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**Partnering for Success: Hibernia College,
the Treoraí and the Student Teacher**

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Partnering for Success: Hibernia College, the Treoraí and the Student Teacher

Each year, post-primary schools across our country warmly welcome student teachers who are seeking to complete a programme of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) into their school communities. These aspiring educators represent the future of our teaching profession. School placement is a crucial step on a student teacher's journey to developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to become a teacher. It is the first step in their professional learning journey.

Introduction

In the Hall et al. (2018) report commissioned by the Teaching Council, the importance of the relationship between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and schools is emphasised. It highlights the need for a partnership to be built between these key partners "in the interests of maximizing the professional learning of student teachers" (p.11). Both the cooperating teacher (CT) and the HEI tutor are expected to collaborate and share expertise in fostering the student teacher's learning. Hall et al. (2018, p.12) conclude, having reviewed the literature, that "CTs need to be carefully selected and trained for their roles and that their roles need to be made explicit in terms of responsibility and approach."

The term **Treoraí**, the Irish word for guide, replaces the term *Co-operating Teacher* and more accurately reflects the nature of the role of a teacher who supports and guides the student teacher during his/her school placement experience.

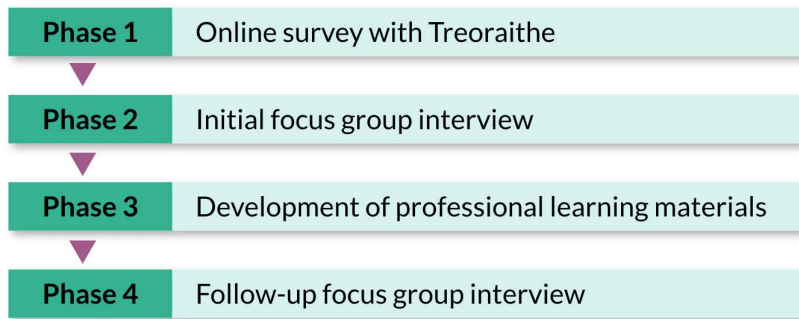
Céim: standards for initial teacher education – in accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001-2015

Research

Collaborative professionalism: an exploration of the Treoraí's role and professional learning needs in supporting a student teacher during the practicum experience of an ITE programme in Ireland

With the support of the John Coolahan Research Support Framework and Hibernia College, we embarked on a small-scale action research study. We investigated the perception of **the Treoraí role** from those currently in the role, and as findings have already been documented in the existing literature, the predominant focus of this research became an exploration from the perspective of the Treoraí of **their professional learning needs in the role**. We undertook to ascertain whether online professional learning resources, developed in response to feedback from research participants, might be of value to Treoraithe.

What did the research look like?



We invited 200 Treoraithe currently supporting post-primary student teachers from Hibernia College to participate in the research. This yielded a sample size of 16 participants (n=16). As data would be gathered from a survey and focus groups, this sample size was deemed appropriate.

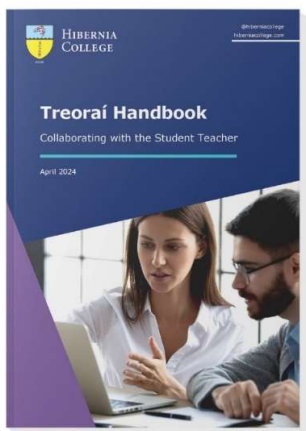
To begin, we designed a survey to capture views on the role of the Treoraí as well as their perspectives on their professional learning needs regarding the Treoraí role. Thirteen participants (n=13) completed the survey.

Findings and Development of Resources

The findings of the survey regarding the professional learning needs of the Treoraí subsequently informed the development of two key professional learning resources by the researchers for the Treoraí.

1. A Treoraí Handbook

The purpose of the handbook was to provide the Treoraí with valuable information on the school placement module. This resource aimed to bridge the information gap and better equip Treoraithe in their roles.



“Both the handbook and resource itself is amazing, I look forward to the day where this is unified.”

