

**The development of a cooperating physical education teachers' (COPET)
programme and an investigation into how this programme impacts on the
teaching practice experiences' of the three members of the teaching
practice triad**

Carol Dunning

Dublin City University



Supervisors: Dr. Sarahjane Belton

Dr. Sarah Meegan

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of science is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Dedication

To every full time teacher who has undertaken research!

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List of abbreviations

COPET	Cooperating Physical Education Teacher
DCU	Dublin City University
PDS	Professional Development School
PE	Physical Education
PEAI	Physical Education Association of Ireland
PETE	Physical Education Teacher Education

Abstract

Title - *The development and evaluation of a cooperating physical education teachers' (COPET) programme*

Cooperating teachers are central to the teacher education process particularly in helping student teachers to make the transition from '*students of teaching*' to '*teachers of students*' (Ganser, 2002). Due to having daily contact and being in '*the trenches*' with the student teacher, researchers suggest that the cooperating teacher plays a fundamental role as a mentor, role model and friend (Tjeerdsma, 1998). Teaching practice however, can be a difficult time for all involved as attempts are made to incorporate two largely separate worlds (Beck and Kosnik, 2000): the university setting and the school setting. All three groups of the teacher education triad make a valuable contribution to the experience; student teachers bring their own experiences as students to physical education (PE) classes, university supervisors bring knowledge gained through teaching and research and cooperating teachers bring subject matter and pedagogical knowledge gained from their experiences as practitioners and as undergraduates (Mc Cullick, 2001). The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of a cooperating physical education teacher's programme on student teacher learning from the perspectives of all three groups involved; the cooperating teacher, the student teacher and the university supervisor.

A cooperating physical education teachers programme (COPET) was designed in an effort to maximise the learning opportunities for student teachers when on teaching practice placement. The programme was piloted with a cohort of twenty-six cooperating teachers supervising twenty-eight student teachers on teaching practice placement. Following this two week placement, separate focus group interviews were held with eleven cooperating teachers, fourteen student teachers and six university supervisors to evaluate the effectiveness of the COPET programme. The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used to analyse the focus group data.

Findings indicate that all three members of the teaching practice triad believe the COPET programme to have had a positive impact on the teaching practice process. This impact centred around levels of interaction between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher, and the support structures put in place as a result of the programme. The majority of student teachers linked their progress directly to the contribution made by their cooperating teachers. The cooperating teachers felt more content in their role given that the programme helped to offer a structure to the process, particularly with regard to providing feedback to the student teachers. The university supervisors felt that the programme ensured that the cooperating teachers were more accountable for their role in assisting student teachers. Concerns were expressed by both student teachers and university supervisors in relation to disparities between cooperating teacher involvement. This is somewhat explained by the main concern expressed by cooperating teachers being the time demands of the programme.

While the COPET programme has resulted in a number of positive changes in the experiences of all three members of the teaching practice triad, a number of key considerations are suggested for future implementation and development of the programme. Effective and efficient programme improvement is a team process and the power for constructive change lies with all parties (Rikard, 1990).

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Teaching is a relationship, a way of being with and relating to others, and not merely an expression of having mastered a set of delivery skills. And advising student teachers is a matter not just of dispensing information in a timely fashion but of building trust, of talking and problem solving together” (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995, p.5)

1.1 Introduction to the research

This research details the development of a programme created to provide structure to the role of cooperating physical education teachers with a view to impacting on student teachers learning during teaching practice. The research not only investigates the impact of such a programme on the experiences of student teachers but also on the experiences of the other members of the teaching practice triad; cooperating teachers and university supervisors. In this opening chapter the researcher reveals the background of the study. The researcher’s work context is introduced and the rationale for the research is outlined. The objectives of the research and boundaries encountered while carrying out the research are highlighted and finally the design and layout of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Background to the research

In an Irish context, while there are three universities offering PETE (Physical Education Teacher Education) courses, the concept of a more structured teaching practice placement clearly defining the roles of those involved is still relatively new (Kiely and Mc Cleland, 2004). To date there have only been three published works Belton *et al.*, (2010), Dunning *et al.*, (2011) and Chambers and Armour (2011) specific to physical education teaching practice. At present Irish physical education teachers and schools accept teaching practice students on a completely voluntary basis. Communication tends to take place between the university and the school principal. Cooperating teachers accept student teachers with little consultation and so in most cases they have been left to construct their own role during teaching practice. This had led to a great variance in the level of interaction between student teachers and their cooperating teachers.

The PETE programme on which this research is based is a four year undergraduate degree programme, which prepares students to teach PE and biology. Students are required to undertake two teaching practice placements during year two and year four. Initially the year two placement on which this research is based lasted for two weeks although this has now changed to three weeks. The year four placement takes place over twelve weeks. Student teachers are assigned two university supervisors during teaching practice, one from the School of Education and the other from the School of Health and Human Performance. During year two, each supervisor will observe the student teacher on one occasion while in year four they student teacher will have four

supervisory visits. Student teachers are expected to teach fourteen class periods each week and also to take an active part in the life of the school observing all aspects of the school day, teaching and extra-curricular activities.

As this PETE programme is relatively new, without sedimented tradition shaping its practices, this provided the researcher with an opportunity to become involved in the development of more innovative approaches to teaching practice. As a practicing physical education teacher in an Irish secondary school, the researcher had previously acted as a cooperating teacher for two student teachers. During this time the absence of a structure for her role led the researcher to develop an interest in clarifying and developing the role of cooperating physical education teachers in Ireland. As the University PETE staff involved in teaching practice had also identified the need for the development of a structured programme to help guide cooperating teachers through the teaching practice process, it was decided that the researcher would become involved in the development of such a programme. The researcher's involvement would help to ensure that the needs of cooperating teachers would be considered throughout the development of the programme.

1.3 Rationale for the research

While teaching practice is clearly acknowledged as being a critical element of any physical education teacher education (PETE) programme, it can also be one of the most problematic areas (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). The influence of poorly organised and unstructured teaching practice placements on prospective teachers can be weak, contradictory and ambiguous (O'Sullivan and Tsangaridou, 1992). Internationally there

is no set manual to follow in relation to structuring teaching practice experiences; research suggests that we must understand, evaluate and develop the particular context in which the experience is being structured (O'Sullivan, 2003).

While it is widely accepted that the cooperating teacher can potentially have a significant influence on student teachers' learning during physical education teaching practice (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2003), in Ireland the cooperating teacher is a resource that has been for the most part underutilised (Kiely and McClelland, 2004). Chambers and Armour (2011) found that support for physical education student teachers in Ireland was, to some degree dysfunctional. The purpose of this study was not only to design a cooperating physical education teachers programme (COPET) with a view to maximising the learning opportunities for student teachers when on teaching practice placement but also to investigate the impact of such a programme on the experiences of cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

1.4 Research objectives

The following are the main objectives of the research;

- To investigate the impact of the COPET programme on student teachers' learning and also on the experiences of each of the members of the triad during teaching practice.
- To utilise the findings of this investigation to provide direction for the university in addressing issues which have arisen and also provide

recommendations for the future development and implementation of the COPET programme

1.5 Key research questions

From the perspectives of each member of the teaching practice triad...

1. What impact can a cooperating physical education teachers' programme have on teaching practice experiences?
2. Can a cooperating physical education teachers' programme impact on the learning experiences of student teachers?

1.6 Theoretical framework

Teacher socialization theory offers an explanation as to how teachers are socialized into their roles at various points in their careers. As the following comment by Feiman-Nemser (1983) highlights teacher socialization may begin long before an individual takes charge of a classroom;

“Human beings have survived because of their deeply ingrained habits of correcting one another, telling each other what they know, pointing out the moral, and supplying the answer. These tendencies have been acquired over the centuries and are lived out in families and classrooms. Thus, children not only learn what they are told by parents and teachers, they also learn to be teachers”.

(Feiman-Nemser, 1983, p. 152)

The highly interactive nature of a teaching practice placement ensures that student teachers not only influence and shape the structures into which they are being socialized

but at the same time that they are being shaped by a variety of forces at many levels (Zeichner and Gore, 1990). According to Templin and Schempp (1989), the three members of the teaching practice triad make up what socialization theory terms a culture. Although Dodds (1989) argued that physical education does not have a shared technical culture, research indicates that within the triad, members have common values, knowledge, norms and beliefs. Within the professional society of physical education teachers, the members of the triad develop beliefs about the other members of the triad which serve as significant agents in the socialization process (Templin and Schempp, 1989). Student teachers are socialized by cooperating teachers during their own schooling, by university educators during their teacher education and again by cooperating teachers during teaching practice. Cooperating teachers themselves have been socialized firstly during their own schooling and then by their undergraduate experiences during teaching practice. Finally university supervisors have been socialized as students, undergraduates, possibly as teachers, and then as PETE staff. Thus insight into the roles and characteristics of all three members of the teaching practice triad is important for understanding the teacher preparation culture (Mc Cullick, 2001).

While socialization research has tended to focus on the student teacher rather than the cooperating teacher, Lortie (1975) highlighted that focus on the cooperating teacher is vital because teacher socialization theory considers that cooperating teachers have a profound influence on what future teachers know and belief about teaching and teacher education. Socialization theory helps to describe how cooperating teachers' views can contribute to the improvement of teacher education programmes (Mc Cullick, 2001).

Collaboration with university supervisors during teaching practice provides an opportunity for cooperating teachers to share their views regarding the teaching of physical education with those who design and maintain teacher education programmes (Mc Cullick, 2001). Since these perceptions come from people who teach in schools on a daily basis, they have a valid perspective on what future teachers should know. This research follows the idea of socialization theory that by connecting practicing physical education teachers with teacher educators and subsequently future teachers the learning potential of teaching practice experiences can be greatly enhanced.

1.7 Delimitations of the research

Good research recognises its' own limitations and every study makes some kind of compromise (Denscombe, 2010). The researcher has identified delimitations from the outset of the study which included the length of the teaching practice placement on which the programme was piloted and time pressures to organise the focus groups following teaching practice.

As the researcher only became involved in the research six months after the initial teaching practice placement, the timing of the data collection and hence data recall was an issue from the outset. Also the length of the teaching practice on which the programme was piloted was another significant limitation to the study. This was only a two week teaching practice placement and so it could be argued that if cooperating

teachers were required to commit to being involved over a longer period of time, their responses to the programme may be altered.

1.8 Presentation of the thesis

As can be seen, chapter 1 sets the scene and introduces the research and its context.

Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter. The literature review provides a snapshot of “*the state of knowledge and of the major research questions in the subject area being investigated*” (Bell, 2003; p.35). This helped to inform the research and direct the development of the COPET programme. The areas examined included 1) teaching practice, its significance and how it can be most effective; 2) the experiences of each of the members of the teaching practice triad; (the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor) and 3) how the members of the triad interact during teaching practice.

Chapter 3 details the development and implementation of the COPET programme. The research methods used for the development of the programme are outlined and a detailed description of how the programme was introduced to each member of the triad is provided. This chapter was included to provide contextual background information on the development of the COPET programme so that its impact can effectively be explored.

Chapter 4 introduces the methodological approach to data collection and analysis. A qualitative approach was used in this research with focus groups being the primary data

collection tool. Procedures for ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of the research are also outlined.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the student teacher focus groups and details their experiences of the COPET programme.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of the cooperating teacher focus groups and presents their experiences of the COPET programme.

Chapter 7 presents the findings of the university supervisor focus groups and communicates their experiences of the COPET programme.

Chapter 8 draws overall conclusions from the analysis. Recommendations are made based on these conclusions for the future development and implementation of the COPET programme.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is divided into five sections. It begins with an examination of the literature relating to teaching practice, particularly looking at effective teaching practice and various models used around the world. The teaching practice experience is then considered from the perspectives of the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. Finally, literature on the combined teaching practice triad is reviewed.

2.2 Teaching Practice

2.2.1 Significance of teaching practice

Teaching practice typically provides student teachers with an opportunity to gain practical teaching experience by becoming immersed in a school environment. During this time, realities of teaching physical education are encountered (Larson, 2005). Dewey (1964) cited in Duffield (2006), was one of the first educational theorists to acknowledge the importance of clinical work in the preparation of student teachers. He noted that students need time in the real world to gain an understanding of how and why children learn. Teacher education should rightfully be viewed as professional education in which

the theoretical and practical knowledge must be integrated through situated and contextualised experiences of teaching (Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga, 2007).

Teaching practice has long been considered to be the most significant section of undergraduate teacher preparation programmes (Cutner-Smith, 1996; O’Sullivan 2003; Chepyator-Thomson and Liu, 2003; Hill and Brodin, 2004; Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). Frequent opportunities to teach in real schools in focused and supervised teaching experiences ought to be a critical feature of any teacher education programme (O’ Sullivan, 2003). This practicum not only allows students to develop pedagogical skills but also to become socialised into the teaching profession. Well constructed teaching practices provide opportunities for student teachers to explore their understandings of teaching, schooling, and the role of the teacher in educating youth (O’Sullivan and Tsangaridou, 1992).

2.2.2 Problems relating to teaching practice

While teaching practice has been acknowledged as being the most critical element of teacher education programmes, it can also be one of the most problematic elements (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). O’Sullivan and Tsangaridou (1992) highlighted studies which recognised that, at times, the influence of poorly organised and unstructured fieldwork on student teachers can be weak, contradictory, and ambiguous. Chambers and Armour (2011) found that while the “*official*” curriculum may place a high value on the development of student teachers’ professional skills, the reality is that student teachers are often unsupported in their learning during teaching practice. Efforts must be made to ensure that teaching practice is well supervised and teaching-centred (Chepyator-

Thomson and Liu, 2003). Ross (2001) stated that a bad teaching experience can be more detrimental than no preservice experience. A student teacher who is not yet mature and knowledgeable enough to recognise poor teaching practice may actually begin to emulate a poor cooperating teachers' deficient practices (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). Colleges and universities must strive to provide instruction and experiences that will adequately prepare teachers to make a successful transition into full time teaching (Hill and Brodin, 2004). Mc Diarmid (1990) stated that the effectiveness of the teaching practice experience is related to how cooperating teachers and university supervisors combine to challenge the student teachers existing beliefs and practices.

Randall (1992) listed the following as obstacles to effective teaching practice experiences:

1. Students are not prepared for their teaching assignments in schools and do not exhibit the curiosity about the process of becoming a teacher.
2. University and school supervisors do not communicate well with one another.
3. There is a lack of shared understanding of the respective role of each triad member in the supervision process.
4. Student teachers lack the managerial and organisational skills considered necessary by cooperating teachers.
5. Goals for student teaching in the managerial and organisational areas are inconsistent.

It is very significant that the development of quality in supervision of student teaching is highlighted. As the university supervisor cannot always be present to perform all of these tasks, the vital but often neglected role of the cooperating teacher comes into focus. Ganser (2002) stressed that cooperating teachers are central in helping student teachers make the transition from '*students of teaching*' to '*teachers of students*' during teaching practice. Due to having such an important role, cooperating teachers must be carefully selected and trained for their role. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of knowledge about how to best guide cooperating teachers to be effective and how to meet their needs within the teaching practice setting (Tannehill, 1990).

2.2.3 Effective teaching practice

Research carried out offers valuable insight to guide more effective teaching practice. A recent review of teacher education and student learning by Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga (2007) recognised the following four elements as key points to successful teaching practice;

1. The building of integrated knowledge in action through reflective practice.
2. Developing quality in supervision of student teaching.
3. Investing in continual professional development.
4. Increasing collaborative relationships between university and school teachers.

Cutner-Smith (1996) also offered some indication as to what criteria are necessary to ensure effective experiences for student teachers, stating that they should;

1. Take place at schools in which the teacher education programme messages are reinforced.
2. Be closely supervised by trained faculty members.
3. Be linked tightly with on campus methods courses.
4. Focus on specific teaching skills derived from teacher effectiveness research.

Dodds (1989) advocated similar factors, stating that teaching experiences must support the programmatic teaching perspective and provide opportunities for student teachers to compare and contrast their views of teaching with their education programme and the cooperating teachers with whom they are working.

2.2.4 Structure and organisation of teaching practice

The university has ultimate responsibility for the logistics of student teaching; arranging placements, selecting cooperating teachers, assigning university supervisors, scheduling on-campus conferences, dealing with problem students and reporting grades (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992). The location of placements has also been acknowledged as being important and influential on the benefits for the student teacher (Jeong and Mc Cullick, 2001). Zeichner (1992) noted that most field sites tended to be selected on the basis of convenience and giving all teachers an equal share, independent of offering the best learning experiences for the student teachers. Larson (2005), in a study of student teachers' experiences, also found that students were placed in schools geographically convenient to the university. School strengths in particular subject areas and courses being taught are also unlikely to be considered by the university. In practical

subjects such as PE this can be very problematic. Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) highlighted the problem of Colleges of Education and not physical education departments organising the majority of student teaching placements. With no specific knowledge of the physical education situation these personnel are again likely to choose schools of convenience rather than those with an adequate PE programme.

The length and timing of teaching practice can also greatly affect the learning opportunities for student teachers. In a study by Hynes-Dusel (1999), cooperating teachers suggested that student teachers should participate in an “*internship*” prior to teaching practice. This would involve student teachers observing and teaching on a smaller scale. This was thought to be particularly important if the teaching practice is considered too short a period and increasing the time is not feasible.

2.2.5 Supervision of teaching practice

Dictionary definitions of supervision include; “*to observe and direct the execution of (a task or activity)*”, or “*keep watch over (someone)*” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). Views such as these are manifested in the conventional overseeing of teaching practice with the university supervisor observing student teachers and then providing feedback on their lesson afterwards. This may not always be as authoritarian as it sounds but frequently it is. Stone (1987) recommended that instead of taking supervision to be a form of surveillance perhaps the terms “*advisor*” or “*helper*” should be used for both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher.

Metzler (1990) listed the following supervisory functions as being necessary during teaching practice: pre-class briefing with the student teacher, collecting systematic data on the instructional process, providing immediate and meaningful performance feedback, and giving the teacher a written record of each observation. For student teachers to learn to teach in new ways, they must have support in changing their beliefs. To facilitate such changes, cooperating teachers and university supervisors must be actively present in supervising student teaching (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1987). Researchers have identified differing perspectives, incongruent role expectations, and lack of communication as barriers to effective supervision (Slick, 1997).

2.3 Teaching practice models

2.3.1 Teaching practice in Ireland

While most student teachers in Ireland, firstly undertake a three year undergraduate degree followed by a one year postgraduate diploma in education, there are a small number of four year concurrent initial teacher education undergraduate degrees that are discipline specific. These are offered at various universities and colleges and tend to cater for more practical subjects such as physical education, science, art and home economics. Teaching practice usually occurs in two blocks throughout the four year programme but the timing and length of each block is specific to individual universities. The Teaching Council of Ireland, established and operating under the Teaching Council Act 2001, dictates that in order to fulfil registration conditions, student teachers must have undertaken 100 hours of school-based teaching practice. The most recent Teaching Council Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011) conveys

that teacher education programmes should be designed and provided using a partnership model involving teachers, schools and teacher educators. The school placement should involve student teachers teaching in a variety of teaching settings and situations. During this time student teachers should be afforded opportunities to plan and implement lessons and receive constructive feedback (Teaching Council, 2011).

All student teachers undergo some form of classroom based supervision when on teaching practice. The supervisor may be a university based member of the faculty of education or they may be an external individual, usually an experienced teacher. The purpose of supervision is twofold: evaluative and supportive (Walsh and Dolan, 2009). While the supervisor is ultimately responsible for deciding upon a grade that reflects the student teacher's ability, they are also an important figure in the support mechanism offered by the teacher education institution. Current documented evidence (Chambers and Armour, 2011) suggests little true collaboration between schools and the university. There are also few incentives for cooperating teachers to support a student teacher.

2.3.2 Teaching practice in the UK

In the 1990's the format of teaching practice in the UK changed significantly. Moves were made to reduce the role of institutes of higher education so that student teachers now spend large portions of time (over 50 per cent of course time) in schools (Cohen *et al.*, 1996). As a result of this restructuring, schools have developed partnerships with universities and colleges and take shared responsibility for the preparation of student teachers. Various initiatives were developed which nurtured

partnership, including the Partnership Promotion Schools Network and the National Partnership Project (Brooks, 2006). More than ever before, teachers became actively involved in teacher training and they now contribute to the design, management and quality assurance of courses. They can also participate in the recruitment, selection and assessment of students and in the external examining process. Courses are now typically planned around school experiences and school contact.

There has also been a rise in the number of school based mentors replacing university supervisors (Cohen *et al.*, 1996). A mentor is often a teacher in a middle or senior management position in a school who takes responsibility not only for advising student teachers how to teach their particular subjects but also for assessing their performance and development. Mentors are trained by the university and they can then deliver training, both within their own institutions and centrally to entire student cohorts. Some mentors remain school-based whilst others are seconded to universities or furnished with contracts that allow them to work part of the time in school and the other part in a university (Brooks, 2006). This move to mentoring in schools accords significance to the part that experienced teachers play in the training of student teachers. It must be noted however that some schools in the UK do not choose to participate in mentoring practices, arguing that it is too time-consuming and onerous for teachers, whose prime responsibility is to teach children (Cohen *et al.*, 1996).

2.3.3 Teaching practice in the United States

Teacher preparation in the US has increasingly become a more collaborative effort between the university and schools. For example, in several undergraduate teacher education programmes in the US, student teachers begin their teaching practice placements as observers during their introductory year, increasing both the amount of time spent in schools and their professional responsibilities as they progress through their programme (Graham, 2006). Guidance for student teachers is typically a shared responsibility of university supervisors and cooperating teachers (Borko and Mayfield, 1995).

Many professional associations, among them the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), have recognised the importance of providing an optimal environment for teaching practice and have created standards both for cooperating teachers and schools where teaching practice takes place (Graham, 2006). Schools, colleges and departments of education have also attempted to define standards. Despite this espoused recognition of the importance of teaching practice and the factors affecting its success, teaching practice in the US has been criticised for being fragmented, lacking curricular definition, and appearing disconnected from other components of teacher preparation programmes (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

2.3.4 Teaching practice in Australia

While different states in Australia have differing teacher education programmes, an example of one programme provides a typical teaching practice experience. Prior to starting teaching practice, student teachers make up to twelve introductory visits to their assigned school. Their first teaching practice placement varies between two and six weeks in length and this is followed by an internship which is approximately ten weeks long. Mitchell *et al.* (2007) reported that some schools and teachers are reluctant to take on student teachers because of other commitments and priorities. This has led to universities facing difficulties placing student teachers (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

Supervision in most Australian teacher education programmes is a joint responsibility of the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. In recent years however, due to the cost of paying both cooperating teachers and university supervisors, the universities are shifting towards the argument that cooperating teachers are well placed to be the sole evaluators of student teachers (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). This gradual redistribution of responsibility has occurred more by default than design leaving many cooperating teachers feeling that they have been left to take on their role without adequate support from the universities or elsewhere (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

2.3.5 Teaching practice in Hong Kong

Teaching practice in Hong Kong is based on the integration of theory and practice as described by Fullan (1985). Collaboration between institutes and schools takes place during teaching practice so that effective theory can be incorporated by the lecturers and

then practiced in schools. In one Hong Kong university teaching practice takes place three times over a two year period with each practicum being split into two phases. Phase one takes place over four or five days and is called an “*attachment period*” (Hung *et al.*, 1998). It involves the student teacher observing their cooperating teacher and learning about general situations in the school. Phase two is a four week block during which time the student teacher takes full control of lessons.

