of cooperating teacher in a variety of ways. Providing support materials for cooperating teachers to help them identify themselves as a cooperating teacher, and how they might then further develop their practice would be beneficial. If one was to consider what a continuum of cooperating teacher practice might look like, and how the disposition of cooperating teacher as bricoleur might be enhanced, vignettes similar to the cases explored would provide tangible, reflective opportunities for cooperating teachers to consider their current and future practice. This could prompt teachers to consider their (over-)reliance on experience, and how they might draw on other sources of information and learning as they navigate their role in practice.

7.5.3 Recommendations and Implications in the Macro-Level Policy Context

The study has shed light on the ways in which cooperating teachers learn about and inform themselves of their role within the school placement process. The reason that this occurs is ultimately due to the limited system and policy support they receive for their role in practice. As such, the study points towards recommendations and implications that can be considered at the policy macro-level:

- While the *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021) outline the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in relation to the facilitation of school placement and the managerial aspects arising from such facilitation, they fail to acknowledge the role of school leaders as teacher educators within the school context. The findings indicate that school leaders are particularly influential in how the role of cooperating teacher is conceptualised in practice. Accordingly, school leaders play an influential role in shaping the practice of cooperating teachers in this context. Review of the *Guidelines* can address this oversight and commit to text the teacher educator aspects of the school leader's role within school placement to ensure recognition of their influence and provide guidance on their role in second-order practice.
- Based on the findings, striving to ensure closer alignment between the roles of PST member for Droichead and cooperating teacher for school placement at the macro-policy level would be useful. While similarities in the roles are evident, a policy recommendation to encourage schools to utilise those teachers with particular expertise in supporting NQTs for the purposes of hosting student teachers on school placement, would support skill transfer between the roles. Such a recommendation may also acknowledge that while

certain skillsets may be useful in both roles, the phases of ITE and induction are distinct and so cooperating teacher practice should be commensurate with the student teachers' stage of ITE. Through further utilisation of the *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (Teaching Council 2011) in practice, school leaders and teachers can be supported in identifying the interconnectedness of each phase within the continuum, yet the distinct differences between these phases. This can afford practitioners the opportunity to identify their place on the continuum and how they can contribute to the continuity of the profession through the support they offer.

7.5.4 Recommendations and Implications in the Research Context

As alluded to earlier, this study has evidently contributed to the research on cooperating teacher learning. However, a number of future directions have come to the fore towards the conclusion of this research, which signal where potential research studies might expand upon the research detailed herein:

- As documented in Chapter Three, the study's participation criteria, while suitable for case study, were explicit. As such, a small and specific cohort of cooperating primary school teachers engaged in the study. If the above recommendation to develop a continuum of cooperating teacher engagement with the role through the use of vignettes is to be enacted, expanding the current research design to a broader cohort of cooperating teachers with other varied experiences would be beneficial.
- Given that this study was prolonged to allow for sufficient time to explore the cases and the various elements within each case, there is merit in future

research exploring a given period of school placement from the perspective of the cooperating teacher. Such a study could focus on cooperating teacher preparation for the role in advance of the placement, the navigation of the placement while enacting the role and the learning that is engaged in as the role is being enacted. This acknowledges the temporal nature of school placement for cooperating teachers, as something they engage with periodically at different stages. This would provide insight into learning experiences and first- to second-order transitions for cooperating teachers as they occur in practice and during their role enactment.

7.6 Potential Impact of the Study from the Professional Perspective

Given the emphasis on contribution to professional practice within a Doctor of Education programme, reflecting on the findings of the study and their potential impact on my current role and the professional space I occupy is worthwhile. As outlined in Chapter One, I currently work in the teacher education support services, specifically in teacher induction. Given the evident blurring of boundaries between ITE and induction as highlighted in the findings, there is scope to consider the potential for those of us working in teacher induction to extend our professional learning offerings to teachers enacting the role of cooperating teacher. This seems like a natural next step. System considerations would be required in terms of ensuring information sharing agreements are in place between teacher professional learning providers and HEIs in relation to cooperating teachers engaging in any such learning; however, there are already many structures in place which could potentially be adapted to support cooperating teachers. Through considering the continuum of teacher education in this

way, rather than a clearly delineated set of stages or sectors, it has the potential to support cooperating teachers in understanding and enacting their role in practice.