2. Professional Learning Resources

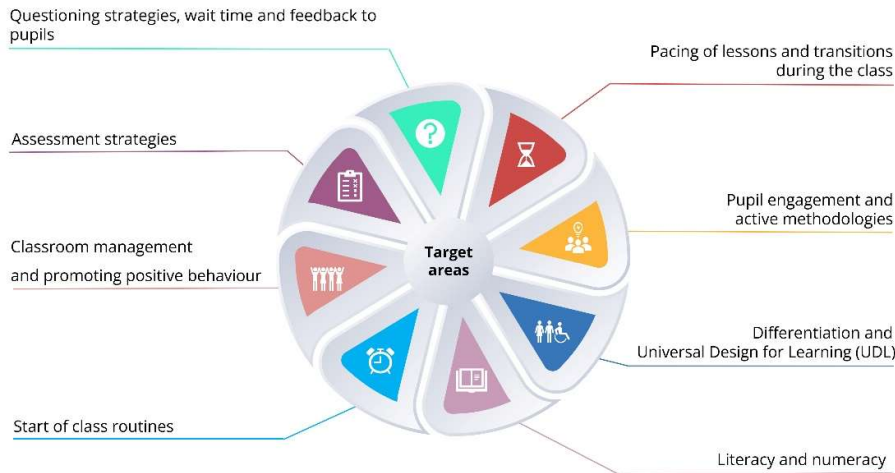
Three online interactive modules were designed to provoke critical thinking and support Treoraithe in their roles, with the aim of better equipping Treoraithe as they guide and mentor student teachers during school placement.

Modules

1. Observation

In the *School Placement in Initial Teacher Education* report, Hall et al. (2018) conclude that a key feature of a student teacher's development should include the opportunity to observe teaching. The first module presents some suggested techniques and strategies for observing student teachers in the classroom with suggestions for focused discussion and reflection.

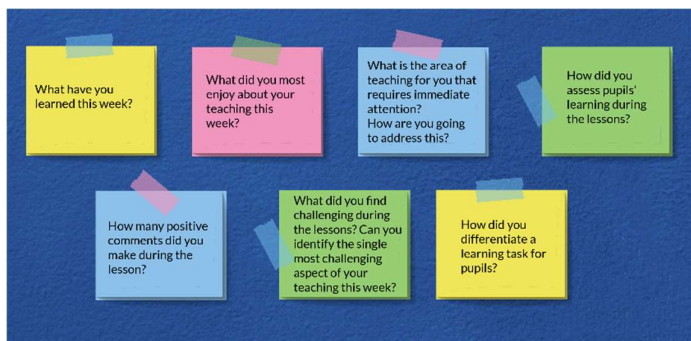
Example of target areas for observation (taken from Module 1: Professional Learning Resources)



“I found the observing teaching and learning section useful as it outlined some excellent strategies to be shared with student teachers.” (relating to Module 1 of the Professional Learning Resources)

2. Feedback and Reflection

Feedback and learning are intrinsically linked, whether it is the feedback pupils receive in the classroom or the feedback that student teachers receive during school placement. The second module aims to enhance the ability of Treoraithe to provide impactful feedback and foster a reflective mindset in student teachers, thereby contributing to their professional development and effectiveness in the classroom. Example of a feedback model from Module 2: Professional Learning Resources)

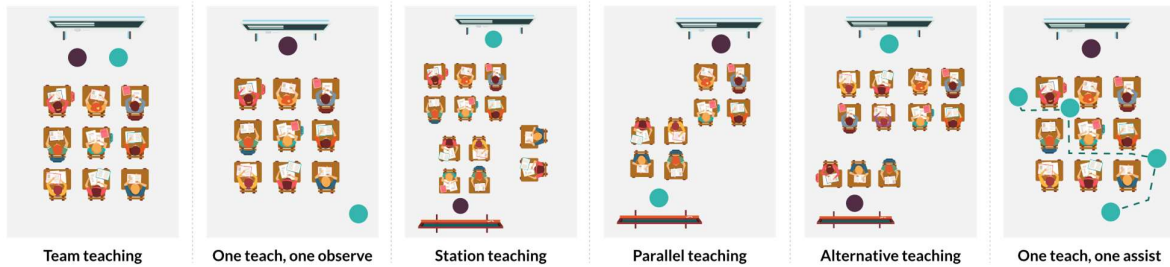


“I found the questions to help with reflection very useful as they help to focus the discussion and promote evidence-based dialogue and action.” (relating to Module 2 of the Professional Learning Resources)

3. Team Teaching

Team teaching, where a student teacher collaborates with an experienced teacher in the classroom, can significantly enhance the learning experience for both the student teacher and the pupils.