Supervision in Hong Kong is shared between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher although it is the supervisor who has the responsibility for assessment. In a review of teaching practice supervision in Hong Kong (Hung *et al.*, 1998) it was reported that the roles of the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor must be more complimentary. A basis of understanding needs to be built on and relationships between schools and the university need to be strengthened (Hung *et al.*, 1998).

2.3.6 Professional Development Schools

The Professional Development School (PDS) model, developed in the United States, attempts to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise that exists within schools in educating student teachers with cooperating teachers being given a voice in the running of the teacher education programme. This model rejects the top down view of transferring knowledge from university to schools, and integrates teacher professional development opportunities with student teacher learning opportunities and into the life of schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994). University supervisors are embedded in the school on

a regular basis to provide them with an opportunity to get to know and appreciate the classroom situations in which student teachers are working. Some supervisors are jointly employed by the university and the school. The PDS represents a commitment to the simultaneous renewal of teacher education programmes and schools and to new kinds of relationships between teachers and university supervisors (Zeichner, 2005).

The development and maintenance of PDS is an expensive and complex task. Both school and university staff must be open and committed to the changes as it is not an easy process to achieve a shift in relationships to enable cooperating teachers and university supervisors to work together as equal colleagues. Zeichner (2005, p.5) stated; *“Teachers are socialised to defer to the expertise of university professors (supervisors) and professors are socialised to believe that they are the disseminators of knowledge to teachers”*. Even in the case of PDSs, increasing workloads will reduce the time available to the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor and the student teacher for conversation and collaboration. As the workplace becomes more demanding, opportunities for effective communication will diminish unless procedures are put in place to alleviate the pressures. Hung *et al.* (1998) reported that collaboration among schools as well as between schools and the university are equally important.

While teaching practice is clearly a key, albeit complex component of every teacher education programme, what must be regarded as central to every teaching practice is the student teacher.

2.4 The student teacher

Many student teachers enter teaching with relatively clear, but not fully articulated, conceptions of teaching and themselves as teachers (Zeichner, 1995). What they learn will be filtered through and made more or less meaningful based upon a set of biographically embedded assumptions or pre-understandings (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995). Zeichner (1995) claimed that before student teachers can learn new theories and practice during teaching practice, they must confront their own existing beliefs and be willing to challenge them. Rajuan *et al.* (2007) also discussed the challenges that exist when student teachers existing orientations conflict with the realities of the classroom or with the pedagogical knowledge of their training programme.

Who the student teacher is as a person, the kinds of experiences they have had inside and outside of school, their values, beliefs and aspirations all have a profound influence on the type of teacher they will become (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995). In addition to these experiences, each student teacher has spent literally thousands of hours sitting in classes engaged in what Lortie (1975) described as an “*apprenticeship of observation*”.

For student teachers, switching over to the other side of the desk and the process involved in taking on an identity as a teacher may bring some surprises. Pre-understandings about teaching and about self as teacher from experiences as a student are inevitably naïve, perhaps misleading, and sometimes blatantly false (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995). These prejudgements may unnecessarily cut off or constrain opportunities to learn

and grow professionally. It is only after students resolve their images of themselves as teachers can they begin to focus on students (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006).

2.4.1 Responsibilities of the university in relation to student teachers

It must be acknowledged that the university and the school setting are two different worlds, in particular for the inexperienced student teacher. Research has shown that the gaps between these worlds are not always effectively bridged. Rekkas (1994) found that student teachers did not know the purposes and goals of the teaching practice experience. The emphasis within many teacher education programmes is narrowly focused on practical teaching skills devoid of theory (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995). This implies that student teachers are trained rather than educated.

In her study of cooperating teachers, Hynes-Dusel (1999) found that all of the cooperating teachers interviewed believed that their student teacher was not adequately prepared for teaching practice. They felt the university taught the “*ideal*” rather than the “*reality*”. Chambers and Armour (2011) also reported student teachers receiving conflicting messages from the university and the school. Tjeerdsma (1998) reported that student teachers could be better prepared by their teacher preparation programme before beginning teaching practice, particularly with regard to areas such as inclusion, working with assistants and general experience with children. This would enable cooperating teachers to spend less time providing general information and more time focusing on actual teaching (Tjeerdsma, 1998).

A structural feature affecting what student teachers learn during teaching practice is the school context in which teaching occurs. For this reason, more careful consideration is needed in selecting the field sites (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992). Griffin (1989) noted that variables that have been shown to affect the student teaching experience and merit consideration when placing student teachers include differences in triad members' perceptions of student teaching outcomes, orientation to supervision, and role expectations. Kahan (1999) also suggested that more consideration needs to be taken in the pairing of student teachers with cooperating teachers. The student teachers may have difficulty achieving success if incongruence between cooperating teacher and student teacher exists. Some cooperating teachers have stated that their positive experiences of teaching practice might be related to their high quality student teachers (Gibbs and Montoya, 1994). If teacher education programmes were to ensure that student teachers met a minimum level of competence prior to teaching practice, this may increase the probability of positive experiences for cooperating teachers, as well as for student teachers.

Systematic supervision has been accepted to be an integral part of the student teaching experience (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). For student teachers to learn to teach in new ways, they must have support in changing their beliefs. To facilitate such changes, cooperating teachers and university supervisors must work collaboratively and be actively present in student teaching (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1987).

2.4.2 Responsibilities of student teachers

Smith (1993) highlighted that student teachers must take some responsibility for their experience while on teaching practice. In a study of teaching practice experiences, Smith (1993) found that strong, competent, assertive and motivated student teachers generated effective practices, while ineffective or lazy student teachers were a hindrance and created extra work for the cooperating teacher. Student teachers must not only be students of teaching but also students of their own development (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995).

Student teachers need to develop the ability to reflect on all aspects of education in order to evaluate what they have absorbed and learned both during their own education and while on teaching practice. This reflection forms part of their professional preparation informing their own practice, and therefore challenging their own beliefs and values (Rossi and Cassidy, 1999). Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga (2007) stated that reflection during action helps student teachers to construct their own professional knowledge. Capel and Blair (2007) discovered however, that reflection is likely to be limited to the specific lesson or unit of work and any change is likely to be superficial.

Student teachers must be prepared to seek advice and information. When student teachers try to teach with little knowledge about pupils, the tendency is for them to grow increasingly authoritarian and custodial (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). Mitchell *et al.* (2007) reported that while classroom management, being flexible in the classroom, and developing relationships were important skills needed by student teachers, cooperating

teachers stated that the most important issue for student teachers was preparation. Observing their cooperating teachers' lessons is one important aspect of preparation for student teachers. It is important however, that they are given specific instructions either from the university or from the cooperating teacher when observing. Smith (1993) reported that student teachers are generally given no guidance as to what to look for when observing lessons and so pay little attention to the movement responses of pupils or the learning environment.

2.4.3 Difficulties faced by student teachers during teaching practice

The main aim of a student teacher during teaching practice is to move from being a "*student of teaching*" to a "*teacher of students*" (Ganser, 2002). Most student teachers are impatient to apply what they have learned and eager to engage in the real work for which their training has prepared them. They see technical strategies as easily learned and implemented, whereas they are more concerned with unpredictable classroom situations that have no clear solutions (Zeichner, 1995).

One of the most daunting challenges faced by student teachers involves negotiating a role within new and unfamiliar contexts (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995). Bullough and Gitlin (1995) described student teachers as visitors passing through their cooperating teachers' classroom and school. They explained that student teachers are vulnerable and in some ways, pressurised by established patterns of interaction and expectation, become imitations of their cooperating teachers. Because they are not their

cooperating teachers, however, the best they can hope to become is a poor imitation of the real thing. Chambers and Armour (2011) highlighted the problems faced by student teachers when inconsistencies exist between school and university expectations. The tension between the demands to experiment with non-traditional teaching strategies and the reality of the conservative school system typically brings the student teacher to routine rather than reflective action (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006).

According to Passe (1994), most student teachers have had little involvement in curriculum development or decision making in the classroom during teaching practice. The challenge of fitting in can be difficult for student teachers and as a result they may have to set aside or compromise their ideals (Passe, 1994). Chambers and Armour (2011) described the confusion faced by student teachers when they must prioritise one set of skills to please their cooperating teacher and another set of skills to please their university supervisor. This may not only be necessary to fit into the school environment but also to ensure that they receive a good grade for their teaching practice. Student teachers may even have to “*passively adapt*” to suit the philosophies of those with whom they are working (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995, p.49).

While teaching practice evokes numerous challenges for student teachers one researcher has suggested that it may hold little real significance. Bullough and Gitlin, (1995) reported that student teachers, being well-trained students, mastered the discourse and reproduced it, but left university apparently unaffected to engage in their teaching

careers. These researchers found that, once the student teachers became “*real*” teachers, they forgot or simply discarded much of what they had been taught at university.

2.5 The cooperating teacher

Cooperating teachers must embody certain personal characteristics in order to have a positive effect on a student teacher who may come under their charge. Hung *et al.* (1998) stated commitment as being the most important attribute of a cooperating teacher. In-depth interviews by Tannehill (1990) with three veteran cooperating teachers revealed an insight into their perception of the role of the cooperating teacher. They listed support, planning and role modelling as being important cooperating teacher functions. They identified learning from the student teacher, professional responsibility and making a difference as reasons for continually accepting student teachers. Cooperating teachers’ main motivation for participating in the role is most commonly because of their professional commitment (Smith, 1993; Hastings, 2004; Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). Hynes-Dusel (1999) reported that acting as a cooperating teacher provided teachers with an opportunity to give something back to the profession. Tjeerdsma (1998) found that cooperating teachers viewed the supervision experience as positive and one that caused them to increase reflection on and revitalise their own teaching.

2.5.1 Characteristics of a good cooperating teacher

Feiman-Nemser (2001) described the ideal cooperating teacher as being a “*co-think*”, scaffolding student teachers into self awareness and deeper levels of thinking. This style provides the student teacher with a great deal of independence and freedom. A

co-thinking cooperating teacher offers just the right amount of support, communicating and engaging with their student teacher on a regular basis and cooperatively planning. In a study of student teachers working in a Professional Development School (PDS), Duffield (2006) reported the use of adjectives such as nice, welcoming and supportive to describe favourite cooperating teachers. Honesty, directness and good communication skills are also acknowledged as crucial to effectively guiding a student teacher (Duffield, 2006). Perhaps most importantly an effective cooperating teacher must also be an effective teacher.

2.5.2 The role of the cooperating teacher

Overbeck and Quisenberry (1976), as cited in Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001), stated that cooperating teachers are responsible for providing diverse experiences and offering professional evaluations and performances during planning and after implementation of field experiences. The mentoring role of the cooperating teacher includes the provision of experiences and circumstances that promote learning in the future, rather than merely solving immediate problems in the present (Zeichner 1995; Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Rajuan *et al.* (2007) noted that cooperating teachers should interact with student teachers to confront problems and learn from them, rather than simply easing them into the system. Cooperating teachers also need to be open-minded to the student teachers ideas and their different ways of teaching, offering support and freedom to allow the student teacher to find their own style (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007).

Formal expectations, working conditions, selection, and preparation all create a set of constraints and opportunities that shape how cooperating teachers define and enact their role. It must be considered that individual teachers interpret their own roles and therefore the nature of mentoring is idiosyncratic (Zanting *et al.*, 1998). It has been suggested that the role of the cooperating teacher should not be limited to teaching practice but should consist of a working relationship throughout the teacher education programme as demonstrated in the PDS model (Mc Cullick, 2001).

2.5.3 Responsibilities of the cooperating teacher

The role of the cooperating teacher can be broken down into the areas of observing, providing feedback, guiding reflection and assessing, although these will vary within each programme. Tjeerdsma (1998) listed three duties which cooperating teachers recognise as making up their role;

1. Guiding and leading the student teacher throughout the teaching experience.
2. Observing the student teacher and providing feedback and ideas.
3. Encouraging, supporting and making the student teacher comfortable in their situation.

Kahan *et al.* (2003) suggested that observing student teacher performance and following up with feedback is one of the main responsibilities of a cooperating teacher. In a survey of 137 cooperating teachers by Jones and Sparks (1998), more than 80% reported holding daily conferences, giving general verbal and written teaching feedback, and giving lesson and unit plan feedback. More than one third also reported observing their student teachers an average of three times daily.

Feedback

Sidentop (1981) showed that student teacher behaviours can be quickly changed when receiving feedback from systematic observation sources. O'Sullivan (2003) also pointed out that positive student reactions and positive feedback from their cooperating teachers were two key factors that confirmed physical education teaching as their career choice. Most cooperating teachers, receive inadequate training for their role and so provide inadequate feedback. Rikard and Veal (1996) found that cooperating teacher feedback ranged from very little feedback to providing both positive and negative feedback to student teachers. Conversations between student teachers and cooperating teachers rarely include in-depth exploration of issues of teaching and learning (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). Even cooperating teachers who believed in providing specific feedback seemed reluctant to choose supervisory strategies that might threaten the delicate interpersonal relationship with the student teacher (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). If feedback is not provided in an honest manner this may lead to a student teacher developing ineffective teaching habits (Mc Cullick, 2001).

Guided reflection

If student teachers are to gain full benefit from their teaching experience, they must be initiated in the practice of learning to reflect before they begin their teaching experiences. While this is essentially the responsibility of the university, during teaching practice the cooperating teacher must guide the student teacher in structured reflection processes (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). Reflection sessions must be organised in a safe, supportive and non-judgemental environment where student teachers can choose the

focus of the reflection, mostly determined by their own concerns. Dodds (1989) affirmed that both university supervisors and cooperating teachers must ensure that the processes of reflection become interwoven and apparent during teaching practice.

Assessment

Assessment is generally the most ambiguous area of a cooperating teachers work and as a result in many countries, universities do not involve the cooperating teacher in the assessment process. Even if the cooperating teacher is not responsible for assigning grades, it is very helpful to be familiar with the assessment criteria (Colvin and Markos, 2007). These assessment tools will provide a framework for the entire teaching experience and will help to guide the cooperating teacher in their provision of feedback.

2.5.4 Responsibilities of the university in relation to cooperating teachers

If the cooperating teacher is the focal point of a successful experience, then colleges and universities must certainly have criteria by which cooperating teachers are trained and selected. This must extend over and above having a recognised teaching qualification and some teaching experience (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). Teachers themselves have suggested that cooperating teachers should have been in the field for at least five years (Mc Cullick, 2001). As well as experience building a knowledge base, by this time a teacher has shown commitment to the profession and hence will serve a student teacher better than someone who is ambivalent about his or her career choice (Mc Cullick, 2001). Research has shown however that early-career teachers are more likely to choose to become cooperating teachers due to their enthusiasm for the profession (Mitchell *et al.*,

2007). This indicates that student teachers are likely to be supervised by teachers who are relatively inexperienced in pedagogical approaches to fieldwork supervision. Research has also shown that cooperating teachers who received poor support when they were on teaching practice are likely to replicate this practice as cooperating teachers themselves (Chambers and Armour, 2011).

Selection of cooperating teachers

Both Mc Cullick (2001) and Smith (1993) recommended that cooperating teachers should be observed and interviewed by a university faculty member to decipher their beliefs and perceptions of the role of cooperating teacher and to decide if their teaching programme is acceptable before a student teacher is placed with them. Additionally if student teachers can be placed in schools geographically close to the university, over a short period of time supervisors can get to know all cooperating teachers and positive relationships can be forged (Colvin and Markos, 2007). In the case of a PDS, university supervisors are familiar with the cooperating teachers as they have already engaged with them on a deeper level (Zeichner, 2005). When these connections exist the university can attempt to place a student teacher with a cooperating teacher with allied personalities, strengths and goals, although this may be somewhat idealistic (Graham, 2006).

Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) found the factors that were considered in the selection of cooperating teachers to include, teaching expertise, supervisory training, having taken a specific course in supervision, interest in supervising, being assigned by

the school district for unexplained reasons, or being the only available teacher within a district. They noted that the placement of student teachers with competent supervisors is often not a major priority of teacher training institutions, or at least not something which they are able to control. Tannehill and Goc-Karp's findings indicate a haphazard approach to the selection of cooperating teachers and placement of student teachers.

Kahan *et al.* (2003) highlighted the problem that the sheer number of student teachers in some teacher education programmes dictates going beyond the small cache of good cooperating teachers. According to three studies (Bonar, 1985; Didham, 1992; Passe, 1994), cited in Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) more power to select the cooperating teachers was given to school principals than university faculty and selection was made without consideration of supervisory skills. It resulted in principals choosing unqualified teachers who were likely to demonstrate incorrect instructional and management techniques as cooperating teachers.

In assuming the position of cooperating teacher, a teacher requires new skills because their work differs from the normal teaching activities. Cooperating teachers have been found to interact with their student teacher in a far more prescriptive and controlling manner than they imagine due to their lack of real training (Beck and Kosnik, 2000). Too often, the assumption has been made that a teacher who has been shown to be an effective teacher will be an effective supervisor. It has been acknowledged however, that basing selection of cooperating teachers on teacher expertise may be faulty logic (Tannehill & Goc-Karp, 1992; Ganser, 2002). Zimpher (1990) states frankly that

when universities fail to prepare teachers for supervising roles, they are exploiting public schools for the purpose of teacher education.

Training of cooperating teachers

Training of cooperating teachers needs to focus on the cooperating teacher adopting the role of significant other who supports the student teacher to a position of increased capability in terms of their knowledge, skill and understanding (Capel and Blair, 2007). Hynes-Dusel (1999) following a study of cooperating teacher's perceptions, indicated that training should include: classroom observation techniques, data collection strategies, evaluation techniques, knowledge of what research has to say about personal and teaching skills of good teachers, and the preparation for developing personal and teaching skills in student teachers.

It is certainly worth teacher training institutions investing in providing adequate training for cooperating teachers. Researchers such as Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1990) have reported significant positive behaviour changes of trained cooperating teachers in performing supervisory practices. Training should avoid consisting of a once-off course. Duffield (2006) advocated that training should be on-going in nature to keep the responsibility of guiding a student teacher active in the minds of cooperating teachers. A suggestion aligned with the PDS framework is that mentoring programmes should be designed in collaboration with those who do the mentoring; the cooperating teachers (Zeichner, 1995). It must also be considered that a training course cannot be developed

for homogeneity. Universities must respond to the challenge of preparing differentiated cooperating teacher populations in various settings (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

2.5.5 Difficulties faced by cooperating teachers during teaching practice

Studies have revealed some points of tension between cooperating teachers' conditions of work, their understanding and experience of their role and the expectations and support provided by the university (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). The mentoring context of the role of the cooperating teacher is one that introduces teachers to a new role in the school in interacting with student teachers and university personnel. Cooperating teachers not only have to continue to interact with their students, colleagues and members of the immediate school community, but during a teaching practice placement they also have this additional contact to maintain. The vague and sometimes undefined nature of their role often leads to negative experiences for cooperating teachers. This can lead to feelings of guilt and frustration with cooperating teachers blaming themselves if their student teacher fails to make progress (Hastings, 2004).

Time issues

Time pressures become a significant issue for many cooperating teachers and this often prevents them from undertaking their role in a manner that professionally, as well as personally, satisfies their expectations. Hynes-Dusel (1999) reported that while cooperating teachers found their role fulfilling as it helped them to become better teachers, it meant that they had more work to do. Ganser (2002) indicated that the most sought after cooperating teachers tend to be active professionals in many other ways such

as serving on school committees and participating in professional organisations. Even in the classroom cooperating teachers are busy with the task of managing learning and handle situations that arise quickly and efficiently, often not having time to explain the rationale behind their actions to the student teacher (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007).

In a study by Borko and Mayfield (1995) cooperating teachers expressed dissatisfaction that even when meetings are scheduled with student teachers, they do not always occur due to time constraints. The extra workload is also reported by Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) who found that some cooperating teachers expressed dissatisfaction with having student teachers in their classrooms in that their presence tended to interrupt regular classroom teaching and routines and forced the cooperating teachers to devote much time and energy to the student teachers. Hastings (2004) reported that much of the negative emotion cooperating teachers associate with teaching practice is related to the limited time for them to devote to their student teacher.

Dual responsibilities

Another difficulty facing cooperating teachers is the dual responsibility that they may feel to both the student teacher and to the pupils in their class as this can create a conflict of interest. Chambers and Armour (2011) reported evidence that some cooperating teachers felt that their responsibilities lay with their own students as opposed to student teachers. Duffield (2006) also reported cooperating teachers having difficulties taking a step back from the class when the student teacher is teaching. Lack of awareness of this conflict is often mistakenly interpreted by student teachers as neglect of their

needs and lack of support (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). It is difficult however for the cooperating teacher to determine when to intervene and what to say and do. They are faced with the dilemma; should they prescribe ready-made, short-term solutions for their student teacher or should they commit to the construction of long-term solutions (Chalies *et al.*, 2008). This becomes less of an issue when the cooperating teacher has confidence in the abilities of the student teacher and allows them to explore their own teaching style. Mc Cullick (2001) highlighted that cooperating teachers must allow student teachers to develop their own style by accepting their views and ideas on how to teach.

New teaching methods

Another challenge faced by cooperating teachers is the shift in teacher training methods. The shift from traditional instruction to student-centred learning poses a threat to cooperating teachers' professional orientations and self-confidence in mentoring (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). Without clear expectations and high quality training, a cooperating teachers' ability to enhance a student teachers' professional knowledge and skills may be minimised. When they are not provided with any formal preparation for their role, cooperating teachers have reported reading fieldwork handbooks, getting feedback from the university supervisor during their visits and attempting to repeat the way they were supervised as a student teacher (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). In fact, most cooperating teachers rely to some extent on their own experiences to define and shape their roles as supervisors of student teachers. Rikard and Veal (1996) referred to Lortie's (1975) "*apprenticeship of observation*" by which cooperating teachers acquire supervisory knowledge and images of supervision primarily from memories of their own student

teaching supervision and their experiences as teachers. However, as previously mentioned this may conflict with the kind of teacher training proposed today which often differs radically from traditional modes of training (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007).