In taking account of the findings of the study, a programme of professional learning for cooperating teachers that focuses on the development of bricoleur mindset has the potential to be of benefit. Approaching a professional learning programme in this way would enable cooperating teachers to consider how they enact their role in practice, and how the elements of other practices that they are familiar with or have experience of, could support them in their work as various scenarios arise. This notion moves away from the idea of providing cooperating teachers merely with a list of defined roles and responsibilities they are expected to fulfil and instead supports the development of a mindset that responds to student teachers' emergent needs throughout a school placement. The case studies described herein provide a potential way of supporting cooperating teachers to think of themselves as bricoleurs. Vignettes of practice to prompt reflection have the potential to empower cooperating teachers to identify elements of their practice that can further support or enhance their role as cooperating teacher, and encourage the reflection on, adaptation of and transfer of skills and knowledge from one practice to another, opening peripheries between practices and promoting reflection and learning.

The model of support offered could include initial professional learning sessions, supplemented with suites of additional and self-paced supports developed to aid cooperating teachers in their day-to-day interactions with student teachers, colleagues and placement tutors during school placement periods. The current models of support provided through teacher induction would also support some of the school-level recommendations mentioned above, in a practical way. For example, sessions with school leaders focused on induction, could make tangible links between the roles

of PST members for Droichead and cooperating teachers for school placement, hence, supporting school leaders in placing student teachers with those experienced teachers also supporting NQTs, as recommended above. Given the blurring of boundaries between the stages of the continuum of teacher education evident in this study, there appears to be a valuable opportunity here to further develop teachers' and school leaders' understanding of the interconnectedness of these stages, and the place of the school in contributing meaningfully to ITE, induction and in-career development.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

This study grew from humble beginnings and a curiosity about teacher learning. As a teacher, I knew how I had learned to be a cooperating teacher without any formal guidance to do so. Whether the way I worked was correct or incorrect was yet to be determined, but it was what worked for me. Of course, I made many mistakes in my practice along the way, but these only strengthened my curiosity. I wondered how others learned what to do in this specific Irish context in which we find ourselves and began to engage in discussions on this topic with colleagues and friends. When concepts like first- and second-order practice were encountered on my journey, it heightened these wonderings further. This study sought to shed light on the sometimes-forgotten cooperating teachers who are relied upon so heavily in the Irish model of ITE. Through exploring the cases of Deirdre, Alan, Isabel, Sarah, Peter and Cora, an insight into some of the ways in which cooperating teachers navigate the landscape in which they find themselves have been shown. I hope that as you have explored this study, you have been able to find elements of your own practice within these unique cases, and it has led you to think about the ways in which you learn or have learned

about a defined role in which you engage when such learning and preparation must be self-directed and individually navigated in the absence of formalised professional learning. This account is not the end of this exploration of cooperating teacher learning, but rather the beginning of a recognition of the ways in which cooperating teachers learn to conceptualise and enact their role in school placement in Ireland, and a stimulus for a renewed focus on cooperating teacher learning and preparation for the crucial, yet voluntary, role they possess in initial teacher education.

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Appendices

**Appendix A: Sample Literature Review Key Words and Search Terms
(including number of results returned)**

<i>Database</i>	<i>Search Terms</i>	<i>Results</i>	<i>15- year filter</i>	<i>Completed</i>
Academic Search Complete	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + CPD <i>or</i> 'continuing professional development' <i>or</i> professional development	Peer Reviewed (12)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + CPD <i>or</i> 'continuing professional development' <i>or</i> professional development	Peer Reviewed (299)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + learning community <i>or</i> learning communities	Peer Reviewed (5)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + training <i>or</i> education <i>or</i> development <i>or</i> learning	Peer Reviewed (35)	✓	✓
British Education Index	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + professional development	Peer Reviewed (10)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + CPD <i>or</i> 'continuing professional development' <i>or</i> professional development	Peer Reviewed (10)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + CPD <i>or</i> 'continuing professional development' <i>or</i> professional development	Peer Reviewed (162)	✓	✓
	Cooperating teacher <i>or</i> mentor teacher + school placement + training <i>or</i> education <i>or</i> development <i>or</i> learning	Peer Reviewed (18)	✓	✓