Models of Team Teaching



Snapshot of the Key Findings



The survey and initial focus group highlighted:

- **More information** is needed by the Treoraí from HEIs offering an ITE programme on the structure and processes of school placement.
- **Greater clarity** vis-a-vis the expectations of the Treoraí role is needed.
- Better articulation of **areas of responsibility** is needed.
- **Continuing professional development (CPD)** that focuses on the professional learning needs of the Treoraí would be welcomed.
- **The need to understand the assessment process** for the student teacher; the research participants said this would facilitate better support for the student teacher.

The follow-up focus group highlighted:

- **The value of the Treoraí handbook**, which was seen as informative, providing essential details about school placement, and not typically available from a HEI. However, the variability in organisational structures across different ITE colleges poses a challenge, as a Treoraí handbook would by its nature be specific to one HEI.
- **Positive engagement with the professional learning resources**, with an appreciation for the online, on-demand nature of the professional learning resources. The content and flexibility of the resources were commended. The interactive elements and specific modules on observation, feedback, and reflection were particularly valued although team teaching was considered less relevant due to limited direct experience.



Main Takeaways

- **Treoraí commitment:** Treoraithe are deeply committed to supporting student teachers; they welcomed and valued professional and collaborative dialogue around this important topic.

- **The role of Treoraí was seen as rewarding**, particularly in terms of the benefits to the Treoraí's own professional practice.
- **Recognition of role:** The role of the Treoraí is not afforded the recognition it needs. As one of the participants commented: "Anyone can be a Treoraí where no training or guidance is given." It may be concluded that if the role of Treoraí "in providing structured support and guidance to student teachers is [to be a] pivotal [one]" (Teaching Council (2021), then there must be further consideration of the Treoraí as a salient partner.
- **Appetite for professional learning:** Despite time constraints, the participants demonstrated strong interest in engaging with professional learning resources to enhance their mentoring capabilities.
- **Importance of more formal structures:** Research participants expressed the view that more formalised structures, such as in place for Droichead, would be beneficial for the school, the Treoraí and the student teacher.
- **Better link and communication between ITE and the Treoraí.** The school placement tutor should link in and discuss the student teacher's progress with the Treoraí. This would enhance the perception of the role as well.

Next steps

This research highlights the absence of professional learning resources for the Treoraí, and in undertaking an evaluation of an interactive professional learning module of learning, it underscores the importance of structured support from HEI colleges offering ITE programmes.

Making appropriate and relevant professional learning resources available to Treoraithe can significantly benefit them by providing the guidance and support necessary for their professional development. This, in turn, can positively impact the student teacher and the broader school community.

References

Teaching Council (2021) Guidelines on School Placement: Revised edition 2021. Maynooth: Teaching Council.

Hall, K., Murphy, R., Rutherford, V. and Ní Áingléis, B. (2018) School Placement in Initial Teacher Education. Maynooth: The Teaching Council.

Author Profiles



David Broderick, an educator with 20 years of experience, serves as a Gaeilge and Physical Education teacher and Assistant Principal at Coláiste Bhaile Chláir (GRETB) in Galway, where he has also acted as Deputy Principal. Recently, he has worked as a school placement tutor for Hibernia College and the University of Limerick, in addition to serving as an academic tutor and author with Hibernia College. David holds professional diplomas in Educational Leadership and Coaching and Mentoring.



Karen Casey is a former principal of St Colman's Community College, a school under the patronage of Cork ETB, and was previously a deputy principal at Mayfield Community School. She currently works as REALT coordinator with Cork ETB. Karen is passionate about learning and teaching, and her areas of professional interest have included Irish-medium education and the professional learning of teachers and school leaders. She holds an MSc in Personal and Management Coaching from UCC. Karen contributes to the field of initial teacher education in her role as academic tutor with Hibernia College.



Patricia Nunan is the Programme Director of the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Post-Primary Education.

Since joining Hibernia College in 2020, Patricia has worked as the School Placement Lead on the PME Post Primary programme. Her background is as a Post Primary teacher of Mathematics and French.

Patricia holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Higher Diploma in Education in Mathematics and French. She previously completed two postgraduate programmes in Maynooth University, namely the Higher Diploma in Educational Management and Administration (2003) and the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership (2009). She graduated from Waterford Institute of Technology in 2019 with a Master of Arts Management in Education (MAME).

Patricia's research interests include initial teacher education and the role both mentoring and reflective practice play within. In her doctoral studies, Patricia is exploring the potential of a collaborative, dialogic relationship between student teacher and cooperating teacher (Treoraí) to enhance pedagogical content knowledge in the Mathematics classroom.