The emotional impact

Nias (1989) cited in Hastings (2004) maintained that an examination of teachers' experiences would be incomplete if it did not incorporate discussion about emotions, both positive and negative. The additional pressures placed on cooperating teachers before, during and after a teaching practice placement is likely to heighten the emotional complexities of their role. Teachers approach a placement with personal perceptions and beliefs. The emotions that are experienced arise from thoughts founded in a person's prior experiences, and in the interaction of current events (Hastings, 2004). Hastings (2004) reported cooperating teachers experiencing a wide range of emotions directly related to their role. These range from feelings of guilt, responsibility, disappointment, relief, frustration, sympathy, anxiety and satisfaction. Mitchell *et al.* (2007) described cooperating teachers' feelings of isolation and uncertainty, particularly when their student teachers were experiencing difficulties. While cooperating teachers are expected to provide all of the solutions to student teachers problems, Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) emphasised that cooperating teachers need emotional support in order to cope with the problems for which there are no expert or ready-made answers in today's classrooms. The opportunity to work with a student teacher exerts both an emotional strain and an emotional satisfaction on the cooperating teacher (Hastings, 2004).

Regardless of the level of responsibility conveyed on the cooperating teacher, there still remains a key role to be played by the university supervisor in ensuring the objectives of the teacher education programme are met, thus ensuring the development of competent teachers.

2.6 The university supervisor

Over thirty years ago Bowman (1979) stated that “*..the supervision of student teachers by the university represents a needless drain upon dwindling resources...*”. Many researchers since then have defended the importance of the university supervisor as an integral member of the teacher training triad (Slick, 1997). While the role of the university supervisor has been challenged and affirmed, few studies have examined the complexity of the supervisor’s role in the student teaching triad. In order to gain a better understanding of the teaching practice experience, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the perceptions, expectations, and obligations of the supervisor.

The title of supervisor implies status and authority, however, a university supervisor frequently assumes a position of low status at the university as well as at the schools they visit. Numerous studies have revealed that supervision is not a high priority among teacher education programmes (Slick, 1998). Many attempts have been made to define the role of the university supervisor including Acheson and Meredith (1987), who categorised supervisors into five roles; the counselor, coach, inspector, mentor and master. Goodman (1985) stated that university supervisors need to help students see connections between theory and practice. The role of the university supervisor is multi-

faceted and complex; on one level they are working to establish links and working relationships between the university and the school while on a deeper level they must maintain the integrity of the teaching profession, or as Slick (1998) described they must act as “*gatekeepers*” to the profession.

2.6.1 Difficulties faced by university supervisors during teaching practice

As university supervisors are put in a position to assume the role of evaluator, judge, and gatekeeper they may in response be perceived by student teachers and cooperating teachers as an uninvited guest in their professional space (Slick, 1998). Schools can often be quite territorial places and the experience of student teaching means entering a pre-established territory and negotiating for power within that territory (Britzman, 1991). This situation is even more complex for the university supervisor entering into this scene infrequently and possibly causing both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher to feel intimidated.

Koehler (1984) suggested that due to the nature of their position, university supervisors often experience feelings of insecurity and powerlessness that may affect their functioning as successful supervisors. Slick (1997) ascertained that university supervisors are alone in defining and enacting their role. They should be provided with opportunities to discuss supervisory practices, university expectations and goals with university colleagues.

The role of the university supervisor is limited by inevitable structural constraints during teaching practice. There is simply no way that university supervisors can be present in classrooms as frequently as cooperating teachers, nor is there any way for them to have the ongoing conversations that are possible between student teachers and cooperating teachers. In a study of supervision of student teachers by Borko and Mayfield (1995), supervisors expressed dissatisfaction with the time constraints they confronted. The observation/conference arrangement and traveling from school to school caused a scheduling nightmare for the supervisors. Supervisors felt that they could have accomplished more if they had had more time with their student teachers. It has also been found that they are unlikely to devote the necessary time to their supervisory role in schools because they have tremendous research and teaching loads (Bowyer and Van Dyke, 1988).

Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that student teachers appeared to place little worth on the feedback they received from their university supervisor because they did not feel the supervisors had sufficient information on which to base judgments. The university supervisor often faces the dilemma of balancing obligations; on one hand trying to assist the student teacher, while at the same time feeling a strong commitment to assess the future teacher. As long as supervisors are responsible for assigning grades, student teachers are likely to perceive them in an assessment rather than assistance role (Calderhead, 1988).

2.6.2 The changing role of the university supervisor

As research has confirmed that the university supervisor is an important figure in teacher education, the tensions and struggles that the supervisor experiences in defining and balancing their role must be addressed. During a study of the role of the university supervisor, Slick (1998) highlighted the following issues;

1. The need to clearly define the mission and goal of teaching practice.
2. The need to clarify the supervisor's role in the teacher education programme.
3. The importance of supporting and validating the supervisor as a member of the teacher education community.
4. The reconceptualisation of the supervisor as facilitator and liaison in light of new knowledge related to learning to teach, collaboration and reflective practice.

Universities must consider ways to encourage supervisors to work collaboratively in making decisions relating to all of the processes of teacher education (Slick, 1997). Since each student teaching situation is unique and supervisors are often isolated in schools, supervisors could also benefit greatly from frequent meetings with supervisor colleagues and other teacher educators on campus (Slick, 1997). This is particularly important in situations where university supervisors are not full time faculty members. Slick (1998) suggested assigning a faculty member as a coordinator of non-university based supervisors to explain clearly the goals of the programme and define and explore their roles as observers, negotiators, and facilitators when in a schools.

A suggestion made by Borko and Mayfield (1995) to improve the role of the university supervisor is that instead of providing feedback on a specific lesson to the student teacher, university supervisors could use their limited time in schools to help cooperating teachers become teacher educators. Previously a similar proposal was made by Emans (1983), whereby the university supervisor should be a liaison and available when problems occur but his/her main role would focus directly on the cooperating teacher and indirectly on the school environment. Reform efforts have taken place in a number of countries in this area over the last decade, with a move towards school-university partnerships in the UK and PDSs in the US. This may provide a new vision of collaborative relationships that could replace the traditional supervision models.

For real change to occur, collegial relationships will need to become a reality among faculty members within education departments, among the members of the student teaching triad and between schools of education and schools where student teachers teach (Slick, 1998). The role of the university supervisor will only be changed if all members of the triad consider the potential for collaboration and reciprocity.

2.7 The triad relationship

The classic triad of teacher education as referred to by Rikard and Veal (1996) is composed of the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. It must be acknowledged that teaching practice is a difficult time for all involved as attempts are made to incorporate “*two largely separate worlds*” (Beck and Kosnik, 2000); the university setting and the school setting. Smith (1993) emphasised the

essential need for congruence to exist between what student teachers observe and do during teaching practice and what they are taught in university.

Difficulties arise when then cooperating teachers, student teachers and university supervisors struggle to define their proper and consistent roles (Chalies *et al.*, 2008). Slick (1997) described as inevitable the communication strain that takes place between triad members as they begin to know one another and negotiate their roles and obligations. Therefore, the identification of the roles and responsibilities of participants, and structural features is central to the success of any programme. Hung *et al.* (1998) in an evaluation of a teacher education programme in Hong Kong reported that practices concerning reporting of student teachers' progress and ways of supporting student teachers must be clearly defined to help both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor fully perform their role in the programme. In a similar evaluation of a teacher education programme in Ireland, Chambers and Armour (2011) reported a lack of consistency of expectations existing among the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor.

2.7.1 Shared responsibilities among members of the triad

The responsibility for designing and facilitating the education of prospective teachers must be shared equally by all involved with the idea of control being diminished, (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992). Behets and Vergauwen (2006, p.415) summed up this sharing of responsibility in the following statement;

“A shared vision on teacher education and a conceptually coherent program will lead to a delineation of the roles and responsibilities between university and school partners, and will result in clearly written and negotiated competencies required for each member of the triad”.

Rikard (1990) highlighted that implementing change in teacher education programmes is not a simple matter. Effective and efficient programme improvement is a team process and the power for constructive change lies with all parties. The problem lies deeper than who is in control of the teaching practice experience (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992) rather it should focus on who should contribute to, develop, and design goals for this critical experience.

It would appear at present that the university supervisor plays a role in organising student teachers' progress in their teaching curriculum and in performing the critical elements of teaching practice, i.e. assessment. Hung *et al.* (1998) determined that student teachers may find requirements from the university supervisor more idealistic, whereas the cooperating teacher can moderate these requirements with more consideration to the school context. The university supervisors' limited presence during the field experience highlights the need for specific training of cooperating teachers in a supervisory role in collaboration with university supervisors. Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) pointed out that supervising student teachers as a collaboration is the most critical component in ensuring a quality teaching practice. In most instances this can prove difficult as the cooperating teacher's practical knowledge conflicts with the formal knowledge of the university supervisor. Veal and Rikard (1998) found that cooperating teachers viewed themselves

as holding a position of power within the teaching practice triad and perceived university supervisors as a threat and less in tune with what was occurring in public schools.

Teacher's views about teacher education should be important to those who design and maintain education programmes. Since these perceptions come from those who teach in schools on a daily basis they have a valid perspective on what future teachers should know (Mc Cullick, 2001). The concept and organisational process of field experiences and teaching practicum's will improve only as they are restructured to reflect a collaborative effort by school and university personnel which merges the knowledge and expertise of those who practice and research in the field (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992).

2.7.2 The relationship between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor

A complimentary relationship between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor not only assists the smooth running of teaching practice but also facilitates the professional development of the student teacher (Hung *et al.*, 1998; Hastings, 2004). Tjeerdsma (1998) in a study of cooperating teachers found them to value assistance from the university, its clear guidelines, and the interactions they had from the university supervisor. The cooperating teachers also suggested and praised three-way conferences and interactions between the student teacher, cooperating teacher and university supervisor. Tannehill (1990) found that cooperating teachers with positive experiences of teaching practice had had specific guidance from the university supervisor, with clear guidelines established and considerable assistance available. In British Columbia,

Canada, the university supervisor is known as a “*faculty advisor*” and while their role is essentially regarded as a support for the student teacher, it is also regarded as support for the cooperating teacher by assisting in modelling practices (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

In one study of cooperating teachers Hynes-Dusel (1999), found that although cooperating teachers liked supervising student teachers, they also reported how concerned they were over what they felt was lack of communication between themselves and universities. Cooperating teachers have also described situations with little assistance from the university and very few interactions with the university supervisor (Rikard and Veal, 1996). This leads to a sense of disappointment for the cooperating teacher and a feeling that the university is failing to meet its obligation to the student teacher (Hastings, 2004). This generally leads to cooperating teachers constructing their own role. It is often common for communication to proceed in superficial ways. It is not only communication that is necessary but also engagement and exchange (Hung *et al.*, 1998). Smith (1993) highlighted that cooperating teachers felt frustration when they did not have sufficient notification of the student teacher’s placement from the university. It is a possibility that communication may be impeded due to a lack of enthusiasm among university supervisors as the supervising of student teachers is perceived as a low status task, particularly in research intense universities (Jeong and Mc Cullick, 2001). Mitchell *et al.* (2007) echoed the low status attributed to supervising teacher education by revealing that few distinguished professors of education are found among the ranks of those who conduct teacher education programmes.

In the case of the PDS model many of the communication difficulties mentioned above are eliminated, particularly if it is the case that the university supervisor is present in the school on a regular basis. The university supervisor will know and appreciate the classroom situations in which student teachers are working and the cooperating teacher will have a voice in the content and structure of the teacher education programme in place (Zeichner, 2005).

2.7.3 The relationship between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher

It has been previously highlighted that the knowledge and experience shared by the cooperating teacher is invaluable to the student teacher. It has been found that the relationship with the cooperating teacher is the most influential factor in the student teachers' formation of a positive or negative perception about teaching practice (Hill and Brodin, 2004; Duffield, 2006). Differences in student teachers' perceptions of their cooperating teachers' influence were associated, to some degree, with the cooperating teacher's views of their role and with the nature and extent of the student teacher and cooperating teacher interactions (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). The initial stage of mentoring consists of complex social interactions that can be problematic when cooperating teachers and student teachers differ in their expectations concerning the purposes of their work together (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). It must be accepted that the development of a mentoring relationship is a gradual process requiring mutual effort.

Cooperating teachers who are welcoming, trusting and can share ownership of their classes provide the student teacher with the most successful experiences. Eby *et al.*

(2000) found that student teachers report more negative experiences when they perceive the cooperating teacher as having contradictory attitudes, beliefs and values from their own. Conflict has also been found to arise when dissimilar role expectations exist between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). Halford *et al.*, (1998) identified that student teachers often do not want to seek help as this may highlight their own weaknesses. Supporting the emotional needs of a student teacher must also be considered at least as important as providing them with a teaching model. The student teacher must feel that they are in an accepting relationship before they can absorb practical and technical knowledge from the cooperating teacher (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007).

It is undeniable that cooperating teachers possess a significant amount of influence over student teachers. Reports of favourite cooperating teachers by Duffield (2006) suggested that the popular cooperating teachers treated the student teachers as equals, making them feel like real teachers. Respect and confidence shown by a cooperating teacher, who is often highly valued by the student teacher, has an impact on the student teacher, and as Teitel (2001) stressed, learning to teach is all about impacts. The relationship can also impact on the cooperating teacher. Hastings (2004) reported cooperating teacher comments that the relationship becomes tangible to the extent that the rapport with the student teacher is highly valued. However when there are problems in the relationship, this is likely to have a negative impact on the teaching practice experience. Koerner (1992) revealed that cooperating teachers have negative perceptions of mentoring in terms of an apprehension of student teachers' questions.

A collaborative effort by the cooperating teacher and student teacher is needed to better understand how to improve, discuss and solve practical classroom challenges for which there are no ready-made solutions. This can provide the kind of learning that Zeichner (1995) described as educative mentoring for both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. If a programme is developed based on the combined concerns and expectations of the cooperating teacher and student teacher, exchanges become more democratic and constructive as the basis is mutual trust and a willingness to share and come to each other's assistance (Chalies *et al.*, 2008). In such a supportive environment, student teachers become more likely to commit themselves to their professional practice by taking greater risks in their lessons and requesting assistance more willingly.

2.7.4 The relationship between the university supervisor and the student teacher

Traditional models of student teacher supervision often assume that student teachers need to be “*supervised closely*” when they leave the university to practice in a school (Slick, 1998, p.821). This closeness usually doesn't materialise as student teachers often express frustration about the minimal time they spend with their university supervisors. While they understand and acknowledge the impossible schedule the university supervisors were expected to keep, from the student teachers' perspective, supervisors visited their classrooms too infrequently and had only limited knowledge about their teaching (Borko and Mayfield, 1995).

In a study by Koehler (1984), university supervisors expressed concerns about the lack of instruction to prepare them for their role. Later research by Borko and Mayfield (1995) also highlighted factors such as poorly defined roles and inadequate preparation for the task of supervision as reasons for limitations in the relationship between the university supervisor and the student teacher. Both Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) and Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that university supervisors limited their constructive criticism of, and depth of discussions with student teachers due to the limitations in their own knowledge bases particularly in some cases their knowledge of subject specific pedagogy. Borko and Mayfield (1995) also reported that university supervisors did not always have the discussions they wanted to have with student teachers because they did not want to be confrontational. They also found that student teachers followed a similar pattern to avoid confrontation and open disagreement. This desire to maximise comfort and minimise risks limits the impact on student teacher growth.

Paperwork has been found to be a prominent guide in meetings between university supervisors and student teachers (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). On one level it can simply be a bureaucratic aspect that has to be handled; lesson plans need to be reviewed and observation forms need to be completed. On a deeper level, paperwork can also create a focus for meetings. Ratings and comments on supervisors' observation forms were one of the few things that encouraged student teachers to ask questions of the university supervisors (Borko and Mayfield, 1995).

Tensions may emerge in the student teacher – supervisor relationship resulting from the dual role of assisting and assessing as faced by the university supervisor. Koehler (1984) reported that university supervisors resented being placed in a situation where they had to play the “*heavy*” by being too critical of the student teacher. Teacher educators must examine closely the area of evaluation and reconsider whether any supervisor should act as both coach and evaluator (Slick, 1997).

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review set out to look at the overall picture of teaching practice and to examine the role of each member of the teaching practice triad in ensuring that student teachers are provided with the best possible learning experience. A number of key issues have been highlighted in the literature. Firstly the significance of the role of the cooperating teacher during teaching practice cannot be underestimated. Universities tend to have a haphazard approach to their selection and training of cooperating teachers. Also with the exception of the PDS model, there is little real collaboration between schools and universities. This leads to role confusion and inconsistent expectations for all members of the teaching practice triad.

It is evident from the literature review that responsibility for organising successful teaching practice falls to the university. It is therefore necessary for all universities to develop a programme which supports open communication with schools and cooperating teachers and promotes collaboration. The university must also clearly define and communicate expectations for each member of the triad during teaching practice.

Chapter 3

The Development of the COPET Programme

3.1 Introduction

Research on participants in teacher education has focused on two major groups; student teachers and teacher educators. Teacher education programmes are designed to meet the needs of student teachers but seldom take into account the needs of the cooperating teachers with whom easily influenced novices are placed (Bullough and Draper, 2004). We know little about cooperating teachers' experiences or how the teaching practice experience impacts on their professional lives (Tjeerdsma, 1998; Hastings, 2004). Bullough (2005, p.144) argued that by failing to focus attention explicitly on the ways in which cooperating teachers learn about and develop their role, teaching practice will continue to be "*a weak exercise in vocational socialisation*".

This chapter presents the stages of the development and implementation of the COPET programme. The main focus in developing the COPET programme was firstly to identify how cooperating teachers could be involved in helping student teachers during teaching practice. Secondly, to discover how they could be prepared for their role, and thirdly to address how this new role for cooperating teachers could be structured. Once a satisfactory programme had been designed in consultation with cooperating teachers, it

was then presented to each of the members of the triad and finally implemented during a two week teaching practice placement.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Participants

All teachers who had acted as cooperating teachers (n=32) during the programme's first block of teaching practice were invited to participate in the research. Twenty three physical education teachers (10 male and 13 female) agreed to participate.

3.2.2 Data collection

The research was broken down into two components, a post teaching practice questionnaire and follow up focus group interviews:

Post teaching practice questionnaire

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) investigating teaching practice experiences was disseminated to the full cohort of cooperating teachers (n = 32). The purpose of this was to get feedback in relation to the teaching practice experience and also to determine their interest in becoming involved in a COPET programme. The following four questions were asked;

1. Did you feel adequate information was provided from DCU as to the role of the co-operating physical education teacher during the teaching practice experience?
2. Do you feel that the co-operating physical education teacher could/should have a more active role in the mentoring of the student teacher on teaching practice?

3. Are there any areas/issues/suggestions in relation to physical education teaching practice in DCU that you would like to bring to our attention?
4. Would you like to be contacted in the future in relation to the design of a co-operating physical education teachers' programme in DCU?

The questionnaire was disseminated to the cooperating teachers after a two week teaching practice placement. They then returned the completed questionnaire to the university in a stamped addressed envelope. The response rate was 72% (n=23).

Of the twenty three responses received, twenty of the cooperating teachers indicated that they were willing to be involved further in the research. These teachers were then contacted by telephone to further discuss their involvement and as a result, nine of these cooperating teachers consented to take part in one of two focus groups.

Follow up focus groups

The focus groups were conducted six months after the completion of the student teaching practice period. This delay was due to the fact that the initial questionnaires were administered by PETE staff and the leading researcher only became involved at a later stage.

The purpose of the focus groups was to further explore cooperating teachers' views on teaching practice and the role of the cooperating teacher. They were structured using a guide of three open ended questions with probes providing a framework for

respondents' answers while allowing respondents to reply freely. These questions were based on findings from the questionnaire and recommendations suggested in teaching practice literature. The focus group protocol was piloted with three physical education teachers who had previous experience as cooperating teachers. The purpose of the pilot was to identify any ambiguities within the questions. It also served as an opportunity for the researcher to develop skills for their role as moderator. Following the pilot focus group some questions were revised and clarified for use in the focus groups.

Prior to beginning the focus groups, all participants were provided with a plain language statement (see appendix B) giving details of the research and what involvement would require. Written informed consent (see appendix B) was then obtained from all participating cooperating teachers. The focus groups were recorded for later transcription and analysis. This allowed the investigator to review the data to ensure a complete and accurate record of the content was reported.

Each focus group began with a summary of the feedback which the full cohort of cooperating teachers had previously provided through the questionnaires. The approximate length of each focus group was 60 minutes. Participants were asked to answer candidly and honestly.

Cooperating teachers were asked to discuss;

1. What they believed their role in teaching practice was.
2. How this role could be structured.
3. How this role for cooperating teachers could be implemented.

The participants tended to talk continuously once a topic was brought up. Often, they went beyond the question at hand and seized the opportunity to portray ideas and engage with others in the field. When this happened the interviewer guided the group back to the original topic. As the focus group progressed, other questions also arose according to the participants responses.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed questions and were analysed descriptively.

3.3.2 Focus groups

The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used to analyse the focus group data. This analysis allowed the researcher to format and transcribe the data into a readily identifiable, readable and structured format. Data was reduced in order to determine themes and provide a means by which rich information could be retrieved. Using the constant comparison method provided systematic steps of identifying key points, such as level of interaction with the cooperating teacher, followed by comparing results with those of other groups in order to identify patterns (Krueger, 1988). Care was taken to ensure that all themes were clearly supported by the data. Areas of significance and importance in relation to the development and implementation of the COPET Programme were identified.

This research employed three strategies to ensure data trustworthiness and credibility. These included member checking, peer debriefing and provision of rich data description. Member checking involved the researcher checking their findings with the focus group participants to verify they were accurate and true. Peer debriefing occurred between the lead researcher and a co-researcher (Dr. Sarah Meegan) to ensure trustworthiness. Both the researcher and co-researcher agreed on the findings i.e. themes identified, and subsequent conclusions so no changes were made.

3.4 Findings

Data was collected in this study using two methods- questionnaire and focus group interviews. Findings for each of these are presented below.

3.4.1 Cooperating teacher post teaching practice questionnaire

The most frequent comment made by cooperating teachers related to the duration of the teaching practice period. Fifteen teachers (65%) expressed concern that a two week placement was too short. It was suggested that students could possibly spend a week prior to teaching practice observing or shadowing the physical education teacher. Six of the cooperating teachers (26%) also indicated that during the teaching practice placement, student teachers should remain in school for the entire day and spend time observing lessons.

There was some criticism of the university's communication with the schools prior to teaching practice. Five of the cooperating teachers (21%) stated that they were uncertain about particular elements of the placement prior to teaching practice; such as the number of class periods the student was required to take. In addition, three teachers (13%) indicated that there was some vagueness regarding the students' prior knowledge and areas of study.