Appendix B: Sample Literature Review Table

Title	Year	Journal	Author	Research Question	Framework	Data collection	Sample size	Key findings	Other	Connecting to my study
The role of the mentor in an increasingly school-led English initial teacher education policy context	2022	Professional Development in Education	Peiser, G., Debbie Duncaif and Andrea Mallaburn	(1) How do mentors conceptualise their roles and describe their work? (2) According to mentors, what factors enable or constrain their ability to carry out their work? (3) Do mentors' views and reported practices vary depending on ITE programme affiliation (university-led or school-led), and, or other contextual variables?	Mixed Methods?	2 step mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design: > Online Survey (n=64) > Semi-Structured Interview (n=7)	> Mentor teachers working wuth STs on school-led and university-led ITE programmes	> Data indicated that mentors had a traditional view of their role as directing the student teacher rather than collaborating with them and focussed on teacher training characteristics rather than teacher education characteristics in their approaches. > The data suggests that those CTs involved in school-led ITE felt more responsible for ST development than those working for university-led programmes. > Culture of school was influential in the types of practices discussed by mentor teachers. For example, schools performing badly saw mentors subscribe to a 'supervision' rather than mentoring approach, where they directed STs what to do in order to ensure pupil attainment was not detrimentally affected. Higher achieving schools showed more flexibility and openness. > School culture and ethos influenced the way in which mentors developed in their roles at school level - some worked in isolation, others worked in teams where knowledge could be		> The impact of school culture and climate can be seen in the ways that mentors engage with STs and with each other, and thus how they understand and operate within their role at school level.

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Initial Interview

Interview Guide Prompts	Associated EQ/Aim
To start, can you think back to the first time you had a student teacher, and tell me a bit about that. • How did it come about that the student came to you? • How did you feel during that time? • How did you know what to do? • What were the kinds of things you did or maybe now looking back, the things you didn't do?	Aim 2 Aim 3
This time, I want you to think about your most recent experience of being a cooperating teacher and tell me about that. • What kinds of things did you do as CT? • How did you know what to do?	Aim 2 Aim 3
So, thinking about the first time you were a CT, or those early occasions of being a CT, and thinking about your most recent experiences of being a CT, are there things that you did then that you still do now, or are there things that you did then that maybe you don't do anymore? Talk me through some of those things. • Why have you stopped doing _____? • Why have you started doing _____? • Where did you find about doing _____? • Where did you find out about these ideas or where did you encounter these ideas that you have now started?	Aim 1 Aim 3
Have you had student teachers who have excelled... talk me through what you did... how did you know...	Aim 1 Aim 3

Talk me through what you do if you a student teacher is having difficulty during their placement, or if you have a concern.	Aim 1 Aim 3
If you were unsure of what to do with a student teacher, tell me about what you would do in that scenario or what steps you might take. Who/where/what would you go to? Why?	Aim 1
What are the kinds of things you discuss with a student teacher when they are on placement in your classroom? - Do you use examples from your own practice? How do you use them? - Why do you focus on those things during your conversations? - Does this change depending on the stage that the student teacher is at? Can you give me an example?	Aim 2
You were asked to participate because.... Can you tell me a bit about that? Do you see any connections between the two? Are there skills that you use in both roles/spaces? Do you see these roles as separate....?	Aim 3
Is there anything that you're thinking about now about your role as cooperating teacher that maybe you weren't thinking about before this conversation. Can you talk through it? If not... include it in the verbal log... etc.	Aim 3
Finally, as we come to the end, I want you to think about this final question and talk me through it. If someone asked you to explain the role of the cooperating teacher to a student teacher who had just started their initial teacher education course, what would you say? Maybe CT who is about to start the role.... Could you think of a similar or comparable role to that of the cooperating teacher? What is it? Why?	Aim 2 Aim 3