During the university supervisor's visit, two of the cooperating teachers (9%) indicated that there was insufficient communication with them about the students' progress. It was suggested by one cooperating teacher that the university assessment criteria be provided to cooperating teachers to enable them to provide appropriate and relevant feedback.

Seventeen of the cooperating teachers surveyed (74%) indicated that they should provide feedback to students on a regular basis. However, ideas relating to the amount of feedback provided and the level of presence during student teacher lessons varied. While four of the cooperating teachers (17%) indicated that they should always be present during student lessons and provide immediate feedback, two of the cooperating teachers (9%) suggested meeting with the student teacher once each week to provide feedback would be sufficient. It was suggested by five cooperating teachers (22%) that observation and feedback documentation could be provided by the university to assist cooperating teachers.

Three of the cooperating teachers surveyed (13%) mentioned that they felt unsure as to their role in assessing the student teacher. Eighteen of the cooperating teachers (78%) felt that they should have some role; suggested formats included a debrief on post lesson appraisals and a written report at the end of the placement. The overall feedback from the questionnaire highlighted that cooperating teachers require clarification of their role and responsibilities during teaching practice, but that they are very willing to become involved and guide student teachers.

Table 1

Overview of cooperating teachers' responses to post teaching practice questionnaire

Information provided prior to TP	84% felt adequate	16% dissatisfied
More active role in the mentoring of the student teacher	78% indicated they should be more active	22% are happy with the current role of the cooperating teacher
Involvement in the development of a mentoring programme for CT	87% are interested in providing some input	13% do not wish to be involved

3.4.2 Focus group interviews

Six of the participants in the focus group interviews taught in co-educational schools, while three taught in single sex boys' schools. Female teachers (n=4) had taught for an average of five years (range 1-8 years) while males (n=5) had taught for an average of 11 years (range 7-26 years). All cooperating teachers were following the same Irish Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) curriculum guide, although there was flexibility allowing each teacher to decide when to teach the different content areas. All cooperating teachers regularly participated in physical education in-services provided by the national Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service.

Following analysis of the focus group data, findings were divided into identified themes relating to each of the members of the teaching practice triad; the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university. The remainder of this section will present the findings for each of the three members of the triad.

The student teacher

Theme 1: Preparedness

It was recommended that prior to teaching practice student teachers should be provided with opportunities in the university setting to teach school children. To date their only experience had been limited to teaching their peers who teachers felt were most likely more enthusiastic and cooperative than the sometimes disinterested teenagers found in schools. Cooperating teachers also advocated that students spend time, up to a

week, observing their cooperating teachers before the placements begin to familiarise themselves with the school situation and procedures;

“The TP student should spend a week before TP observing in the school. This would help them to become familiar with the layout and organisation of the school. They would also see how an experienced teacher deals with certain situations and even that we make mistakes!”

Cooperating teachers also emphasised that student teachers must be familiar with the teaching practice process and should be able to inform their cooperating teachers of exactly what is required of them.

Theme 2: Observation of lessons

The cooperating teachers felt that not all of the student teachers' lessons should be observed so that students would still feel free to experiment with their own teaching styles. One cooperating teacher commented; *“We shouldn't be there putting them under pressure all of the time, they should be able to do their own thing as well”*. They also felt that student teachers themselves should be eager to observe as many lessons as possible during teaching practice.

Theme 3: Feedback

It was suggested that the student teacher could team-teach with the cooperating teacher or re-teach lessons that they had observed to their own classes. It was noted that if the cooperating teacher is willing to observe their teaching and provide feedback, the student teacher must be willing to accept this feedback; *“The TP student must be willing*

to accept feedback. It should be set down in TP criteria that students will receive constructive criticism from the cooperating teacher”. Cooperating teachers suggested that the student teacher should be willing to meet with them on a regular basis to analyse their teaching and set goals for future lessons.

The cooperating teachers also recommended that in order to ensure that the student teachers were easily identifiable and dressed in professional attire, they should wear a DCU uniform when on teaching practice. Cooperating teachers also felt that student teachers should remain in school for the entire day and immerse themselves in school life as much as possible.

The cooperating teacher

Theme 1: Communication and collaboration between the school and the university

The cooperating teachers expressed a desire to be notified about the placement of a student teacher with them, well in advance of the beginning of teaching practice, ideally the previous school term. This would allow them to include the student teacher in their planning. In addition, cooperating teachers proposed that they should have a say in the topics that the student teaches instead of the university dictating areas to be covered; *“We should be given a more significant role in the planning of the TP student’s timetable. The TP student should fit in to some degree with our school planning that is already in place”.*

Theme 2: Documentation for cooperating teachers

It was suggested that a checklist should be provided for cooperating teachers prior to the commencement of teaching practice, detailing what is expected of the student and what is to be achieved through this. The cooperating teachers also noted that a copy of the universities' assessment criteria would be very useful to have, to enable them to help students with the specific areas on which they are assessed. *"Even if we're not assessing them we still need to know the specific areas that they will be assessed on"*. It was also proposed that an observation sheet could be provided by the university, and that this could help to structure feedback.

Theme 3: Observation of lessons

All cooperating teachers agreed that they should observe a number of the student teachers' lessons. Suggestions varied from being a constant presence during the students' lessons to observing one lesson each day. *"I think one lesson each day would be enough to give the student feedback"*.

Theme 4: Feedback

There was complete agreement from all cooperating teachers that they should provide some form of feedback to the student teacher. While some cooperating teachers believed that feedback should happen after every lesson, most agreed that time pressures would not allow for this. As a result it was suggested that a set time period should be agreed each week, during which time the cooperating teacher would provide general guidance, discuss the student teachers' progress and set targets for the following week;

“A formalised period of time for reflection should be set aside each week. This could be one 40 minute period at the end of the week or it could be broken down to two 20 minute periods, one at the beginning of the week and one at the end of the week”.

Theme 5: Assessment

In relation to assessment, most of the cooperating teachers believed that they should have some opportunity to provide feedback to the university in relation to the student's progress. One cooperating teacher commented;

“I would like to have an opportunity to have a discussion with the supervisor when they come out to the school because you never know the student might just have had a bad lesson that day but they might actually be very good”.

The cooperating teachers were quite adamant however, that this feedback should not be used to form part of the student's assessment report. The cooperating teachers stressed that the University would need to put a framework in place with very clear guidelines defining the assessment criteria if cooperating teachers were to ever be involved in assessment.

The university

Theme 1: Communication and collaboration between the school and the university

The cooperating teachers suggested that the university should open clear channels of communication with them prior to the student teachers' arrival. Details of areas studied by the student teacher should be provided to allow the cooperating teacher to

prepare for their arrival and form fair and realistic expectations. Communication was further identified as a problem between cooperating teachers and university supervisors. It was suggested that a meeting of the cooperating teacher, the student teacher and the university supervisor would be very useful prior to the commencement of teaching practice to resolve any problems and to set goals. *“It would be great if we could meet with the supervisors and maybe the students together before TP so that we’d all be singing from the same hymn sheet”*.

Theme 2: Feedback

During the university supervisors’ visit, the cooperating teachers suggested that the supervisor should be willing to discuss the student’s performance and progress as this would allow the cooperating teacher to provide enhanced feedback and assistance.

3.5 Discussion

It was evident from the feedback received from both the questionnaires and the focus groups but in particular from the focus groups, that cooperating teachers were very positive about their role and viewed themselves as being an integral part of the teaching practice placement. During the focus groups however, the cooperating teachers pointed out that if they were to be productive in their role, it must first be made clear what is expected of them. Without clear expectations, a cooperating teachers’ ability to enhance student teachers’ professional knowledge and skills may be minimised (Rikard and Veal, 1996).

Cooperating teachers highlighted the importance of having knowledge of what the student teacher has previously studied. Mc Cullick (2001) supported this in reporting that cooperating teachers should be aware of what students learn in their undergraduate curriculum such as classroom management skills, pedagogy and ability to teach a wide curriculum. The importance of observing student teachers and providing feedback was also continually mentioned by the cooperating teachers. Kahan *et al.* (2003) suggested that observing student performance and following up with feedback is one of the key cooperating teachers' functions. Feedback functions as motivation, reinforcement and information and therefore may be necessary for behaviour change or intervention, and it may be especially beneficial for student teachers who are still learning to teach (Bunting, 1988; cited in Kahan *et al.*, 2003). O'Sullivan (2003) also pointed out that positive student reactions and positive feedback from their cooperating teachers were two key factors that confirmed physical education teaching as their career choice.

Although cooperating teachers did express some desire to be involved in the assessment procedure during the focus groups, this dual role of assessing and assisting student teachers can provoke an area of tension for them (Behets and Vergauwen, 2006). As assessment is generally the most ambiguous area of a cooperating teachers work, many universities do not involve the cooperating teacher in the assessment process. However, even if the cooperating teacher is not responsible for assigning grades, it is very helpful for them to be familiar with the assessment criteria (Colvin and Markos, 2007) as suggested by the cooperating teachers in the present study.

Information collected during this research indicated that all three groups of the triad would benefit from the development of a Cooperating Physical Education Teacher (COPET) Programme. Although similar programmes already existed in other universities internationally, this programme sought to fulfil the unique needs of: 1) the PE students, 2) their cooperating teachers and 3) the university in question. Cooperating teachers would be central to the success of the programme so their feedback and future input would be essential in the development of the programme.

3.6 Implementation of the research findings

Based on the findings detailed above and an extensive review of the literature and relevant teacher education programmes internationally, the COPET programme was developed with a view to implementing it during the second year teaching practice placement in the following year. Based on the recommendations of the cooperating teachers, two key structures were identified and developed to assist the cooperating teachers in their role; a COPET booklet and a COPET training programme.

3.6.1 COPET booklet

Handbooks providing information about teaching practice are commonly provided in many teacher education programmes. Graham (2006) provided details of one such handbook illustrating that it not only describes the roles and responsibilities of the various people involved in the teaching practice process, but it also explains the evaluation criteria and identifies levels of professional competence that student teachers are expected to attain.

The COPET booklet (see appendix C) was developed based on findings from the literature and information provided by the cooperating teachers during the focus groups as detailed above. The format of the booklet was ten A4 pages including the following three key components;

1. Definitions of the roles of the three members of the teaching practice triad.
2. A check list for cooperating teachers to use before, during and after teaching practice.
3. Daily and weekly feedback sheets.

Before being finalised, a copy of the draft booklet was sent to each of the cooperating teachers who had participated in the focus groups for feedback and clarification. The feedback was very encouraging with comments that included; “*A very informative document clearly stating the roles and responsibilities of the three members of the triad*”, and “*Feedback documents will be very useful*”. There was one concern raised by one cooperating teacher and this related to cooperating teachers being “*overloaded*”, both in terms of reading and comprehending the booklet and implementing the new programme.

3.6.2 COPET training

It was decided at the outset that information and material relating to the COPET programme would not be given to any members of the triad without them firstly taking part in a training programme. This decision was made to ensure that the aims of the

programme were fully understood, that it would be implemented well, and to allow participants to ask questions particularly in relation to their own responsibilities. Jeong & Mc Cullick (2001) advocated that an induction session allows all participants involved in the teaching practice experience to have a mutual understanding of their roles and responsibilities and opens channels of communication.

In the cases of the student teachers and the university supervisors the organisation of COPET training was a simple task, with a separate, ninety minute seminar for each group taking place in the university prior to the beginning of teaching practice. During this session, a detailed description of the COPET programme was provided with particular emphasis being placed on the roles of each member of the triad. Each of the student teachers and university supervisors were then provided with a copy of the COPET booklet.

As cooperating teachers are central to the success of the COPET programme, a more specific two hour training workshop was organised to meet their needs. All cooperating teachers (n=39) scheduled to have a student teacher during teaching practice were contacted firstly by e-mail and then by telephone to briefly explain to them about the COPET programme and to invite them to attend the training workshop in DCU. Ten cooperating teachers (5 male, 5 female) attended this training session. Due to the low number of cooperating teachers available to attend in DCU, it was decided that the researcher would visit cooperating teachers in their schools to provide COPET training to those who had been unable to attend training but were willing to be involved in the

programme. Subsequently arrangements were made to visit sixteen cooperating teachers (6 male, 9 female) in their schools. In total, twenty-six of the cooperating teachers received training to implement the COPET programme. Only cooperating teachers who took part in this training were provided with a copy of the COPET booklet.

The value of training for cooperating teachers is clearly acknowledged in the literature as is highlighted in Chapter 2. There is much evidence that the potential of the cooperating teacher's role in helping student teachers improve their instruction and knowledge is often not realised. The main factor which is cited as the reason for this limitation is the inadequate preparation and training of cooperating teachers for the task of supervision (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). In the Professional Development School (PDS) model, cooperating teachers are invited to participate in seminars during which the discussion topics focus on defining expectations for teaching practice, interpreting the standards used for evaluation, clarifying performance levels that the student teachers are expected to attain, and exploring the dilemmas of teaching practice that inevitably surface (Graham, 2006). A similar model was used in the provision of training for the COPET programme.

Capel and Blair (2007) found that if incongruence exists between the focus of school and university based elements of a teacher education programme, student teachers are likely to dismiss the university-based elements of the programme as not relevant to their work in schools. To avoid this situation and ensure cohesion, a description of what areas student teachers had studied to date including practical content, was provided to

allow cooperating teachers to understand and appreciate their level of knowledge and to situate this knowledge in the school setting. Particular reference was made to the teaching styles and instructional models which student teachers had studied and would be using during teaching practice. This was also an opportunity for cooperating teachers to update their own knowledge on teaching styles and to ensure that they could provide their student teacher with appropriate feedback. A detailed description of the role of the cooperating teacher and how best this role could be performed was provided. Best practice in relation to the provision of feedback was also explored. The university assessment criteria were discussed and cooperating teachers were given opportunities to ask questions about all aspects of the programme.

3.7 Conclusion

It was planned that all cooperating teachers who had received training would implement the COPET programme during a two week teaching practice placement with second year students. These cooperating teachers were then invited to evaluate the impact of the programme on their teaching practice experiences. The programme was also evaluated from the perspectives of the other members of the teaching practice triad; the student teachers and the university supervisors. All three members of the triad were also involved in evaluating the impact of the programme on the learning experiences of student teachers. While this evaluation of the COPET programme from the perspectives of all three members of the teaching practice triad is presented in chapters five, six and seven, the following chapter firstly outlines the methods used to collect and analyse data in order to facilitate such an evaluation.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology used in the evaluation of the COPET programme. Qualitative research was the method employed. Issues relating to ethics, data trustworthiness and credibility are described in detail below.

Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.4) noted that research is “*concerned with understanding the world and that this is informed by how we view our world, what we take understanding to be and what we see as the purpose of understanding*”. The objectives of this research are to evaluate the impact of the COPET programme on student teachers’ learning and on the experiences of each of the members of the triad during teaching practice. It is intended to utilise this evaluation to provide direction for the university in addressing issues which have arisen and to provide recommendations for the future development and implementation of the COPET programme.

4.2 Research approaches

4.2.1 Main features of qualitative research and rationale for use of qualitative inquiry

Guba (1978), cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985), revealed that qualitative inquiry is primarily a naturalistic or discovery oriented approach, which is non-manipulative and non-controlling in the sense that an attempt is made to understand real world situations as

they unfold naturally. This is carried out without placing any predetermined constraints or outcomes prior to investigation. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and this approach of the “*human as instrument*” originally developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.193), enables inquirers to be responsive, adaptable and holistic. Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p.26) encapsulated this view stating that the human instrument “*is the only instrument which is flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience*”. Cohen *et al.* (2000) noted that a qualitative research methodology addresses the need to examine real situations through the eyes of participants rather than through the researcher. A qualitative research methodology can also respect an individual’s own involvement with the life experience itself.

Qualitative research tools allow us to study areas in which statistical analysis may not always be appropriate, as is the case with this particular study. This study sought to evaluate the impact of a new programme not only on student teachers’ learning but also on the experiences of each of the members of the teaching practice triad.

4.2.2 Focus groups

Qualitative measures often use interviews or focus groups as one method of data collection. In this study focus groups were chosen for two key reasons, firstly due to participant numbers (n=31, made up of student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors) and secondly based on the fact that the COPET programme was a new initiative in Ireland and focus groups are well suited for exploratory studies in a new

domain (Kvale, 2007). The open nature of focus groups facilitated the gathering of data on the real experiences of the participants.

Focus groups are essentially group interviews. They can be defined as “*a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment upon, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research*” (Gibbs, 1997 p.1). Krueger and Casey (2000) described focus groups as a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. As a qualitative research method, focus groups create a process of sharing and comparing among participants to generate data needed about a topic.

In order to gather information, participants were asked to share their feelings and uncover attitudes, ideas and opinions about their experiences during teaching practice. The research aimed to capture and analyse subjective thoughts and opinions, it did not set out to quantify or measure. The research aimed to capture experiences of the individuals involved in teaching practice.

4.2.3 Research paradigm

While there are a number of paradigms within the qualitative context (e.g. constructivism) the exploratory nature of this research lends towards the interpretivist approach. This is due to interpretivists recognising the unique experiences of each individual. Interpretivism is based on an understanding of human behaviour in its own

context (Sarantakos, 1998). Sarantakos (1998, p.35) explained that reality is assumed to be “*in the minds of the people...it is internally experienced and socially constructed*”. In interpretivism, research is usually carried out in natural settings, using observational methods or in-depth interviews. During this time a close relationship often forms between the researcher and the researched (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). The above assumptions were met in this research as the research was carried out in school and university settings (both natural settings for the respective triad participants). Focus groups, retrieving in-depth experiences from each triad member involved in the COPET programme, were employed and the researcher developed close ties with the participants, primarily the cooperating teachers.

4.2.4 Ethical considerations

Smith (1990, p.261) explained; “*Ethics has to do with how one treats those individuals with whom one interacts and is involved and how the relationships formed may depart from some conception of an ideal*”. Denscombe (2010) maintained that all researchers should protect the interests of all participants involved in research. As qualitative research methods are highly personal it was vital that certain points were explicitly addressed with each participant prior to the commencement of the focus groups including confidentiality, anonymity, consent and voluntary participation. Each participant was provided with a plain language statement and an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and adequate time was provided to allow participants to ask questions.

Participants were encouraged to respond honestly and openly. It was also clarified with participants that their responses would have no bearing on their schools' participation in future teaching practices. Denscombe (2010) described evaluation apprehension as being when participants in research become apprehensive because they think that they may be judged by their answers.

Plain language statement and informed consent form

The plain language statement served to inform participants what the research was about and what would be done with the findings. Bell (2003) advocated that all researchers are responsible for explaining what the research aims and objectives are to their participants. As part of informed consent, all participants were made aware that they were entitled to opt out of the research at any stage.

All participants also agreed to the focus groups being recorded using a dictaphone for accuracy and cross checking purposes. Respondents were also advised that both a copy of the recordings and the completed study would be made available to them if required. This method allowed all participants to engage fully in the discussion.

4.3 Data collection

Data collection refers to the way in which information is gathered for the purpose of research. One of the main complexities of undertaking research is choosing from the large number of alternative methods available to the researcher. As detailed above, due

to the experiential and personal nature of this research and the need to explore the ideas of three different participant groups, focus groups were selected for the research.

4.3.1 Participant selection

One of the planning issues of principal importance when using focus groups as a method of data collection is deciding who to include in the focus group. The target groups for the focus groups were student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors who had experienced the COPET programme during teaching practice placement. As this study sought to collect data from three distinct groups who each had a different role in teaching practice and hence different experiences of the COPET programme, focus groups were arranged separately. Seven focus groups in total took place. Three focus groups took place involving fourteen student teachers, broken down into two groups of five and one group of four. Three focus groups also took place involving eleven cooperating teachers, with five participants in the first focus group and three taking part in the two remaining focus groups. It was only necessary to carry out one focus group with university supervisors due to the smaller number (n=6) of supervisors involved in teaching practice.

Silverman (2000) described two types of research access; covert access in which the participant does not have knowledge of the interview and overt access in which the participants are informed of the research objectives and their agreement is sourced. This research was overt in nature. In order to recruit participants for each focus group, the researcher contacted by either telephone or e-mail all student teachers (n=30),

cooperating students (n=26) and university supervisors (n=10) who had been involved in the COPET programme. During this initial contact, participants were made aware that research was based on their opinions, ideas and experiences, and the research questions were clearly outlined and explained. Fourteen student teachers, eleven cooperating teachers and six university supervisors agreed to participate in focus groups. Times and dates were arranged for each focus group with the location being a conference room in the university or a classroom in one of the schools involved in the research.

4.3.2 Developing a questioning route

When planning a focus group, question formulation requires advanced consideration. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that good questions have several distinguishable qualities and should be: conversational, use simple language, be easy to say, clear, short and usually open-ended. Additionally they recommend avoiding questions that ask “*why*” as this is interrogatory and implies rational answers. Arksey and Knight (1999) cautioned against the use of leading questions, assumptive questions or ambiguous questions as these limit the potential for free flowing topical discussion among participants. In order to facilitate cross-group comparisons, questions also must remain consistent across interview sessions. A similar questioning route was developed and used for all three members of the teaching practice triad

The researcher used a funneling-sequencing technique (Lindlof, 2002) to maximise the information gathered during the focus groups. To prevent participants from feeling uncomfortable at the initial stages of the focus groups, funneling of questions was

applied where questions graduated from general to specific. This approach allowed both the researcher and the participants to settle into the focus group while simultaneously permitting a logical and comfortable progression to responses. In each of the focus groups the researcher started with a question asking participants about their experiences of teaching practice in general. The questions then moved more specifically to the role played by the cooperating teacher and even more specifically to the impact of the COPET programme and recommendations for the future of the programme. By summarising the main outcomes generated by the group at the end of each focus group, the researcher also encouraged participants to state their final position on key topics and to offer any additional comments, or to allow comment on the accuracy of researchers' summary.

4.3.3 Moderator skills

The role of the moderator in conducting focus groups is essential. Marshall and Rossman (2006) identified that the moderator must create a supportive environment by asking focused questions to encourage discussion and the expression of different opinions and points of view. The moderator uses principles of group dynamics to focus the group in the exchange of ideas, feelings and experiences on a clearly understood topic (Krueger and Casey, 2000). An assistant moderator was also present during each of the focus groups. The role of the assistant moderator was to carry out member checking, note participants' body language, record any overt themes emerging from discussion and note any other nuances, e.g., participant body language or individuals who were very vocal during the discussion.

As a researcher it is important to address the concept of observer dependency. In qualitative research there is a risk of results being influenced by the researcher. It has been recognised that in conducting focus groups, researchers are not detached observers but participants themselves. In simpler terms, a relationship always exists between the researcher and those being researched. Delamont (1992) provided a solution to this issue indicating that the researcher must constantly be self conscious about their role and their interactions while collecting data.