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Influential Other

Sample Interview Topics/Questions for Informal Supplementary Interview with Influential Other(s):

- The co-operating teacher mentioned you in their discussion.... Are you aware of the role you played? Was it a deliberate role / action? Where / how did you learn to do that?
- Interactions between cooperating teacher and other.
- Discussion between cooperating teacher and other – school placement specific discussions, general discussions about the classroom, general discussions about practice etc.
- Cooperating Teacher mentioned _____, tell me a little bit more about this from your perspective.

Appendix E: Sample Reflective Log Prompt Questions

Suggested Prompt Questions for Reflective Log:
• Is there anything you would like to add to what we discussed in the interview? • Is there anything you would like to clarify based on what we discussed? • Has anything else come to mind about your role, your experiences, your preparation for the role etc. which you would like me to know about? • Is there anything you would like to have said but didn't get around to saying? • Is there anything that you think may have been miscommunicated which you would like to give some more information on? • Are there things you are thinking about now which maybe you hadn't been thinking about before our interview?

Appendix F: Participant Recruitment Flyer

WANTED!
Research Participants

**Maynooth University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Who? Primary teachers working in Ireland

Are you a **primary teacher** who has...

- 1) Worked as a **cooperating teacher** for student teachers **within the last 2 academic years?**

and

- 2) Taught for **at least 5 years** post-qualification?

If you answered **YES** to each of the above criteria, please read on!

Do you also fit within **at least one** of these categories?

A cooperating primary teacher who...

...completed your Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland?	...completed your Initial Teacher Education abroad?	...works as a Principal or Deputy Principal?
...is a trained Droichead Induction Support Team member?	...has engaged in postgraduate study in education beyond your ITE?	...volunteers as a coach in a sporting/ community setting?

If you answered **YES** to **at least one** of the above criteria, then I would love to hear from you!

What is the study? A research study on cooperating primary teacher preparation for their role.	Who is conducting the study? Mark O'Sullivan, Doctoral Researcher in Maynooth University	What next? For more information, scan the QR code or contact Mark at:
--	--	--



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Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet for Cooperating Teachers



INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

'Learning to teach student teachers in school:

An exploratory case study of the learning associated with the role of cooperating primary teacher in the Irish context.'

Purpose of the Study.

My name is Mark O'Sullivan. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Rose Dolan and Dr. Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich.

The study is concerned with cooperating primary teachers who work with student teachers during their school placement. It focuses particularly on cooperating teacher learning and preparation for their role.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

What will participating in the study involve?

The study will involve you becoming a research participant and engaging with me on a number of occasions, in different phases of the study, to explore your learning and preparation for your role as cooperating teacher.

- Before the initial interview, we will **identify where** the interview will take place. You will have the option of attending an Education Centre, or conducting the interview in your place of work, outside of work hours. There is also the option of conducting a remote interview via Maynooth's University's Microsoft Teams platform.
- Phase 1: Initially, we will engage in a **semi-structured interview**, between forty-five minutes and an hour in length where we will discuss your role, your experiences, your learning for the role and so on. This will be audio-recorded, in order for me to transcribe it after the interview is completed. You will also have the opportunity to send me a **voice-note** via email or to upload this to a secure OneDrive folder, as a reflective log, if there is anything you would like to add or clarify after the interview. This is optional. Voice-notes have been selected as they provide you with the option

to record your reflections when and where you have the opportunity to do so. It also means you can listen back to your reflections, which will hopefully make the process of reflecting on your practice and our interactions together accessible to you should you wish to engage in this optional aspect of the study.