4.4 Data analysis

As a result of seven focus groups taking place altogether; there was an extensive amount of text assimilated. This had to be processed from the perspectives of each of the members of the teaching practice triad in order to generate the conclusions which would ultimately evaluate and further develop the COPET programme. The analysis of qualitative data is somewhat more complex than that of quantitative analysis as it does not utilise statistics and hard measurement tools. It is the role of the researcher to identify themes and patterns as they emerge.

Cresswell (2003) described the process of data analysis as “*eclectic*”, and highlighted that various approaches to data analysis exist. The researcher must be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. The researcher must also be open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the findings (Cresswell, 2003). The constant comparison method of data analysis (Merriam, 1998) was used to analyse focus group data in this research. This is an

inductive approach, where data related to the focus of inquiry is collected with no predetermined variables, data is then transcribed and themes and sub themes are generated through coding and refinement of categories. This structure ensures that what is presented as findings is an accurate reflection of the focus group participants' views.

The researcher used systematic steps of identifying key themes such as level of interaction with the cooperating teacher, followed by comparing results with those of other groups in order to identify patterns (Krueger, 1998). This provided a means by which rich information could be retrieved. Using the constant comparison method, similar themes and sub themes from different groups were grouped together under headings. Areas of significance and importance in relation to the development and implementation of the COPET programme were identified. The constant comparison method allowed for formatting and transcribing the data into a readily identifiable, readable and structured format. This process was conducted by thoroughly, and repeatedly, reading through the focus group transcripts and comparing findings amongst the other transcripts. This resulted in repeated and common themes, both expectant and non-expectant, emerging from the data. It is important to note that the nature of the questions posed for each triad member evolved around four key themes; 1) Structure of the COPET programme, 2) Role of the cooperating teacher, 3) Impact of the COPET programme and 4) Suggestions for the future of the COPET programme. Findings in subsequent chapters are presented under these four themes with pertinent emergent sub themes arising from the data.

4.5 Trustworthiness and credibility

Ely *et al.* (1991, p.93) indicated that “*being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied*”. Within qualitative research, a range of strategies can be used to ensure credibility of data findings (Creswell, 2003). The present study employed three strategies to ensure data trustworthiness and credibility. These included member checking, peer debriefing and provision of rich data description.

Member checking involved the researcher checking their findings with the focus group participants to verify they were accurate and true reflections of what they discussed. Participants were given the opportunity to make amendments or add suggestions to the findings. Peer debriefing i.e. examining the transcripts, findings and conclusions, occurred between the researcher as the main moderator and focus group assistant moderator. Both the researcher and assistant moderator agreed on the findings i.e. themes and emergent sub themes identified. Data credibility was enhanced by conveying findings through the provision of rich, thick data description as presented in the chapters that follow (Thomas *et al.*, 2005).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the procedures undertaken to conduct a qualitative investigation into the research objectives of this study. The following three chapters will

offer an analysis of the data generated by each of the groups during the focus group sessions.

Chapter 5

The Impact of the COPET Programme on Student Teachers' Teaching Practice Experience

5.1 Introduction

The research presented in this chapter relates specifically to the experiences of the student teacher. Its purpose was threefold; firstly, to investigate the extent to which student teachers felt the COPET programme influenced their learning experiences while on teaching practice. Secondly, to determine the level of interaction between student teachers and cooperating teachers and finally, to identify ways in which the COPET programme can be improved to maximise the learning opportunities available to student teachers when on teaching practice placement.

As detailed previously in the methodology chapter, fourteen student teachers took part in three focus group interviews. The focus groups were guided using five open ended questions;

- Did you and your cooperating teacher refer to the COPET document before and during teaching practice?
- How would you define the role of your cooperating teacher on your recent teaching practice?
- How did the cooperating teacher impact on your teaching?

- What aspects of the COPET programme were positive/negative?
- What recommendations for change would you make regarding the use of the COPET programme in future teaching practices?

Results are presented under four key themes and relevant sub themes that emerged from the data. See figure 1.

1. Structure of the COPET programme.
2. The role of the cooperating teacher.
3. The impact of the COPET programme from the student teachers' perspective.
4. Student teachers' suggestions for the future of the COPET programme.

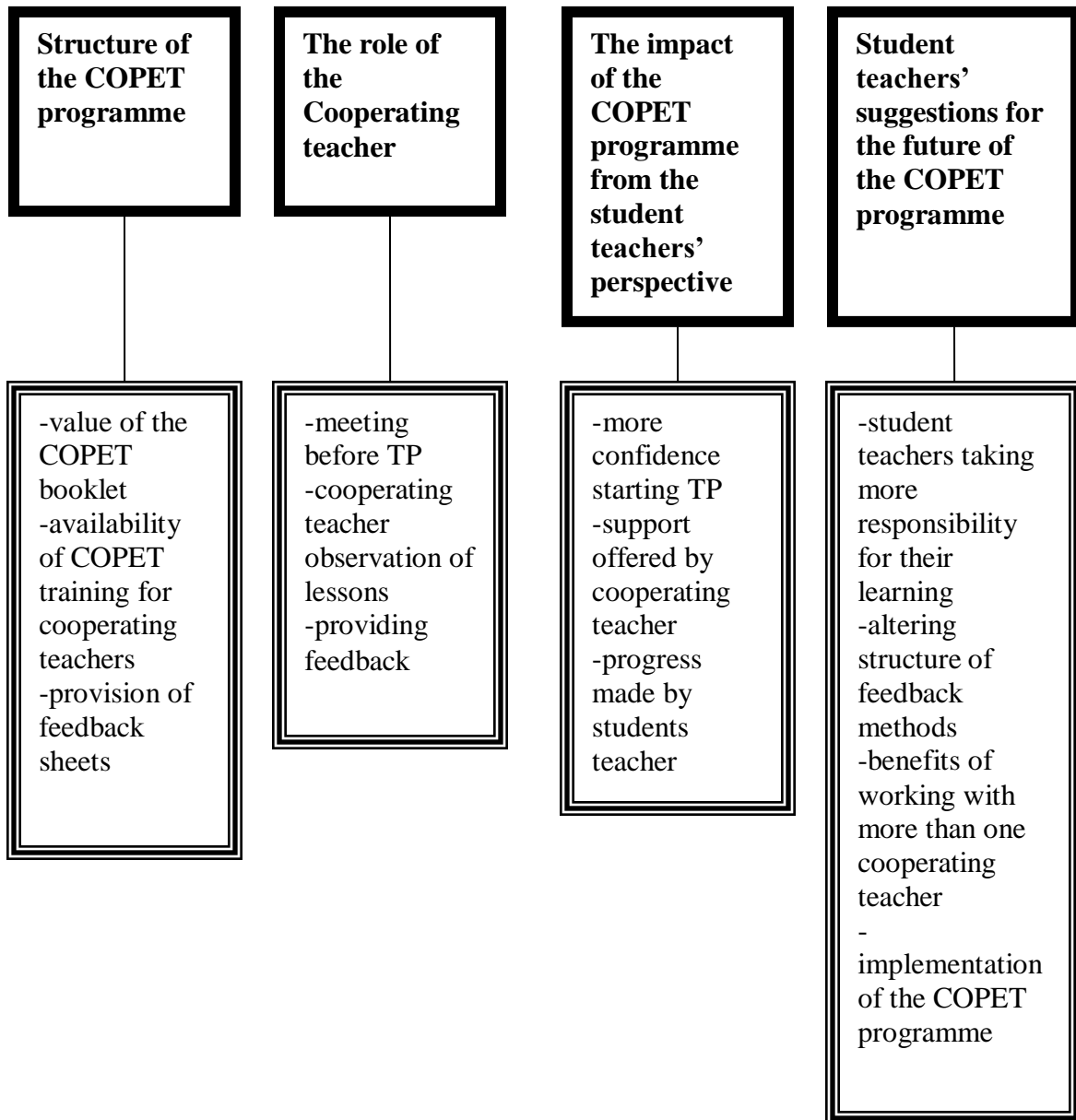


Figure 1. Themes and sub themes which emerged from the student teacher focus groups

5.2 Theme 1: Structure of the COPET programme

As mentioned previously, student teachers were provided with a detailed introduction to the COPET programme as well as a hard copy of the COPET booklet during a student teacher pre-teaching practice workshop. From analysis of the data it is clear to see that student teachers had a good understanding of the structure of the programme from the outset.

Sub theme 1: Value of the COPET booklet

Student teachers described the booklet as being helpful, particularly with regard to defining the roles of those involved in teaching practice. One student teacher commented that; *“it was useful, it told us what the COPET programme was all about, what the cooperating teachers role was and what we had to do”*. This identification of structural features and the roles and responsibilities of participants is central to the success of any programme, as difficulties arise when those involved struggle to define their proper and consistent roles (Chalies *et al.*, 2008).

From their comments, it was evident that student teachers found having access to the COPET booklet valuable when preparing for teaching practice; *“It was useful beforehand really to see what you needed to do before you went to the school”*. A checklist was also provided in the booklet to guide the student teachers’ preliminary visit to their school. During this visit a number of cooperating teachers discussed and reviewed the programme with the student teachers, although some student teachers reported insignificant use of the booklet; *“My cooperating teacher mentioned that she*

had it [the booklet], but she didn't really use it". There were also issues raised with regard to student teachers visiting their assigned schools before their cooperating teachers had received COPET training. One student teacher reported feeling quite unprepared as a result; *"some teachers hadn't gotten it (the document) yet and you felt after your visit when you saw the booklet that you hadn't got a lot of things done"*. This situation was only highlighted once as the remainder of the student teachers reported that their cooperating teachers did have a copy of the COPET booklet when they made their preliminary visit.

Sub theme 2: Availability of COPET training for cooperating teachers

Although all cooperating teachers had received COPET training prior to the beginning of teaching practice, one student teacher voiced concerns regarding their understanding of the programme; *"I think the COPET teachers could receive more training because I had to explain to my teacher what to fill out and what she had to do. I think they should be clearer on their role"*. Both Rikard and Veal (1996) and Grimmett and Ratzlaff (1986) have highlighted the point that when cooperating teachers are unprepared for their supervisory role, this contributes to the overall ambiguity of the role. While it was compulsory for involvement in the programme that all cooperating teachers had been present at a training workshop, this point highlights that they may not have engaged fully with the training process.

Sub theme 3: Provision of feedback sheets

The feedback sheets in the COPET document included a daily observation sheet and a weekly evaluation sheet. These were provided to ensure that student teachers received feedback in a similar manner. As the following comment demonstrates, it was clear that the student teachers found the daily observation sheets to be very beneficial;

“The observation sheets helped you to focus and gave you a clear idea of the areas that you were going to be assessed on. You could easily read back over the feedback sheets and immediately see the areas that you needed to work on”.

The majority of the student teachers commented on the difficulties cooperating teachers reported with regard to completing the forms. One student explained;

“They were used all of the time but both of the teachers said to me that there was too much to fill in. They had to do it everyday and they said that they felt they had to write something down”.

Findings suggest that few cooperating teachers held weekly evaluation meetings with student teachers and completed the weekly evaluation form. One student teacher reported;

“I think ten minutes was long enough for it [weekly evaluation], especially when it’s only a two week period. You might need to spend longer if you were going to have more time to work on things. You haven’t really done enough in one week to spend too long talking about it. And then sure at the end of the second week you had nothing to plan for”.

It appeared that the inexperienced student teacher viewed the end of the teaching practice placement as the end to planning and preparation. As recommended by Behets and Vergauwen (2006) the cooperating teacher could take this opportunity to guide them in structured reflection processes and to develop evaluation techniques, as this is seen as one of the key responsibilities of a cooperating teacher.

5.3 Theme 2: The role of the cooperating teacher

Bertone *et al.* (2003) described the role of the cooperating teacher as helping the student teacher to anticipate and prepare for a wide variety of classroom situations, to perceive and make sense of new events and to quickly determine the actions that need to be taken in order to adapt to the demanding classroom. It was obvious throughout the research that the majority of student teachers valued the role played by the cooperating teacher as demonstrated by the following two comments; *“I found their advice very helpful”* and *“It was good to know that you had someone there”*.

Sub theme 1: Meeting before teaching practice

Interactions begin prior to teaching practice when the student teachers made their preliminary visit. The importance and value of this visit is highlighted by the following student teacher comment; *“It helps to calm you down before teaching practice when you know exactly how the cooperating teacher runs their classes and what the students expect”*. Mc Cullick (2001) reported that this induction day or preliminary visit provides an opportunity for both student teachers and cooperating teachers to gain background

information particularly relating to student teachers previous experiences and their content and pedagogical knowledge.

Not all student teachers were afforded an opportunity to meet with their cooperating teacher before beginning teaching practice and this created an uncertain start for them as one student teacher explained;

“I only got to visit my school for the first time on the Friday and we were going out to them on the Monday. The principal just didn’t seem to have any interest and pass the messages on. We weren’t even sure what classes we’d have on the Monday, I came in with so much material prepared and then the teacher just decided to take the class. It was a real downer because I’d spent so much time over the weekend preparing”.

Sub theme 2: Cooperating teacher observation of lessons

As part of the COPET programme, the cooperating teachers were asked to observe at least some of the student teachers’ lessons and offer feedback. The student teachers appeared to value this element of the cooperating teacher’s role. Although some student teachers were nervous about the presence of the cooperating teacher during their lessons, almost all acknowledged the benefits with one student teacher commenting;

“I liked him being there because he pointed out things that I failed to see and so if he hadn’t been watching I never would have learned and improved on those things. We only have one inspection so you don’t get many opportunities to get feedback”.

While most cooperating teachers didn't interrupt the student teachers' teaching as recommended by the COPET programme, they offered support by their presence with one student teacher describing them as "*a safety net*". Student teachers also reported feeling more confident when the university supervisor visited to assess their teaching as they were used to having somebody watching them. "*It was good having them [cooperating teacher] in before the supervisor to get used to having someone watching you, it was like a pre-run*". Also;

"My cooperating teacher was nearly worse than my supervisor. He would tell me what went well and all my bad points. When I improved on them then he would tell me too. When my supervisor came then, it was much easier".

It is noteworthy that not all cooperating teachers observed student teachers' lessons with some introducing the student teacher to the class before the first lesson and then leaving them on their own. Feiman-Nemser (2001) described this as a laissez-faire approach whereby the cooperating teacher fails to provide support and guidance to the student teacher. While this approach may appear negative, the feedback received from the student teachers provided mixed views with one student stating; "*I felt the boys had more respect for me when he [cooperating teacher] wasn't there because when he was there they wouldn't listen to me, they'd only stop if he told them to stop*". It must be noted that if the cooperating teacher isn't present, as the COPET programme recommends them to be for at least some of the student teachers' lessons, then it is almost impossible for them to offer relevant and practical feedback.

Sub theme 3: Providing feedback

Feedback not only provides information but it also functions as motivation and reinforcement. It is therefore not only beneficial but also necessary for student teachers who are still learning to teach (Bunting, 1988; cited by Kahan *et al.*, 2003). Almost all of the student teachers described the provision of feedback as being a positive experience with most attributing the progress they made during teaching practice directly to the feedback provided by the cooperating teacher. One student teacher explained; *“The cooperating teacher helped me to look at aspects of the lesson and recognise when things weren’t working. Then the next week you were better prepared and engaged the students more and enjoyed the lesson more”*.

It is acknowledged in the literature that the provision of feedback can affect the relationship between the student teacher and their cooperating teacher. This is particularly evident in the initial stages of mentoring when they may differ in their expectations concerning the purposes of their work together (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). Halford *et al.* (1998) identified that student teachers often do not want to ask for help as they feel that this may indicate a sign of weakness. This was not a finding in the present study. Moreover, findings showed that almost all of the student teachers were happy to seek and receive feedback, as cooperating teachers accompanied constructive criticism with praise and support;

“They weren’t too critical; they were just there to give me some tips and feedback.

They always told me what I was doing well too so they were building up my

confidence. They also told me what areas to work on but it was mainly positive feedback and encouragement”.

Two student teachers reported negative experiences with regard to feedback. It is arguable that this affected their relationship with the cooperating teacher as well as their teaching practice experience. One of the student teachers explained her experience of feedback;

“There were two of us there on teaching practice and if I wasn’t teaching she used to make me sit in with her and criticise the other girl and then do the same when I was teaching. When we were going home in the evening we used to chat about what she had said about us”.

It was evident from the findings that most of the student teachers enjoyed a more supportive relationship with their cooperating teacher and appreciated the significance of their role. As previously mentioned, Ganser (2002) acknowledged the significance of this role as being central in helping student teachers make the transition from being students of teaching to teachers of students.

5.4 Theme 3: The impact of the COPET programme from the student teachers’ perspective

It is evident that over the course of teaching practice student teachers came to appreciate and value the input of their cooperating teacher. During the focus group interviews they reported positive opinions of the COPET programme and acknowledged the impact that it had had on their teaching.

Sub theme 1: More confidence starting teaching practice

Elements of the programme took effect even prior to the beginning of the teaching practice placement when the student teachers met with their cooperating teachers for the first time. Most of the cooperating teachers had a clear understanding of their role due to the training they had received and the COPET booklet had provided a checklist to guide the preliminary visit. This gave the student teachers a greater sense of confidence knowing that cooperating teachers had agreed to participate in the programme and thus offer them additional support as one student teacher explained; *“It was good knowing what the cooperating teacher could do or would do for you when you were out on teaching practice. You knew that you had someone to fall back on, it wasn’t all falling on your shoulders”*.

Sub theme 2: Support offered by cooperating teacher

The COPET programme entailed cooperating teachers interacting with their student teachers on a regular basis. The majority of student teachers clearly valued this contact throughout teaching practice. The word *“guide”* was used on numerous occasions to describe the cooperating teacher; *“He was like a guide and helped me to plan what I could teach with the class so that I knew where I was going”*. This guidance spanned a variety of areas from providing information about pupils’ previous experience to providing keys to locked presses. Tjeerdsma (1998) acknowledged the importance of cooperating teachers encouraging, supporting and making the student comfortable in their situation.

Almost all of the student teachers described their relationship with their cooperating teacher as a very positive one, with cooperating teachers providing much help and encouragement. This is illustrated in the following comment; *“He was really helpful, he let you know, not just about the students in your class but also about the teachers and the staffroom. You knew who would help you and things like that. It was helpful that way”*. Furthermore, as this was the student teachers’ first teaching experience, cooperating teachers were dealing with novices (Bullough and Draper, 2004). During their COPET training cooperating teachers had been provided with information about the student teachers prior knowledge and experience. Student teachers valued this aspect of the programme as they felt that cooperating teachers had a better appreciation of the stage they were at in their development as teachers. This inexperience was acknowledged a number of times during the interviews with one student teacher stating; *“We had only ever taught for 12 minutes and then suddenly you’re into forty minute classes, so at the start I was way off with my planning, either too little or too much”*.

Sub theme 3: Progress made by student teachers

During the focus groups, a number of student teachers talked in detail about the progress they had made during the two week placement. As mentioned previously, progress was linked directly to the input of the cooperating teacher. One student teacher reported;

“We sat down for about ten minutes at the end of the week and I got really good feedback. It showed how I had progressed during the week and then the next week I could see again what I had worked on so it was really good”.

Due to the likelihood of increased interactions between student teachers and their cooperating teachers, as a result of the COPET programme, also provided a new insight into the subject of PE. Student teachers described how their cooperating teachers changed their approach to lessons and their relationships with students with one student teacher commenting; *“The cooperating teacher encouraged me to calm down and enjoy the lessons. She has a great relationship with her students. She also taught me to expand my views of PE”*. Several student teachers reported how they had developed new teaching skills resulting from cooperating teachers input such as altering lesson content and the style of teaching to suit student needs. These findings are similar to a study conducted by Richardson-Koehler (1988) which revealed that 80% of student teachers believed their teaching knowledge and practices were attributable to their cooperating teachers.

5.5 Theme 4: Student teachers’ suggestions for the future of the COPET programme

It is evident from this research that almost all of the student teachers value the COPET programme and see its benefits. They did however, have some clear ideas as to how the programme could be improved in the future.

Sub theme 1: Student teachers taking on more responsibility for their learning

On a number of occasions during the research, student teachers alluded to the busy nature of a PE teachers’ job and the extra workload that the COPET programme may have brought with it. *“My cooperating teacher was fairly busy, he was the only PE teacher in the school so had to drive the school bus, bring teams to matches, so COPET*

was a lot of extra work for him". This had become an issue for some cooperating teachers during teaching practice and the student teachers made several comments regarding alleviating time pressures on the cooperating teacher. One student teacher suggested a less structured role for cooperating teachers be adopted;

"I think the cooperating teacher should be given the option to float in and out of the class rather than having to sit in on every lesson. This gives you a better sense of responsibility and puts less pressure on the cooperating teacher".

This comment highlights some misinterpretation of structure of the COPET programme on the part of the student teacher or the cooperating teacher, as cooperating teachers were not required to observe every lesson.

Interestingly, some student teachers suggested that elements of the COPET programme be altered to allow them to take more responsibility for their learning. The following comment illustrates this willingness;

"If the cooperating teacher isn't in the room all of the time then the onus is on the student teacher to go to them and tell them about things that happen during the lesson and seek advice about dealing with issues. If we want to develop as teachers we have to want help".

As previously mentioned in chapter two, Smith (1993) highlighted that strong, competent, assertive and motivated student teachers generated effective practices, while ineffective or lazy student teachers were a hindrance and created extra work for the cooperating teacher.

Sub theme 2: Altering structure of feedback methods

Student teachers made a number of suggestions with regard to changes that could be made in how feedback is provided. These included the provision of a checklist for the cooperating teacher to discuss at the end of each lesson as well as the option of the cooperating teacher providing oral feedback with the student teacher writing it down.

“I think the feedback sheets would be reduced and replaced by oral feedback at the end of each lesson. Even if the cooperating teacher had a checklist of specific areas to give us feedback on. I know that my cooperating teacher ticked some boxes on the feedback sheet that weren’t even relevant but she just felt that she had to write something”.

This correlates with an aforementioned finding where some student teachers felt they should take more responsibility for their own learning.

Sub theme 3: Benefits of working with more than one cooperating teacher

Due to constraints within schools, such as timetabling, some student teachers worked with other PE teachers apart from their COPET trained cooperating teacher. This was at the schools discretion and beyond the control of the COPET programme. In schools where this occurred, feedback tended to be positive with one student teacher stating;

“In my situation there were always two PE classes on at the same time so I was usually being given feedback from two different teachers which I thought was really helpful. They would notice different things and give different opinions”.

The involvement of more than one cooperating teacher may also alleviate some of the time constraints frequently mentioned by the student teachers although both teachers would have to receive similar COPET training. Hastings (2004) reported that much of the negative emotion cooperating teachers associate with teaching practice is related to the limited time for them to devote to their student teacher. Findings indicated the student teachers were aware of these time pressures with one stating; *“My cooperating teacher only filled in the two evaluation sheets. Even though I was teaching her classes she still had a lot of other things going on”*.

Sub theme 4: Implementation of the COPET programme

Student teacher reports were varied as to the overall level of implementation of the COPET programme even when cooperating teachers had received training and agreed to participate in the programme. Some student teachers encountered cooperating teachers who were enthusiastic about the programme and willingly undertook their role; *“It was really helpful them [cooperating teacher] giving you feedback because you wouldn’t be able to improve so much if you were there by yourself”*, while others reported little interaction with their cooperating teachers; *“The teacher I had wasn’t helpful at all. He was good for showing me around the school and the staff room but once I started teaching, I never saw him. He just went off and did his own thing”*.

Other student teachers recognised the difficult situations faced by their unsupported peers and observed that if the COPET programme is to be successful into the future then all student teachers should receive similar assistance from their cooperating

teachers. *“Talking to others, they got really bad teachers who just used the student as a break for themselves, they weren’t really willing to help, the student was just left on their own”*.

5.6 Conclusion

Many of the findings detailed in this chapter agree very clearly with findings in the literature, most notably the impact that a cooperating teacher can have on the learning and progress made by a student teacher during teaching practice. The idea of student teachers feeling more prepared for teaching practice when the roles and responsibilities of all members of the triad are clearly defined has also been detailed in the literature. Little has been reported in the literature however, of the impact of cooperating teachers’ failure to fulfill their role on student teachers’ progress, an issue that was raised on numerous occasions during this research. It must be acknowledged however that much of the previous research has been focused on established programmes in which cooperating teachers are experienced in their role. As this research has constructed a new role for the cooperating teachers involved, with additional duties and responsibilities in place, it may be beneficial to revisit the literature and make a comparison when cooperating teachers have had an opportunity to apply themselves and realise the potential of their role fully.

This chapter has examined the student teachers’ descriptions of their experiences of teaching practice and their views of the impact that the COPET programme has had on their learning experiences. Over the following two chapters, the experiences of the other

members of the teaching practice triad will be examined, namely cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

Note: Findings of this chapter of the research have been published in EPER. (Dunning, C., Meegan, S., Woods, C. and Belton, S.J. (2011) 'The impact of the COPET programme on student PE teachers' teaching practice experiences', European Physical Education Review, 17(2), 153-165, see Appendix E).

Chapter 6

The Impact of the COPET Programme on Cooperating Teachers' Teaching Practice Experience

6.1 Introduction

The information presented in this chapter represents the views of the cooperating teachers in relation to the COPET programme. The purpose of this element of the research was firstly to investigate the extent to which the COPET programme met the needs of cooperating teachers in schools. Secondly, to investigate the impact of the COPET programme on the teaching practice process, and thirdly to identify ways in which the COPET programme can be improved to maximise the learning opportunities available to student teachers when on teaching practice placement.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, three focus group interviews were carried out with eleven cooperating teachers. Eight of the cooperating teachers had worked with one student teacher while three had worked with two student teachers. A set of focus group questions was developed to guide discussion but did not limit the researcher probing or asking follow-up questions. The following questions guided the focus group interviews;

- Did the cooperating teachers find the COPET programme useful on teaching practice?

- Did the COPET programme affect the role of the cooperating teacher?
- To what extent did teachers adhere to the guidelines provided in the COPET programme?
- How can the COPET programme be improved?

Results are presented under four key themes and relevant sub themes that emerged from the data. See figure 2.

1. Structure of the COPET programme.
2. The role of the cooperating teacher.
3. The impact of the COPET programme from the cooperating teachers' perspective.
4. Cooperating teachers' suggestions for the future of the COPET programme.

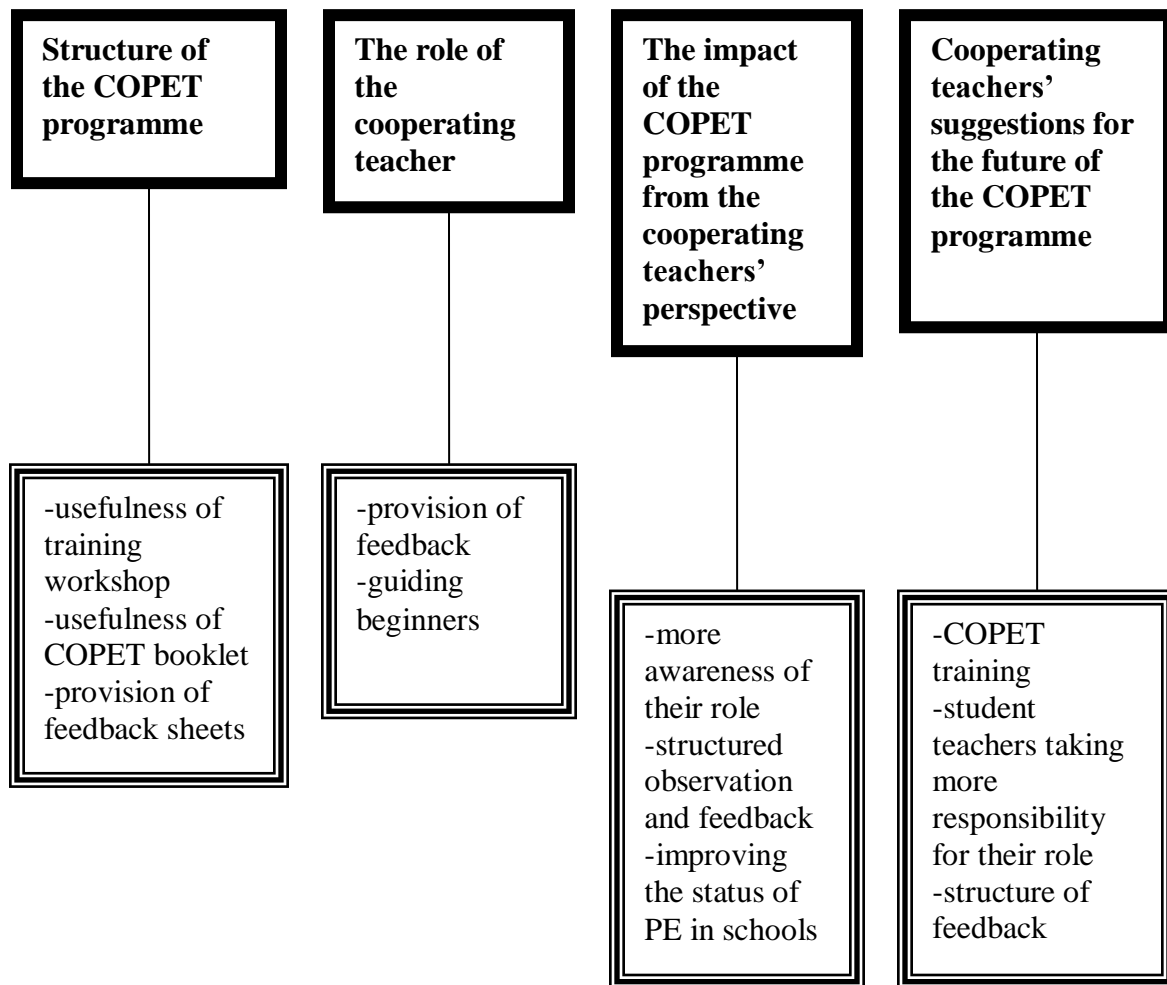


Figure 2. Themes and sub themes which from the cooperating teacher focus groups

6.2 Theme 1: Structure of the COPET programme

The key topics discussed by the cooperating teachers in relation to the structure of the COPET programme centred on the training workshop provided, the guidelines and observation sheets given within the COPET booklet, and practicalities for the implementation of the programme in a school setting.

Sub theme 1: Usefulness of training workshop

Teachers found the workshop and the associated information provided useful. One cooperating teacher commented; *“It was interesting to have guidelines to follow, to be clear on the things we were looking for with students and to be clear on the areas that we could help them with”*. Though the teachers had varying experience acting in the role of cooperating teacher, none had previously received training for this role. Teachers felt that it was helpful to know what the student teachers had covered prior to going out on teaching practice, feeling that this allowed them have realistic expectations of what the student teacher should know and be able to do at this stage; *“...it was a help to know what they had covered and what level what they were at”*. Dodds (1989) highlighted the fact that all people associated with teaching practice may not necessarily share the same teaching perspectives. It is unlikely that all of the cooperating teachers shared the same approach to teaching as their student teachers but the COPET training provided them with an opportunity to recognise and appreciate other teaching styles and so provide relevant feedback.

Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) stated that untrained and unprepared cooperating teachers provide little productive feedback and guidance to students. This notion is supported by Mc Cullick (2001) who stated that cooperating teachers should be aware of what students learn in their undergraduate curriculum such as classroom management skills, pedagogy and ability to teach a wide curriculum. Teachers identified the COPET training as something which helped them to help the student teacher, *“I think the training we received was sufficient in providing the knowledge that we needed to help the student...”*.

Sub theme 2: Usefulness of COPET booklet

Cooperating teachers felt that the guidelines for teaching practice provided within the COPET booklet were helpful and gave a clear focus and structure to their role as cooperating teachers. *“I did find aspects of the document very useful especially telling you what you had to do before hand and who should be doing what during teaching practice. I found that excellent, there’s no doubt about it”*. Rikard and Veal (1996) stated that without clear expectations, a cooperating teacher’s ability to enhance student teachers’ professional knowledge and skills may be minimised. Cooperating teachers did make mention however that reading the booklet was time consuming; *“...there was a time issue with reading the document”*.

Sub theme 3: Provision of feedback sheets

The issue of time also dominated teachers’ comments in relation to the observation and feedback sheets provided within the booklet. While most cooperating

teachers welcomed the structured approach to providing feedback to the students, they did indicate that the time required to fill in these sheets was sometimes excessive. One teacher commented; *“I had a very busy timetable so I was unable to do it [complete feedback sheets], also due to my PE hall being 500 yards away from the school building”*. A suggestion from cooperating teachers to get around the time issue was to make the feedback form more student driven; allow the cooperating teacher to give the feedback to the student verbally.

“I think changing the forms and making them more student teacher driven so they’re not so time consuming for the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher speaks and the student teacher fills out the form, stating what he did right and what he plans to do in the next class. This form could be attached at the end of his lesson plan, so it’s all there to reflect back on”.

The benefit of the feedback sheets provided in the COPET document from the teachers’ perspective was that they allowed for a definite avenue for providing feedback to the student. This was something which in the past some teachers felt they had struggled with or been hesitant to do. Rikard and Veal (1996) highlighted cooperating teachers’ fears that providing feedback can potentially threaten the delicate interpersonal relationship with the student teacher. It seems however that the cooperating teachers found the structure provided by the COPET programme helped them circumvent this potential problem.

“I think because the CT took more responsibility with the student, it helped in terms of feedback and tips like how to deal with unruly kids and things like that.

They got that feedback that they probably normally wouldn't have gotten if the teacher had just left which would have helped them a lot".

Teachers felt that the daily observation sheets were simple and well structured but that due to time constraints they couldn't be filled in every day. Some teachers indicated that they did not use the weekly evaluation sheets over the teaching practice period. *"I had some difficulty with the feedback documents. Some of the stuff you were asked to do, like so many appraisals during the week and at the end of the week it was just too much".* The teachers that had used the weekly evaluation sheets suggested that an additional space should be included on the form so that the teachers could comment on how well the student was involving themselves more broadly in school life. *"If there was a space on one of the evaluation documents for the teacher to comment on the student's involvement in extra-curricular activities, surely this might encourage them to get more involved, maybe on the weekly evaluation document".*

6.3 Theme 2: The role of the cooperating teacher

For the most part the cooperating teachers described their role as that of mentor. This word was not suggested by the researcher, nor was it one associated with the COPET programme. For example one participant noted: *"Everybody's context that they teach within is different, so any new member of a school needs to be mentored into that school, to see exactly how things are done there".* Cooperating teachers identified their key role as helping the student teacher with the transition from student to teacher, and

making them comfortable within the school environment. A number of other functions were also identified in the data in terms of the cooperating teachers' role.

Sub theme 1: Provision of feedback

Kahan *et al.* (2003) suggested that observing student performance and providing feedback afterwards is a key role of a cooperating teacher. This suggestion is very much supported by the cooperating teachers' comments, who felt this was an area where they have something to offer. One cooperating teacher suggested: *"I think its constructive criticism that helps them most"*. Cooperating teachers were careful that student teachers understood that the feedback they provided was as a means of assistance rather than assessment. *"I don't think she felt like she was being assessed or anything because the way we did it was very informal"*.

A number of the cooperating teachers were also clear that their role was to guide the student teachers rather than prescribing solutions.

"Really I think you can only guide the student because every teacher will have their own style. You can't tell them not to do certain things, if the student has a completely different style you may actually see them doing things that you never would have thought would have worked with your students. I think you need to organise them but also motivate them and helping them understand what works with your particular students. I just tried to guide and help her with the things that she was doing but not to dictate what she had to do".

It is important that the cooperating teachers recognised this aspect of providing feedback as Feiman-Nemser (2001) found an “*imposing*” style of feedback as inhibiting student teachers positive teaching experiences. If a student teacher is encouraged to directly replicate their cooperating teacher’s style of teaching, all that they can hope to become is a poor imitation of their cooperating teacher with few ideas and opinions of their own (Bullough and Gitlin, 1995).

Sub theme 2: Guiding beginners

As mentioned previously, following the COPET training, cooperating teachers had a clear idea of the level at which the student teachers’ were at, particularly as this was their first teaching practice experience. Chalies *et al.* (2008) described how cooperating teachers accompany beginning teachers on a journey during which they discover workplace realities. A number of the cooperating teachers described how they had to boost the moral of student teachers when lessons did not go as well as they had expected with one commenting; “*The student teacher after day one her confidence was shot, I as the co-operating teacher had to sit the student teacher down and build her back up*”. There were also some issues mentioned with regard to safety which also required cooperating teacher guidance; “*I had to step in because there were safety issues, but she did improve and we did demonstration classes*”. One cooperating teacher described very clearly a model which she used to best guide her student teacher;

“*What we try to do in the first week was observe and step in if had to, the second we let them at it but there were times we had to step again, but this will improve with experience and they had good understanding about what was expected*”.

The majority of cooperating teachers were prepared and willing to guide their student teachers as they experienced the realities of teaching for the first time and in some cases this helped to build their relationship with the student teacher and their appreciation of their new role.

The comment below highlights the passion demonstrated by one cooperating teacher for her role and it is reflective of the views expressed by many of the other cooperating teachers interviewed.

“...we also have another thing in this situation; a young person whose aspirations are to be a PE teacher. You’re bringing a young person from one side of the desk to the other for the first time in their lives, even if they have coaching experience, there’s a different thrust on it. I got an awful shock after the third day when my student said that he was going to give this up because he was having such a bad experience. I was shocked but I felt like I was his mammy there! So I sat down and told him what I would like to see at the end of the fortnight and asked him what he would like to see. So then when there was a problem we could both see it and agree a strategy. It worked because at the end of the fortnight he came to me and said ‘I enjoyed that’. I think the role is about a lot more than helping the student with organisation, it’s about their thoughts and feeling about the experience”.

Many of these findings are supported in a previous evaluation of a pre-service science teachers supervision programme in Irish schools (Kiely and McClelland, 2004): It

was found that from a student teachers perspective cooperating teachers played a key role in the training of student teachers by guiding, coaching, challenging, planning, providing feedback and reflecting with the student during their teaching practice placement.

6.4 Theme 3: The impact of the COPET programme from the cooperating teachers' perspective

All of the cooperating teachers commented that the COPET programme had a positive impact on the teaching practice process. While the majority of the cooperating teachers were happy to have formal expectations in place for the first time, their accounts of the impact of the programme varied. This is in line with Zanting *et al.* (1998) where the nature of mentoring was described as being “*idiosyncratic*”; even when a set of directions are in place to shape an experience, individual cooperating teachers will interpret and enact their own roles.

Sub theme 1: More awareness of their role

Cooperating teachers emphasized that having clearly defined roles for themselves, their student teachers and the university supervisor provided clarity and structure throughout the students' placement. While they felt that there was a time issue with reading the COPET document (i.e. it took too long), it was acknowledged that the more structured approach to teaching practice offered by the COPET programme made their job as cooperating teachers easier. In relation to the programme, one teacher commented;

“Yeah I thought that it was good, it was planned really well in advance, like you [DCU] had contacted us and come in, which I had never experienced before with

TP, and then the student I had as well also had the COPET stuff to give to me so there was very little that I had to do”.

Tjeerdsma (1998) found that cooperating teachers viewed the supervision experience as positive and one that caused them to increase reflection on and revitalise their own teaching. In a study of cooperating teachers by Hynes-Dusel (1999, p.189), cooperating teachers expressed an enjoyment of supervising student teachers because it provided them with an opportunity to “*give something back to the profession*”. They also found it fulfilling because it helped them to become better teachers even though it meant that they had more work to do. Similar findings were reported by the cooperating teachers in this research with one cooperating teacher reporting that he felt that when he had a student teacher on placement with him he had a responsibility to make sure that he was doing things “*the right way*”.

Sub theme 2: Structured observation and feedback

As mentioned previously, cooperating teachers felt they had a lot to offer the student teachers, particularly in terms of observing their lessons and providing feedback. Cooperating teachers found the COPET programme facilitated the provision of structured formal feedback as there were designated daily and weekly feedback sheets for completion subsumed within the programme. Furthermore, the programme recommended that cooperating teachers regularly observe the student teacher lessons and provide formal (feedback sheets) and informal (discursive) feedback after their lessons. Comments made by cooperating teachers highlighted that due to the COPET programme,

they were more inclined to stay in the sports hall and observe the student teachers where previously they tended not to do so or did so intermittingly. One teacher commented;

“Definitely before I would have just left the student but this made me stay with them for the majority of classes, like I would have been in and out. I would wait to see how they started the lesson, how they progressed it and then how they finished it. It gave me probably more responsibility for the student teacher that I wouldn’t have had in the past”.

This comment also highlights once again the finding that teachers felt the COPET programme encouraged them to undertake a more responsible role as cooperating teacher. They felt that students put more effort into the planning of their lessons as they knew that the cooperating teacher would have a look through it to provide them with feedback afterwards. One teacher noted; *“Students put a lot of effort into planning because they knew we were there and they knew what we were looking for”*. The cooperating teachers felt that knowing what physical education curriculum and pedagogical content students had covered to date allowed them to offer feedback in line with the students’ curriculum knowledge and teaching capabilities.

Behets and Vergauwen (2006) identified a dual role of a cooperating teacher assessing and assisting a student teacher as one which could provoke an area of tension between them. Teachers felt it important that student teachers knew that they had nothing to do with grading, that the cooperating teachers’ role was to help and provide feedback rather than to assess. The impact of this attitude was evident in the cooperating teachers’ comments.

“I think because they knew that we had nothing to do with their grades, that was a good thing as well. They knew that it didn’t matter, not that it didn’t matter what you said to them but that it wouldn’t affect their grades in the long term. They were willing to take on board your comments”.

Sub theme 3: Improving the status of PE in schools

An interesting and unexpected finding that emerged from the cooperating teachers’ feedback was how the COPET programme impacted on the status of physical education in their schools. Teachers felt that the programme positively impacted on the subject as other teachers in the school were interested in the programme and recognised the value of having a structured programme specifically for physical education teaching practice. One cooperating teacher commented: *“I did find other teachers in the staffroom interested in the programme and I really think that it [the COPET programme] is raising the status of PE because no other subject areas have anything else like this when student teachers come in”*. Mac Phail and Halbert (2005) highlighted that PE in many Irish post primary schools is not being afforded appropriate time or significance due to demands made by other subjects. It is therefore important to acknowledge the potential of the COPET programme to help to elevate the standing of PE in Irish schools.

6.5 Theme 4: Cooperating teachers' suggestions for the future of the COPET programme

While cooperating teachers expressed overall satisfaction with the COPET programme, they did make a number of suggestions to make the programme easier to implement and have more of an impact from their perspective.

Sub theme 1: COPET training

Cooperating teachers' reaction to the COPET training workshop was very positive with most of their comments relating to how much better prepared they were for their role as a result. *"I thought that it [the training workshop]) was very good, it was planned really well in advance and I had never experienced training before with TP so it was good to know exactly what was expected of me"*.

They also expressed an opinion that cooperating teachers should have to attend the training workshop before they could take on a student teacher. A number of cooperating teachers recommended that training should continue to take place each year. *"I think the training we received was sufficient in providing the knowledge that we needed to help the student teacher and I think training every year would be good idea"*. This point is similar to Duffield's (2006) suggestion that training for cooperating teachers should not consist of a one-off event but rather it should be on-going in nature to keep the responsibility of guiding a student teacher active in the minds of cooperating teachers. It is unclear if cooperating teachers in their comments about annual training intended that they would attend training every year or if training would continue annually to allow new

cooperating teachers to get involved in the COPET programme. A suggestion made by one cooperating teacher proposed that refresher training should be provided every 2 – 5 years for teachers that may have previously attended training; *“It would be important to have some kind of training structure in place and you should have to attend it every two or five years or something to keep up to date with the different structures and teaching methods”*.

Sub theme 2: Student teachers taking more responsibility for their role

The finding of encouraging independent learning and responsibility among student teachers came up frequently from cooperating teachers’ feedback. Comments centering around this notion included suggesting that student teachers request feedback from cooperating teachers instead of cooperating teachers being responsible for giving it. Student teachers could then document this feedback themselves and they should also be reminded to take notes while observing cooperating teachers lessons. One cooperating teacher commented; *“I think it should be up to them [student teachers] to come to me to look for feedback”*. The notion of encouraging independent learning is supported by Smith (1993), who highlighted that student teachers must take responsibility for their experience.

The COPET programme recommended that, where possible, students should observe the cooperating teacher teaching physical education lessons. The cooperating teachers applauded this recommendation but suggested that it should be more of an expectation than a recommendation. *“I think students themselves should be pushing to*

observe lessons, you shouldn't have to tell them to". They also proposed that in order to optimise this learning experience, the student teachers should make notes while observing such classes for subsequent reference and discussion. One cooperating teacher commented; "I told my guy to take notes down while watching straight away otherwise he would forget them later. It needs to be highlighted to them that they must take notes".