- Phase 2: At the end of the interview, I will ask your permission to follow up on some of the ideas or sources you might have mentioned in the interview. I will also ask you to consider, if you are happy to do so, giving my contact details to someone you may have mentioned during the interview as influencing your practice in your role as cooperating teacher. They can then decide to make contact with me, if they would like to engage in a short, informal discussion (approx. 15 minutes) with me about their perceived influence on your practice, and the types of discussions or activities you engage in together in that regard.
- Phase 3: You and I will then engage in a **final interview** after I have completed the above phase and discuss everything that I have gathered to date – our initial interview, any voice-notes you may have sent or uploaded, and any sources or other people I may have interacted with. This will also be audio-recorded.

What information will be collected?

As above, the types of data which will be collected will include:

- Interview Data, which will be audio-recorded
- Voice-note data (optional), which you will record yourself and email/upload to me
- Additional source data, which you indicate in your interview and I then follow-up on (which may include a short, informal interview with an individual you suggest, or a document analysis)

Why have you been selected to take part?

You self-nominated to take part in this study and were subsequently selected because you are a cooperating primary teacher, with a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and you have engaged as a cooperating teacher within the last two academic years. You also fall within one of the specific categories of cooperating teacher with the required expertise, listed in the box below:

You are a cooperating primary teacher, who:
• completed your Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland <i>or</i> • completed your ITE abroad <i>or</i> • is a senior leader (principal/deputy principal) <i>or</i> • is a trained Droichead Induction Professional Support Team member <i>or</i> • has engaged in postgraduate study in education (beyond ITE) <i>or</i> • works/volunteers as a coach in a sporting/community setting.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research, despite initially self-nominating to do so. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to continue

with your participation in the study. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until one month after our final interview together, at which point data sources are irreversibly anonymised. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with Maynooth University.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential and no names will be identified at any time after the data collection phase. However, given the nature of the case study, and the data collection techniques outlined above, your name and participation will be known by those to whom you have passed on my contact information for Phase Two of the study. The topics that you discuss with me in terms of your interaction with this individual will also be shared with them.

While maintaining your confidentiality will be paramount during the study, it is also expected that you will respect and maintain the confidentiality of the other individual(s), who you may be aware of, are also engaging in Phase Two of the study.

All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet until such time it can be transferred to the secure MU server. Electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU servers and will be accessed only by Mark O’Sullivan. Access may be required by Dr. Rose Dolan and Dr. Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich in a supervisory capacity, given the nature of the research as a doctoral study.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion, up until such time as the data are irreversibly anonymised (one month after your **final** interview).

‘It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.’

What will happen to the information which you give?

All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. You can access your data up to the point of irreversible anonymisation (one month after your final interview) by contacting Mark O’Sullivan, via the details below. Data will be retained for ten years on the Maynooth University server, in line with university protocols. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by Dr. Rose Dolan (Primary Research Supervisor). Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by my supervisor in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a thesis in the first instance. However, it is also intended that the findings may be used in presentations at national and international conferences, and may be published in journals, policy advice papers and so on. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

While it is not envisaged that there will be any negative consequences for you in taking part, it is possible that talking about your experiences as a student teacher or cooperating teacher may cause some distress. A list of supports will be made available to you at the start of the interview to assist with this.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of each interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience. If you experience any distress following the interviews, you may contact the supports available on the list provided.

You may also contact my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Rose Dolan, if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above:

Dr. Rose Dolan

**Is there anything else I should know in relation to this research?**

This research has received support in the form of a small bursary from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). This support is to encourage primary teachers to engage in doctoral study and the bursary support from the organisation will not influence the study's findings or the dissemination of these findings.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me to discuss this more:

Mark O'Sullivan



If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form provided.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix H: Participant Information Sheet for Secondary Participants (Influential Others)



INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

'Learning to teach student teachers in school:

An exploratory case study of the learning associated with the role of cooperating primary teacher in the Irish context.'

Purpose of the Study.

My name is Mark O'Sullivan. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Rose Dolan and Dr. Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich.

The study is concerned with cooperating primary teachers who work with student teachers during their school placement. It particularly focuses on cooperating teacher learning and preparation for their role.