Though it was not a focus of the research to investigate the role of the student teacher on teaching practice, cooperating teachers frequently commented on the importance of whole school involvement when a student teacher was on teaching practice, and identified this as key to a student truly getting practical experience as a PE teacher. They felt that student teachers should try to involve themselves professionally in the school in any way that they could, and that they should be continually pushing to get involved in school life. Chambers and Armour (2011) highlighted the importance of student teachers becoming members of the learning community. One teacher acknowledged that the student teachers were probably quite busy but strongly felt that engaging with the after-school programme was a very important part of their development as student teachers;

"Maybe they [student teachers] were so busy with preparations but we felt that to get a good concept of school life they needed to even come and see the after school programme. It wasn't that we wanted them to work, just come and see".

Sub theme 3: Structure of feedback

Cooperating teachers suggested that lesson feedback should be given to student teachers immediately after the lesson rather than at a later stage. One teacher commented; *“I think the forms need to be filled in straight away and the feedback given before the momentum of the lesson is lost”*. The cooperating teachers felt that if the episode was fresh in the students’ memory, the feedback would be easier for them to understand and retain. Cooperating teachers also commented that student teachers should approach the cooperating teachers seeking feedback. The importance of this is emphasised in this teachers’ comment *“One student approached me for help and feedback, the other didn’t. I feel it was up to them to come to me”*. This links in with the previous point of student teachers become more active in and responsible for their own learning.

In a number of cases the cooperating teachers worked in a school where there were two or more PE teachers. In these instances the student teacher usually taught a number of classes from within each PE teachers’ timetable. The majority of cooperating teachers in such a situation found that the other (non COPET trained) teachers were unwilling to engage with the feedback sheets. One teacher in this situation explained that *“I found myself going to other PE teachers and getting feedback on the student teacher and filling in the form for the student teacher. Other PE teachers were unwilling to do it; they saw it as too much extra work”*. This highlights a need for the guidelines of the COPET programme to clarify the situation if more than one cooperating teacher is working with a student teacher, particularly with regard to receiving COPET training.

6.6 Conclusion

One of the key issues addressed by the cooperating teachers in this research was their appreciation of the training they received as part of the COPET programme and the sense of readiness this gave them for their new role. The value of training for cooperating teachers is widely discussed in the literature with an emphasis being placed on continuous training rather than a one-off event, as was also discussed by the cooperating teachers in this research. The time pressures faced by cooperating teachers was mentioned on numerous occasions in this research, not only by the cooperating teachers but also previously by the student teachers. This is an issue which is not widely discussed in the literature although this may be due to the fact that in many situations around the world, when teachers become cooperating teachers their teaching timetable is reduced hence eliminating some time pressures.

At this point, both the cooperating teachers and student teachers views relating to the impact of the COPET programme have been explored. In order to build a complete picture of how the COPET programme has impacted on the teaching practice experience, the opinions of the university supervisors, the third members of the teaching practice triad, will be established in the next chapter.

Note: Findings of this chapter of the research have been published in EPER. (Belton S, Woods C, Dunning C, and Meegan S (2010) 'The evaluation of a cooperating physical education teachers programme (COPET)', European Physical Education Review, 16(2), 141-154, see Appendix E).

Chapter 7

The Impact of the COPET Programme on University Supervisors' Teaching Practice Experience

7.1 Introduction

While the COPET programme relates more specifically to the roles and experiences of student teachers and cooperating teachers, the impact of the programme on the position of university supervisors must also be carefully considered. In the literature, there has been significantly less research published in relation to university supervisors when compared to the number of studies concerning student teachers and cooperating teachers. However, the input of the university supervisor to the teaching practice experience and the impact of programmes such as COPET on their experiences' must not be underestimated. Slick (1998) acknowledged that university supervisors have the complex and multifaceted role of creating bridges between the university and the school as well as supporting the student teacher and the cooperating teacher.

This chapter examines the impact of the COPET programme on the experiences of university supervisors. One focus group interview took place with six university supervisors to gather information in relation to their teaching practice encounters. Each supervisor was either a member of the university staff or an experienced PE teacher contracted to supervise student teachers during teaching practice. Each of the supervisors

had supervised five student teachers. The following five questions guided the focus group interviews;

- How would you define your role as a university supervisor?
- How would you define the role of the cooperating teacher during TP?
- What contribution do you feel the COPET programme made to the TP process?
- How would you describe the relationship between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor, and how did COPET impact this?
- What recommendations for future change would you make regarding the use of the COPET programme on TP?

The supervisors' discussion provided much dialogue and debate about teaching practice and contributed to rich data collection. Results are presented under four themes that emerged from the data. See figure 3.

1. Structure of the COPET programme.
2. The role of the cooperating teacher.
3. The impact of the COPET programme from the university supervisors' perspective.
4. University supervisors' suggestions for the future of the COPET programme.

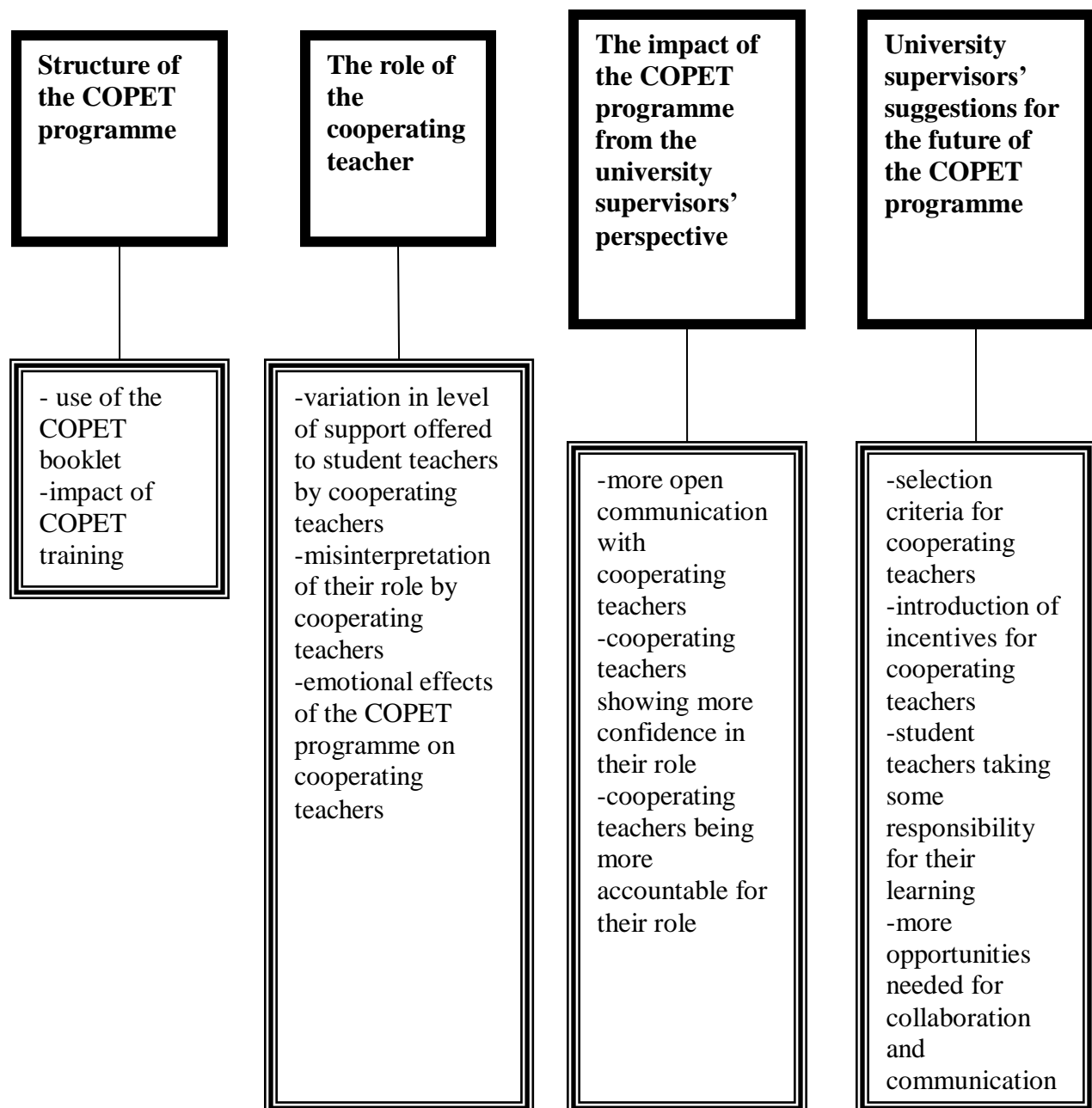


Figure 3. Themes and sub themes which from the university supervisor focus group

7.2 Theme 1: Structure of the COPET programme

Prior to the commencement of teaching practice, the university supervisors had attended a COPET induction meeting during which they received a copy of the COPET booklet. They were also provided with an explanation of how the COPET programme would work and what their role within the programme would be. During the focus group interview much of the discussion centred around how the structure of the COPET programme had affected cooperating teachers rather than the supervisors themselves.

Sub theme 1: Use of the COPET booklet

A number of the university supervisors reported poor use of the COPET booklet by some cooperating teachers. While they acknowledged that cooperating teachers had the booklet, some supervisors highlighted that the programme guidelines as outlined in the booklet were not being implemented and this led to feelings of frustration on the side of the supervisors. The following comment illustrates this;

“There was no contact, the student was left on their own even though the COPET booklet states that you must be there, you must supervise, you must fill in all the things in the booklet. It is extremely good, the COPET booklet, if that was followed you would have no problem but I have to say I was so disappointed this year with the cooperating teachers”.

This comment highlights the supervisor’s misinterpretation of elements of the COPET programme. As involvement in the programme by cooperating teachers was voluntary, the university could not insist on any element of the programme being compulsory. Instead, it was suggested that cooperating teachers would use the feedback sheets

contained in the booklet when observing some lessons, not that they must be present during all lessons as this comment implies. This also highlights that this university supervisor and possibly others were overestimating the requirements of cooperating teachers.

While a number of the university supervisors were somewhat critical of cooperating teachers' use of the COPET booklet, it must be noted that throughout the interview, none of the university supervisors mentioned using the booklet themselves. Furthermore, one of the supervisors made reference to the separate 'university supervisors' booklet which is provided by the University, which he used to guide his role; *"I used the teaching supervisors' handbook, it sets out very specifically what the job of the supervisor is"*. Undoubtedly, there is additional information required by university supervisors for assessment purposes which goes beyond the guidelines set out in the COPET booklet, but it would seem more beneficial for all involved in the teaching practice process if both university supervisors and cooperating teachers referred to the same guidelines in their work with student teachers.

Sub theme 2: Impact of COPET training on the role of the cooperating teacher

The university supervisors were very positive regarding the introduction of a training workshop for cooperating teachers. Research has reported significant positive behaviour changes of cooperating teachers in performing supervisory practices as a result of training (Tannehill and Zakrajsek, 1990; O'Cansey, 1988). One university supervisor highlighted the positive mindset of cooperating teachers who have attended a training

programme in the following comment; *“I suppose if you attend the training course you’re kind of enthusiastic and interested in your own field. You’re a totally different teacher welcoming in a student teacher than a school who just says yes we’ll have them”*.

While all of the cooperating teachers had received information regarding student teachers’ previous knowledge and practical experience during the training workshop, a number of the university supervisors believed that this had not been acknowledged in the cooperating teachers feedback to both themselves and to student teachers. One university supervisor commented; *“The lack of being very critical sometimes comes down to cooperating teachers thinking well they haven’t had much time in schools before this placement. But they should know what we expect”*. Another supervisor commented; *“There’s definitely a disparity between what some cooperating teachers’ feel is good physical education practice and what we as supervisors would have discussed as best practice”*. Chambers and Armour (2011) also reported student teachers receiving conflicting messages from cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

Research by Hung *et al.* (1998) determined that cooperating teachers will often moderate requirements for student teachers based on the school context as opposed to the requirements from the university supervisor which may seem more idealistic. This again raises the issue of collaboration between the university and schools. A conflict appears to exist between university and school expectations, with student teachers being socialised into school procedures or following the *“unofficial curriculum”* as opposed to following guidelines set out by the university or the *“official curriculum”* (Chambers and Armour, 2011). Cutner-Smith (1996) in outlining one of the key criteria necessary to ensure

effective experiences for student teachers, highlighted that teaching practice should take place in schools in which the university's teacher education programme messages are reinforced. Research has revealed some points of tension between cooperating teachers conditions of work, their understanding and experience of their role and the expectations and support provided by the university (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

7.3 Theme 2: The role of the cooperating teacher

Homogeneity across many dimensions of cooperating teacher practices is assumed by universities (Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). While the COPET programme clearly states the role of the cooperating teacher, it must be accepted that variation will continue to exist in how the role is interpreted. What must be considered is the issue that this diversity essentially causes in the learning opportunities for student teachers.

Sub theme 1: Variation in level of support offered to student teachers by cooperating teachers

All of the university supervisors acknowledged varying levels of interaction and support for the student teachers from the various cooperating teachers with whom they worked. It must be remembered at this point that one of the limitations of the research in relation to the university supervisors is that they were dealing with both COPET trained and untrained cooperating teachers so this variance is to be expected. While almost all had had some experience of indifferent and unenthusiastic cooperating teachers, one of the supervisors in particular was very negative of his experience of the role played by the cooperating teacher. The following comment portrays his dissatisfaction; "*My biggest*

disappointment on teaching practice while supervising this year, was the role of the cooperating teacher. I found it to be abysmal". A number of the supervisors expressed concern about the lack of support offered by some cooperating teachers. Chambers and Armour (2011) also reported cooperating teachers being unwilling to offer support but highlighted that this may be due to the fact that they do not have the skills to do so, particularly in relation to pedagogical content knowledge.

One supervisor linked the cooperating teachers impact directly to students' progress; *"Depending on who the students were working with really influenced their own performance quite a lot, it really did"*. Research confirms this suggestion that due to having daily contact with student teachers, cooperating teacher plays a fundamental role in their learning experience (Tannehill, 1990; Tjeerdsma, 1998).

Sub theme 2: Misinterpretation of their role by cooperating teachers

One of the university supervisors made an observation that some cooperating teachers are misinterpreting their role and the role of the student teacher. She described a situation where it appeared that the student teacher had only been accepted in the school as a source of assistance and knowledge for the cooperating teacher. It was observed that; *"There was no reciprocal transfer of knowledge and it never even dawned on the cooperating teacher that it was meant to be a reciprocal relationship at the very least"*. Tannehill (1990) found that the number one reason for veteran cooperating teachers to accept student teachers was having the opportunity to learn new ideas for the classroom. The university supervisors have highlighted the point that some cooperating teachers may

be accepting student teachers for their own benefits with little regard to the expectations associated with their role. In a study of cooperating teachers, Tjeerdsma (1998) noted that only 25% of cooperating teachers were concerned with student learning. In a later study Larson (2005) found cooperating teachers showed a lack of interest in interacting with student teachers.

Sub theme 3: Emotional effects of the COPET programme on cooperating teachers

Hastings (2004) described how cooperating teachers experience a wide range of emotions directly related to their role. These range from feelings of guilt, responsibility, disappointment, relief, frustration, sympathy, anxiety and satisfaction. As can be expected with the implementation of any new programme such as COPET, a number of the university supervisors noted that some cooperating teachers appeared to feel uncomfortable and unnerved in their role. This may have led to some cooperating teachers altering the truth to either protect themselves or their student teacher as one supervisor alluded to in the following comment;

“The interesting thing is when you speak to the cooperating teacher first and they say ‘oh she’s great’ or whatever and then you sit down with the student they say well how could they know that when they were never in any of my lessons. I mean it just makes the whole thing ridiculous”.

A number of the supervisors also reported cooperating teachers apparently displaying feelings of guilt and frustration regarding their student teacher. *“If the student comes out with a low mark they feel a little bit responsible perhaps for the fact that they were supposed to be mentoring them”.* Similar findings were reported by Hastings (2004)

whereby the cooperating teacher blames themselves for a lack of progress made by their student teacher. Some cooperating teachers were also reported as being less critical of the student teacher because of these feelings of responsibility. One supervisor commented;

“They’ve gone through that turbulent experience with them they feel they’re on the students side so while they’re very supportive I think the students were a little bit scuppered by the fact that they weren’t as critical as they could have been because they were trying to be positive”.

Research has found that cooperating teachers placed high priority on being positive in their interactions with student teachers, in order to build their confidence (Borko and Mayfield, 1995). Mc Cullick (2001) found that even cooperating teachers who believed in providing specific feedback seemed reluctant to choose supervisory strategies that might threaten the delicate interpersonal relationship with the student teacher. However if feedback is not provided in an honest manner, this may lead to a student teacher developing ineffective teaching habits (Mc Cullick, 2001).

7.4 Theme 3: The impact of the COPET programme from the university supervisors’ perspective

Schools can often be quite territorial places and the experience of student teaching means entering a pre-established territory and negotiating for power within that territory (Britzman, 1991). This situation is even more complex for the university supervisor entering into this scene infrequently and possibly posing a threat to both the cooperating

teacher and the student teacher. The cooperating teacher may feel that their own teaching methods are being scrutinised. As a result of the development of the COPET programme all of the supervisors described some positive progress in their experiences in schools.

Sub theme 1: More open communication with cooperating teachers

A number of the university supervisors described how the COPET programme had directly opened communication channels particularly with the cooperating teacher. One supervisor commented;

“For me the biggest impact of the COPET programme on teaching practice is the tool it gives me as the supervisor to talk to the cooperating teacher, the tool it gives me to sit down and say well, how did you find the document, did you manage to give them any feedback. Before I had no way of doing that because I felt I was putting them in an awkward position or putting myself in an awkward position because there wasn’t a defined role. That’s something that we didn’t have before and certainly from my perspective it’s empowering, it does give the supervisor a bit more power”.

A number of positive interactions with cooperating teachers were reported as a result of the cooperating teachers’ new role. One university supervisor described how cooperating teachers were very happy to be provided with an opportunity to discuss their experiences with others in the profession. She said;

“The cooperating teachers loved giving me feedback and both of them actually said to me afterwards that they enjoyed the conversations we had, just sitting

there talking to someone about PE and about good practice. They took some ideas from it and they learned from it”.

Another supervisor made the following comment when discussing their interactions with the cooperating teacher; *“It was very much that the cooperating teacher was giving feedback and they felt very positively about that and it improved their view of their responsibility and they saw that it was a partnership between the three”.*

This is a very positive situation because in their research on teaching practice supervision Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that one factor that contributed to cooperating teachers’ and university supervisors’ limited impact is when beliefs about learning to teach are not shared and discussed. Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) also pointed out that supervising student teachers as a collaboration is the most critical component in ensuring a quality teaching practice.

Sub theme 2: Cooperating teachers showing more confidence in their role

Previously there had been little collaboration or even opportunity for cooperating teachers and university supervisors to enter into discussion regarding the progress of the student teacher. This lack of communication may have led to cooperating teachers placing little value and having little confidence in their role. The opportunities that the COPET programme provided for cooperating teachers to have a discussion, not only about the student teacher but about their ideas and theories with another member of the PE community was a valuable one. The increased communication and improved relationship between some cooperating teachers and university supervisors appeared to improve the confidence of the cooperating teacher as one supervisor commented; *“I think*

it's a very interesting point that a teacher, a fully fledged teacher, thinking that they wouldn't have something to contribute, being almost afraid to contribute. It's something I hadn't considered".

A number of supervisors also highlighted the benefits of the student teacher relationship for the cooperating teacher and the fact that a student teacher observing lessons also provides some reinforcement for the cooperating teacher particularly if they are the only PE teacher in a school; *"A student observing is also very helpful for the cooperating teacher because I'm sure it's a very lonely field for someone if they are the only PE teacher in the whole school"*. Hastings (2004) described one of the unexpected positives that cooperating teachers have reported in their work with student teachers; the sense of satisfaction and pride in their role.

Sub theme 3: Cooperating teachers being more accountable for their role

Mitchell *et al.* (2007) highlighted that disparities often exist between what cooperating teachers perceive their role to be and what the university would like their role to be. Almost all of the university supervisors reported that the COPET programme had made the cooperating teacher more aware of the central role that they can have in assisting student teachers. One supervisor commented;

"The programme has brought a little bit more accountability for being cooperative with the student and having a little bit of responsibility for the student. It brings a little bit of pride in role of the cooperating teacher, it's more structured".

As mentioned previously, a number of the university supervisors also made reference to the training for cooperating teachers and the positive impact that this had on their attitude to their role.

7.5 Theme 4: University supervisors' suggestions for the future of the COPET programme

Overall the university supervisors were positive regarding their experiences of the COPET programme. Their main recommendations for improving the programme relate to it being implemented more uniformly across cooperating teachers.

Sub theme 1: Selection criteria for cooperating teachers

Before any student teacher is assigned to a school for teaching practice there are a number of criteria set out by the University in accordance with the guidelines of the Teaching Council of Ireland which must be fulfilled (see Appendix D). One of the key criteria is that the school must have in employment a fully qualified PE teacher who is willing to engage with the student teacher while they are on teaching practice. It is also advocated that the school's PE programme encompasses the range of activities as required within the PE curriculum.

While the COPET programme goes beyond the general expectations of cooperating teachers as outlined by the university, all of the cooperating teachers involved in the research had agreed to implement the programme. As has been discussed previously, the level of implementation of the COPET programme varied from school to

school. Some cooperating teachers appeared to be reluctant and unwilling to engage fully with the programme. While it must be accepted that there will always be a variation in how cooperating teachers implement any programme depending on their teaching situation, it must also be recognised that there is little point in trying to force cooperating teachers to engage if they are disinterested and unenthusiastic. A number of university supervisors suggested being more selective in the future when assigning schools and cooperating teachers. One supervisor commented;

“I think it’s really positive and I suppose because of the diversity of the experiences we’ve had I think the thing is to look for the schools that implemented the programme positively and as far as possible send students to those schools”.

This corresponds to research by Mitchell *et al.* (2007) which advocated that if the cooperating teacher is central to a successful teaching experience, then universities must have criteria by which cooperating teachers are trained and selected, extending over and above having a recognised teaching qualification and some teaching experience.

Sub theme 2: Introduction of incentives for cooperating teachers

The COPET programme cannot continue into the future without the assistance of cooperating teachers. A number of the university supervisors discussed the need for incentives to be put in place to encourage all cooperating teachers to view the programme as a positive project to be involved in.

“I think you have to make it worthwhile for the PE teacher so that they think well maybe I’m going to learn something here. You need to hook them for that and

make them see how you can make their lives easier by being involved in this, maybe by a special opportunity that other teachers aren't necessarily getting".