There are three phases in the study. The first phase is an initial interview with cooperating primary teachers. **This information sheet relates to the second phase of the study, where other individuals known to a cooperating teacher have been identified as being influential on their practice as a cooperating teacher.** The third phase involves a final interview with the cooperating teacher.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

What will participating in the study involve?

The study will involve you becoming a research participant and engaging with me for a short, informal interview about your interaction with the cooperating teacher who considered you influential to their practice, and the topics that you discuss or have discussed with them in this regard.

- Before the interview, we will **identify where** the interview will take place. You will have the option of attending an Education Centre, or conducting the interview in your place of work, outside of work hours. There is also the option of conducting a

remote interview via Maynooth's University's Microsoft Teams platform.

- We will then have a **short, informal interview** (15 minutes duration approx.), where we will discuss your interaction with the cooperating teacher who identified you as influential to their practice, and the types of things that you discuss or have discussed with them or with others in a similar position, in this regard. This will be audio-recorded, in order for me to transcribe it after the interview is completed.

What information will be collected?

As above, the type of data which will be collected is:

- Interview Data, which will be audio-recorded

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to participate, and subsequently volunteered to do so, because you have been identified by a participating cooperating teacher, as being influential to their practice or learning in their role as cooperating teacher, and they have provided you with my contact details so you could demonstrate your willingness to participate.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research, despite contacting me for more information about the study. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to continue with your participation in the study. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised and analysed, one month after your interview. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with Maynooth University.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential and no names will be identified at any time after the data collection phase. However, given the nature of the case study, and the data collection techniques outlined above, your name and participation in the study will be known to the cooperating teacher who has identified you as influential to their practice, and who has given you my contact details in order for you to demonstrate your willingness to participate. The topics that you discuss will also be discussed with the cooperating teacher for the purposes of understanding your interactions with one another.

While maintaining your confidentiality will be paramount during the study, it is also expected that you will respect and maintain the confidentiality of the other individual(s) you are aware of who are engaging in the study.

All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet until such time it can be transferred to the secure MU server. Electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU servers and will be accessed only by Mark O'Sullivan. Access may be required by Dr. Rose Dolan and Dr. Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich in a supervisory capacity, given the nature of the research as a doctoral study.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion, up until such time as the data is irreversibly anonymised (one month after your interview).

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give?

All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. You can access your data up to the point of irreversible anonymization, one month after your interview, by contacting Mark O'Sullivan, via the details below. Data will be retained for ten years on the Maynooth University server, in line with university protocols. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by Dr. Rose Dolan (Primary Research Supervisor). Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by my research supervisor in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a thesis in the first instance. However, it is also intended that the findings may be used in presentations at national and international conferences, and may be published in journals, policy advice papers and so on. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

While it is not envisaged that there will be any negative consequences for you in taking part, it is possible that talking about your experiences as a student teacher or cooperating teacher, or your interactions with others fulfilling those roles, may cause some distress. A list of supports will be made available to you at the time of interview to assist with this.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of each interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience. If you experience any distress following the interviews, you may contact the supports available on the list provided.

You may also contact my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Rose Dolan, if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above:

Dr. Rose Dolan



Is there anything else I should know in relation to this research?

This research has received support in the form of a small bursary from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). This support is to encourage primary teachers to engage in

doctoral study and the bursary support from the organisation will not influence the study's findings or the dissemination of these findings.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me to discuss this more:

Mark O'Sullivan



If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form provided.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix I: Consent Form for Participants



CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I agree to participate in Mark O'Sullivan's research study titled:

'Learning to teach student teachers in school:

An exploratory case study of the learning associated with the role of cooperating primary teacher in the Irish context.'

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission for my interviews with Mark O'Sullivan to be audio-recorded. ☐

I understand that I can decide if I want to give Mark O'Sullivan's contact information to an 'influential other' I have mentioned within my interview, in order for them to decide to engage in a follow-up discussion about their influence on my role. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to irreversible data anonymization, one month after my final interview. ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access them on request up until the data are irreversibly anonymised. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet. ☐

I agree to maintain and respect the confidentiality of other participants, where I am aware of the participation of others, as described in the information sheet. ☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interviews and reflective logs. ☐

OR

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interviews and reflective logs. ☐

Signed:

Date:

Participant Name:

[BLOCK CAPITALS]

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed:

Date:

Researcher Name:

[BLOCK CAPITALS]

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The Data Protection office is located in Room 27, Rye Building, North Campus, Maynooth University, which can be contacted at dataprotection@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Appendix J: Consent Form for Secondary Participants (Influential Others)



CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I agree to participate in Mark O’Sullivan’s research study titled:

‘Learning to teach student teachers in school:

An exploratory case study of the learning associated with the role of cooperating primary teacher in the Irish context.’

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission for my interview with Mark O’Sullivan to be audio-recorded. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to irreversible data anonymization, one month after my interview. ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access them on request up until the data are irreversibly anonymised. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet. ☐

I agree to maintain and respect the confidentiality of other participants, where I am aware of the participation of others, as described in the information sheet. ☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview. ☐

OR

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.



Signed:

Date:

Participant Name:

[BLOCK CAPITALS]

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed:

Date:

Researcher Name:

[BLOCK CAPITALS]

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The Data Protection office is located in Room 27, Rye Building, North Campus, Maynooth University, which can be contacted at dataprotection@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Appendix K: Support Document for Participants

If you are in need of further support and require assistance or someone to talk to, please see the following list of supports and resources available to you:

The Department of Education's Employee Assistance Service, **Folláine le Chéile**
– Information available here:



<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/23acf5-employee-assistance-service/>

Spectrum Life, who offer 'in the moment' and sustained support options:



Call: 1800 411 057

Text/WhatsApp: text 'Hi' to 087 369 0010

<https://www.spectrum.life/>



<https://wellbeingtogether.spectrum.life/login?org=yVIIU17>

The Samaritans offer confidential support services, see:



Call: 116 123



<https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/samaritans-ireland/>

pg ④ - Middle Para.
* Being pulled from classroom by Principal but liked being in there.

Link to CT4
Link to CT5
Link to CT6
Link to CT7
Link to CT8
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↓
follow-up - how did that feel? do you do it now to CTs?

pg ⑥ - Middle.
* not qualified to give feedback.

pg ⑦ - Top.
* mentioned inspect crate guidelines.

↓
which ones?
Follow-Up Needed?

pg ⑩ - Top.
→ balancing role demands CT/Teacher/Principal.

Appendix M: Sample Coding using Microsoft Word

R: Okay and so that first time that that student came to you, like how did it come about that it was decided that the student was coming to your class? Or that the student was coming to you?

CT3: Ahm, my principal just came to me and said he had a student who was looking for placement in a senior class and I was teaching 6th class at the time ahm, and I suppose, I hadn't had a student teacher before and I'm thinking now, maybe the others, we have three 6th classes, maybe the other 6th classes had already had a student teacher the year before. [Whereas I] was in 6th a couple of years at this stage and I hadn't had somebody yet so we usually try and spread it out, so that one person wouldn't be getting a student all of the time. Ahm, and I suppose I'm not too long gone from being a student myself compared to maybe the other 6th class teachers, so I suppose he maybe also felt that I might be a good person to take it on, I suppose. Ahm, especially for a student teacher who was only kind of on his second placement and was just getting started. | And yeah, that was it really.

R: And given that it was your first time having a student teacher, how did you know what to do?

CT3: Ahm...

R: Or like what are the kinds of things that you did? Like just talk me through them.

CT3: Yeah, I didn't, I suppose I didn't really... the guidelines that we were given were probably just like a page with bullet points so it wasn't a whole pile of information that we got in order to kind of guide us to how to support the student. [Ahm, I would have chatted with him a lot during the observation week and obviously he might have been watching lessons and things and asking me questions about how I approached certain things]. Ahm, I would have gone through subject areas with him, taken out books and I would have talked, spoken to him about maybe behavioural issues in the class and maybe I suppose needs in the class and what, what it might look like when he was teaching himself with regards our support teacher coming in and out as well. | Ahm, and how did I know what to do? I suppose, I probably thought back to when I was a student myself and how the teachers kind of interacted with me, ahm, as well as, maybe, how I would have liked to have been interacted with at the time and also I suppose, especially once he had began, to kind of see what his personality was and how he was getting on. it gave me more of a sense for how I could maybe proceed with him. [Was he someone who maybe needed a lot of guidance or was he someone who didn't really need a lot of guidance? Ahm, I would have gone through timetables with him. He might have asked me for ideas the different subject areas, or an odd time he would have said, you know after he might have finished, he might have said 'Oh that

Mark O' Sullivan
Principal's decision

Mark O' Sullivan
Principal's rationale

Mark O' Sullivan
Guidelines

Mark O' Sullivan
Observation and discussion

Mark O' Sullivan
Discussion points

Mark O' Sullivan
Experience as ST

Appendix N: Sample Coding and Analysis Management System

Initial Codes			Refined codes:		Categories:		Refined Categories:	Principal	Concepts:	Experience	
	Time of year	Placement structures		Autism Class Experience		Positive Experience as CT					
	Placement duration	Placement structures		Own experience as ST		Negative Experience as CT					
	Class teacher uncertainty	Feeling underprepared		Own experience with CTs		Positive Experience as ST		Class teacher experience		Induction	
	Class profile	Being a class teacher		Interacting with STs		Negative Experience as ST					
	Newly qualified	Own experience as a NQT		Challenges with STs		Droichead Mentor Experience		Own experience as a NQT		Relationships/Interactions	
	Apprehension	CT vulnerability		Feeling underprepared		Droichead Training					
	Challenges	Challenges with STs		Interacting with Inspectors		Experience as NQT		Droichead Experience			
	Newly qualified	Own experience as a NQT		Droichead Mentor Experience		Relationships with Colleagues					
	Reflection	Reflection		Working with Colleagues		Interactions with STs		Experience as a ST			
	Principal request	Principal Involvement		Principal Involvement		Principal Involvement					
	Class profile	Being a class teacher		ST areas of focus		Teaching Experience		Cooperating Teacher Experience			
	Relationship with ST	Interacting with STs		Reflection		Reflection					
	Difficult	Challenges with STs		CT vulnerability		Interactions with SP Tutors		Working with Student Teachers			
	Underqualified	Feeling underprepared		Own experience as a NQT		Role and Responsibilities					
	Own TP experience	Own experience as ST		Teacher friends				Collegial Support			
	Own experience with CTs	Own experience with CTs		CT responsibilities							
	Principal support	Principal Involvement		Placement structures							
	CT experience of SP	Own experience as ST		Relationships with STs							
	Support from principal	Principal Involvement		Role separation							
	ST seeking support	Interacting with STs		Droichead Training							
	Principal involvement	Principal Involvement		Being a class teacher							
	CT vulnerability	CT vulnerability		Developing as a CT							
	Three-way discussion	Interacting with STs									
	Class teacher development	Being a class teacher									
	Being newly qualified	Own experience as a NQT									
	CT reflection	Reflection									
	Pressure on CT	CT vulnerability									
	Age	Challenges with STs									
	Reflection	Reflection									
	Responsibility	CT responsibilities									
	Professional conversations	Droichead Mentor Experience									
	Droichead	Droichead Training									
	Autism class experience	Autism Class Experience									
	Collaboration	Relationships with STs									
	Different perspectives	Working with Colleagues									
	Seeking support	Working with Colleagues									
	Supportive process	Droichead Mentor Experience									
	Induction experience	Own experience as a NQT									
	Collegial support	Working with Colleagues									
	Mentor	Droichead Mentor Experience									
	Vulnerability	CT vulnerability									
	Experience as CT	Developing as a CT									