These suggestions are similar to those made by cooperating teachers in a study by Hung *et al.* (1998) which proposed the sharing of experiences and the organisation of teacher development programmes as incentives for mentoring student teachers. One of the university supervisors was particular adamant that cooperating teachers should attend training prior to the beginning of teaching practice and suggested offering particular incentives in the future to encourage attendance; *"For cooperating teachers who attend the training, maybe we could allow them to have access to the DCU library and we could upload our resources there for their use"*. In a study of cooperating teachers, Hastings (2004) reported the belief that the collaborative opportunities that emerge during teaching practice, both with the student teacher and the university were invaluable to cooperating teachers. In the same study one very experienced cooperating teacher advocated the role of the cooperating teacher as being the most effective form of professional development.

In a number of countries including the UK, America and Australia, cooperating teachers often receive monetary incentives, although these rewards tend to also require cooperating teachers to be involved in the assessment process. Due to large scale cuts in education budgets in Ireland in recent times, it would be very difficult to offer a monetary payment at present. One of the university supervisors suggested however, that in the future, cooperating teachers involved in the COPET programme could also take on the role of assessor.

“I think that by giving the cooperating teacher a bit more responsibility, and this is going to be a controversial point, we could then move to them being the number one assessor. Now there are many issues with it as well, but they wouldn’t necessarily be the only assessor but they would have to be involved in the moderation process to come up with the mark at the end”.

This supervisor has acknowledged that this may be a contentious area and research has tended to agree. Assessment is generally the most ambiguous area of a cooperating teachers work and as a result many universities do not involve the cooperating teacher in the assessment process. As recommended by Colvin and Markos (2007), however the universities assessment criteria were included in the COPET booklet. This ensured that while the cooperating teacher is not responsible for assigning grades, they can at least be familiar with the assessment criteria and bear these in mind when providing feedback. Jeong and Mc Cullick (2001) pointed out that supervising and evaluating student teachers as a collaboration between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher is one of the most critical components in ensuring a quality teaching practice.

Sub theme 3: Student teachers taking some responsibility for their learning

Although the university supervisors have indicated that every effort must be made to ensure a more uniform level of implementation of the COPET programme, some variance will inevitably exist. To deal with this issue, one supervisor suggested that student teachers should take on more responsibility for their own progress and development. She commented;

“It would be important that if they’re [student teachers] not getting the support from the cooperating teacher that they get it elsewhere. To be a reflective teacher, to be someone who is going to develop throughout their career they need to go and get help. So this is the same situation, if they’re not getting help from the person nearest to them in the school which is the cooperating teacher, then as a professional they should seek the help. They should be coming to us as the supervisors, now we may need to open those doors a bit more but I think that that is really, really important”.

This comment highlights the hesitance which student teachers may feel in seeking advice from their university supervisor. This again highlights the difficulties faced by university supervisors in their dual role of assisting and assessing. Borko and Mayfield (1995) reported that student teachers did not always have the discussions they wanted to have with their university supervisor because of their desire to maximise comfort and minimise risks.

Sub theme 4: More opportunities needed for collaboration and communication

While the university supervisors reported that during their visits to schools they developed better relationships with cooperating teachers, there still appears to be a need for more collaboration and sharing of ideas between teachers and the University as the following comment highlights;

“If we’re going on about great practice and having a good teaching philosophy and the students go out on teaching practice and the [cooperating] teacher has a different philosophy and they feel that the lecturers in the university do all the

theory but let's get real now. They're [the student teachers] told you're in a real situation now, and logistics and what won't work for our kids and all this kind of talk it comes washed out".

When such disparities exist between cooperating teachers and university supervisors this can be very unsettling and confusing for the student teacher. Pitfield and Morrison (2009) recommended that a collaborative partnership be developed which presupposes no hierarchy in the different types of professional knowledge contributed by both university supervisors and cooperating teachers. Such collaboration could be considered as it would promote joint and equal responsibility for student teachers, although it has time, cost and resource implications for both partners.

It is interesting to note that the university supervisors did not acknowledge any areas for development for their own role in the COPET programme.

7.6 Conclusion

A key finding of this research and one that has previously been reported in the literature is the issue of cooperating teachers modifying their expectations of student teachers depending on the school situation. This not only creates confusion for student teachers but it also creates a gap between what is studied in university and what is practiced in schools. The literature suggests that careful selection and training of cooperating teachers may help to resolve this problem. Similar suggestions have also been made in this research in particular with regard to the selection of cooperating teachers. Another finding of this research in-line with previous findings is the positive

effects that the development of links between the school and the university can have for all three members of the teaching practice triad. One aspect in particular which was reported in this research that has not been widely reported in the literature is the renewed sense of professionalism and self-confidence that being involved in a programme such as COPET may bring to cooperating teachers. This research highlighted cooperating teachers' positive feelings towards their new status as key figures within the teaching practice triad. University supervisors reported cooperating teachers showing an improved confidence in their role due to their increased interactions with members of the PE community.

As the opinions of all three members of the teaching practice triad on how the COPET programme has impacted on their teaching practice experiences have now been discussed, the final chapter will further discuss these viewpoints and will provide conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Note: Findings of this chapter of the research are currently being written for publication.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Directions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of the overall research are discussed. The aim of the research was to develop a cooperating physical education teachers' programme and to investigate the impact of this programme on the teaching practice experiences of each of the members of the teaching practice triad. A programme was designed in consultation with cooperating teachers and was subsequently implemented during a two-week teaching practice placement. The impact of the programme was then assessed from the perspectives of the three members of the teaching practice triad; student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

This chapter presents conclusions from the analysed data and findings in relation to the COPET programme in general. Additionally a number of recommendations regarding the future development and expansion of the COPET programme will be discussed.

8.2 Conclusions

Having examined the feedback provided by all three members of the teaching practice triad, there is little doubt that the COPET programme has impacted on the

teaching practice experience. In order to draw ultimate conclusions the researcher will now focus on answering the following key questions as outlined at the outset of the research:

From the perspectives of each member of the teaching practice triad...

1. What impact can a cooperating physical education teachers' programme have on teaching practice experiences?
2. Can a cooperating physical education teachers' programme impact on the learning experiences of student teachers?

8.2.1 Impact of the COPET programme on teaching practice experiences

Student teachers' experiences

Student teachers indicated that they were more prepared and more confident starting out on teaching practice as a result of the COPET programme. During teaching practice they felt encouraged and supported due to the structured interactions with their cooperating teachers as set out by the COPET programme. These interactions with their cooperating teachers also resulted in student teachers being more reflective than they believed they would have been without the COPET programme in place.

Cooperating teachers reported spending more time engaging with their student teachers as a result of the COPET programme. They also felt that student teachers received more focused feedback due to the standardised COPET feedback documents.

University supervisors perhaps described the strongest impact of the COPET programme on student teachers. Having worked with both COPET and non-COPET trained cooperating teachers they witnessed varying levels of interactions with student teachers. They suggested that a student teachers performance during teaching practice could be directly linked to the increased level of interaction with their cooperating teacher as a result of the COPET programme.

Cooperating teachers' experiences

Most of the student teachers reported that cooperating teachers were prepared for their role during teaching practice as a result of the COPET training and the COPET booklet provided. A number of student teachers suggested however, that the COPET programme, in particular the feedback sheets, caused time issues for cooperating teachers.

Cooperating teachers discussed feeling confident in their role and clear about the structure of teaching practice due to the COPET booklet. They also described the COPET training workshop as being helpful in providing them with information about and expectations for student teachers. Cooperating teachers however reported that elements of the COPET programme, mainly observing lessons and providing feedback, were overly time consuming.

University supervisors believed that cooperating teachers took their role more seriously and were more accountable for their student teacher in general as a result of the

COPET programme. They also felt that cooperating teachers were more interested in student teachers' progress as a result of the programme. University supervisors described cooperating teachers as being more willing to have discussions with them about the student teacher and about PE in general.

University supervisors' experiences

University supervisors believed that their relationships with cooperating teachers improved as a result of the COPET programme. They appreciated the structure that the COPET programme brought, allowing them to seek feedback from cooperating teachers. They did report however, that due to the high level of interaction between cooperating teachers and student teachers and hence the development of closer relationships, some cooperating teachers were overly positive in their feedback. This led university supervisors to be somewhat wary of cooperating teachers' feedback.

It must be noted that neither student teachers nor cooperating teachers were asked to discuss during their focus groups how they believed the COPET programme had impacted on university supervisors' experiences.

8.2.2 Impact of the COPET programme on student teachers' learning experience during teaching practice

From the perspective of student teachers

Student teachers revealed that they were encouraged to try new things during teaching practice as a result of the structured feedback provided by cooperating teachers.

They also believed that their interactions with their cooperating teachers provided them with an insight into the realities of teaching PE. The structure of the COPET programme also allowed a number of student teachers to appreciate the busy nature of their cooperating teachers' role and realise the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning.

From the perspective of cooperating teachers

Cooperating teachers felt that the COPET programme provided student teachers with the support to develop their teaching styles and strategies. When lessons didn't go to plan, the structure of the COPET programme ensured that student teachers were encouraged and guided to reflect on their teaching. This led to student teachers gaining valuable experience in problem-solving and overcoming many of their initial difficulties.

From the perspective of university supervisors

As mentioned previously, a number of university supervisors linked student teachers' progress directly to the learning experiences provided through interactions with their cooperating teacher. They believed however, that some student teachers' progress was hindered by cooperating teachers being overly positive in their feedback.

8.2.3 Summary of conclusions

As a result of the development and implementation of the COPET programme, all three members of the teaching practice triad have reported feeling more confident and having a better understanding of their roles during teaching practice . Richer learning

experiences have been created for student teachers due to increased interactions with cooperating teachers, although levels of interaction varied. Links between schools and the university have also begun to develop, although there is further potential for collaboration in the future.

8.3 Recommendations

Borko and Mayfield (1995) described student teaching practice, but in particular the interactions and collaboration that take place during it, as being critical sites for the implementation of any educational reform. A number of the recommendations made for the COPET programme are in line with the Professional Development School (PDS) model. As part of the PDS model, there is an attempt to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise that exists within schools in educating student teachers with cooperating teachers being given a voice in the running of the teacher education programme. This leads to new kinds of relationships between teachers and university professors (Zeichner, 2005).

A model such as the PDS one may appear idealistic but in any reform effort, change occurs slowly, and it is unlikely to occur unless efforts are made to view current practices open-mindedly and to seriously consider potentials for change (Graham, 2006). Graham (2006) described the development of one PDS where a five year period was allocated to develop structural supports for both cooperating teachers and student teachers. A similar time frame should be considered to allow the COPET programme to be developed further and implemented in a more meaningful way by all participants.

This restructuring and reculturing must involve all participants forging a commitment to an enriched vision of teaching and learning to teach.

8.3.1 Recommendation 1: Careful selection of schools and cooperating teachers

Research has not only highlighted the importance of carefully selecting schools and cooperating teachers for teaching practice but also the benefits that this careful selection can have on the success of teaching practice (Jeong and Mc Cullick, 2001). More effort should be made in future to place students in schools where cooperating teachers are eager to engage with and implement the COPET programme. The University must take responsibility for developing a network of willing cooperating teachers.

8.3.2 Recommendation 2: Provision of incentives for cooperating teachers

Rikard and Veal (1996) reported that for some cooperating teachers, their involvement with student teachers was as a response to unacceptable practices that they experienced during their own student teaching. While this may initially be enough of an incentive for some cooperating teachers, further incentives need to be offered to retain current COPET trained cooperating teachers and to attract new cooperating teachers to become involved in the programme. Hung *et al.* (1998) described a number of incentives which could be offered for cooperating teachers including opportunities to share experiences and resources, and the organisation of teacher development programmes and further training. Although incentives will depend on available funding and structures, this is an area which must be considered by the University.

8.3.3 Recommendation 3: Creation of a position in the University for COPET liaison officer

This recommendation is very much in line with the PDS model. A university faculty member would not only teach student teachers in the university and supervise teaching practice, but they would also be a regular presence in the schools. This would help to develop collaborative links and also support and guide cooperating teachers during teaching practice. More collaboration with schools must be considered by the University in order to ensure that cooperating teachers feel that they have more ownership of and input into teaching practice and the COPET programme.

8.3.4 Recommendation 4: Seminars involving all three members of the teaching practice triad

Seminars could be arranged before, during and after teaching practice to afford all those involved in teaching practice opportunities for discussion and feedback. This would not only assist in the building of collaborative links but it could also be used to define standards and expectations for teaching practice and explore dilemmas faced by all three members of the triad. Cooperating teachers could gain an understanding of the methodologies being taught to their student teachers and hence offer practical suggestions to adapt these to the needs of their students in schools. These seminars would also allow student teachers to refine their personal views of teaching and begin to develop their professional identity by engaging with more experienced teachers, discussing their practice and beliefs about teaching and learning.

8.3.5 Recommendation 5: Development of a community of practice

The process which has occurred over the course of the COPET programme development and evaluation may be considered the first steps in the development of a “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991), where student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors have all been given a role and a voice. It seems logical that for this programme to survive (and subsequently thrive) much effort needs to be directed to the nurturing of this community so that it may serve the needs of all members of the triad. This may in turn become an incentive for cooperating teachers to initiate and sustain involvement in the COPET programme. A learning community would not only promote collaboration and the sharing of ideas and resources throughout the year, but it would be particularly beneficial for cooperating teachers during teaching practice. The community could be initially developed and maintained jointly by the COPET liaison officer and a representative of cooperating teachers, possibly from the PE Association of Ireland (PEAI).

8.3.6 Recommendation 6: More focused weekly meeting between cooperating teachers and student teachers

The COPET programme advocates that cooperating teachers meet with their student teachers once each week to evaluate learning and plan for the following week. In future, if guidelines for more structured meetings were included within the COPET programme, these meetings have the potential to be a lot more beneficial for both parties. They should no longer be exclusively focused on the progress of the student teacher but rather become an exchange of ideas that are useful to both parties. Topics for discussion

such as assessment or classroom management could be suggested within the framework of the COPET programme or could be agreed upon in advance by the cooperating teacher and student teacher. This would give cooperating teachers an opportunity to evaluate their pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies against newer, alternative methods suggested by the student teacher. The student teacher, in turn, could learn why specific strategies were successful in a particular context. Perhaps more importantly student teachers would be provided with an opportunity to hear an experienced teacher provide reasoned arguments for using particular instructional strategies and organisational procedures in their classrooms, and describe the evolution of their practices throughout their career. These sessions would help student teachers to become more reflective and deepen their understanding of the complexity of teaching.

8.4 Limitations of the Research

Time pressures caused quite a lot of difficulties throughout the research. Adequate time to interview cooperating teachers was particularly difficult as they almost all worked in different schools, many of which are a significant distance from the university. As the researcher only became involved in the research six months after the initial teaching practice placement, the timing of the data collection and hence data recall was also an issue. Organising focus groups with the university supervisors was also a problem as the time of data collection coincided with the end of the academic term. Most of the supervisors were busy marking exams. This led to focus groups having to be re-arranged in the next academic semester. As a result the university supervisors had been involved in both 2nd and 4th year teaching practice and so their experiences may have

differed slightly from both the student teachers and cooperating teachers involved in the research who had only been involved in 2nd year teaching practice . As a result of this timing issue, the university supervisors had interacted with a mix of both COPET trained and non-COPET trained cooperating teachers.

In terms of the breadth of the study the researcher believes that the sample number may be a limitation for each of the three groups. As there were only fourteen student teachers, eleven cooperating teachers and six university supervisors involved in evaluating the programme, this could be considered a limited number from which to draw conclusions and make recommendations for the future of the programme. In particular having a larger number of cooperating teachers involved in the research may have further added to the generalisability of the study. Also as this research has been confined to developing a programme for cooperating physical education teachers, this means that any conclusions drawn or recommendations made can only be applied to physical education teachers.

While considering these limitations, the author concludes that the research ultimately yielded results that have investigated the effect of the COPET programme and can inform the future development of the programme to ensure its greatest possible impact on all three members of the teaching practice triad.

8.5 Findings

While there have been few situations where unenthusiastic or unwilling cooperating teachers have been reported in the literature, this has been a key finding in this research. A recent study however, by Chambers and Armour (2011) which was also carried out in an Irish context also reported student teachers as often being unsupported by cooperating teachers. As previously reported the literature reveals that cooperating teachers' main motivation for participating in the role is most commonly because of their professional commitment (Smith, 1993; Hastings, 2004; Mitchell *et al.*, 2007). While it is not being suggested that cooperating teachers in Ireland are not committed to their profession, but rather this research suggests that the lack of tradition and experience surrounding the role of a cooperating teacher is currently affecting the execution of the role. Previous findings (Tannehill and Goc-Karp, 1992; Jeong and Mc Cullick, 2001) place a lot of the blame for poor teaching practice experiences with the university, citing a lack of training for cooperating teachers or poor selection of schools. Few studies have questioned the motivation of cooperating teachers in their supervisory role. A number of the recommendations above have sought to motivate cooperating teachers by providing support, encouragement and incentives for them in the future.

The structure of the COPET programme was designed to allow all three members of the triad to work together as effectively as possible. In situations where the guidelines were followed and the programme was implemented fully, findings indicate that the learning experiences of the student teacher were enhanced. When any one member of the triad struggled to define or perform their role however, difficulties arose. This finding is

well supported by previous findings, in particular those by Chalies *et al.* (2008). Findings also indicated that when problems arose in the relationship between the student teacher and their cooperating teacher, this was likely to have a negative impact on the teaching practice experience. Although it is widely reported in the literature (Slick, 1997; Hastings, 2004) that conflicts exist during teaching practice due to the inevitable strain as each member of the triad attempts to negotiate their own role, there have been few suggestions offered to improve communication links and forge real working relationships. A number of the recommendations based on this research have been made in an attempt to build more meaningful relationships among all members of the triad in the future.

8.6 Future Directions

The encouraging results of this study will need to be confirmed by further research comprising of a much greater number of cooperating teachers and the implementation of the COPET programme during a longer block of teaching practice. Further studies should address two key factors; the need to develop incentives to encourage cooperating teachers to engage with the COPET programme, and the need to gather data on the development of similar programmes in Ireland and internationally. Another research direction which would logically extend and build on this study, would be the implementation of similar programmes to COPET in the University for all teacher education programmes. This would ensure that all student teachers within the University are afforded similar opportunities to those provided for PE student teachers by the COPET programme.

While the responsibility for the development and design of the DCU PETE programme lies with the University, teacher education regulatory bodies (i.e. The Teaching Council of Ireland) and teacher unions must also be consulted regarding any radical reform of the teaching practice process which would include the role of the cooperating teacher. It must also be acknowledged that additional demands cannot continue to be placed on cooperating teachers particularly in the current situation where teachers' terms of employment are deteriorating due to budget cuts in education in Ireland.

Finally, what must be remembered is that the teaching profession will only get stronger because of the sharing of ideas and approaches (Graham, 2006). If the COPET programme is to continue to develop in the future, all members of the teaching practice triad must see their roles as being both personally and professionally fulfilling; student teachers must be provided with equal opportunities to make progress, university supervisors must be able to assess student teachers who have had equal opportunities to make progress, and cooperating teachers must ultimately create the link to provide these opportunities for progress. If the COPET programme is truly to become a collaboration linking the school and university setting, then only one question must be asked to judge its success, "Is everybody learning?"

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<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/supervise>

Appendix A

Post teaching practice questionnaire



School of Health and Human Performance
Physical Education Area
Cooperating Teacher Teaching Practice (TP) Survey

Please answer the 4 questions below, and return the survey at your earliest convenience in the stamped addressed envelope provided. All of your thoughts/comments will be very useful. Thank you for your time.

1. Did you feel adequate information was provided from DCU as to your role during the TP experience?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, please indicate what type of additional information would be needed-

2. Do you feel that you (co-operating PE teacher) could/should have a more active role in the mentoring of the student teacher on TP?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please indicate what you think this role may be-

3. Are there any areas/issues/suggestions in relation to TP in DCU that you would like to bring to our attention?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please indicate what these areas/issues/suggestions are -

4. Would you like to be contacted in the future in relation to the design of a co-operating *Physical Education* teachers (mentoring) programme in DCU?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, please give the following details:

Name: _____

School: _____

E.mail Address: _____

*Should you have **any additional comments** please use the space provided overleaf*

Appendix B

Plain language statement and informed consent form



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Plain Language Statement

The title of the proposed research study is 'The development of a Co-Operating Physical Education Teacher (COPET) programme'. It involves the gathering of information and views from co-operating physical education teachers, student teachers and university supervisors, regarding the role of the cooperating teacher during teaching practice. This data will be combined with a review of successful models of mentoring identified in the literature and a programme will be developed. This programme will then be piloted and evaluated from the perspectives of the University, the cooperating teacher, and the student teacher. The end goal of the research is to have developed a Co-operating Physical Education Teachers (COPET) programme that can be put in place in co-operating schools when PEB students are on second and final year teaching placement. The school involved is the School of Health and Human Performance, DCU. Dr. Sarahjane Belton is the principal investigator. Other investigators are Dr. Sarah Meegan, Dr. Catherine Woods and Ms. Carol Dunning. Dr. Sarahjane Belton may be contacted by e-mail at: sarahjane.belton@dcu.ie or by phone at: 01-7007393. Ms. Carol Dunning may be contacted by email at: dunningcarol@hotmail.com or by phone at: 087 7971347.

Involvement in the research project will require participants to take part in focus groups, interviews and complete a survey. A small number of participants will also be involved in case studies. Prior to the commencement of the focus groups, interviews, survey completion, and case studies participants will be asked to read the plain language statement. If the participant agrees to proceed, he/she will be required to read and complete an informed consent form. During the focus group or interview, participants will be asked a series of questions regarding their thoughts and experiences of the physical education teaching practice mentoring process. Focus groups and interviews will be recorded on a Dictaphone for later analysis. Participants can benefit from taking part in this research by becoming active members in a Dublin-based physical education teacher community of practice. Involvement in this research will assist the participants in learning mentoring skills that will assist them when they have pre-service physical education teachers in their schools on teaching practice. Additionally, participating teachers will be given the opportunity to voice their needs and requirements as practicing physical education teachers and will allow the researchers to identify areas where the School of Health and Human can assist in meeting these needs and requirements.

Confidentiality is an important issue during data collection. Participant's identity, their school or other personal information will not be revealed or published. Participants and schools will be assigned either a pseudonym or an ID number. All personal information will be stored in a secure file and saved in password protected file in a computer at DCU. The investigators alone will have access to the data. Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. Data will be stored for 12-months following the completion of the project, in line with University regulations for examinations. The data will be then be destroyed by the principal investigator. Involvement in the research is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at anytime. There shall be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research project have been completed.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

Section 1.01 The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title

The development of a Co-Operating Physical Education Teacher (COPET) programme

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to develop a Co-operating Physical Education Teachers (COPET) programme by gathering the views of co-operating physical education teachers, student teachers, and university supervisors regarding the role of the cooperating teacher on teaching practice. This data will be combined with a review of successful models of mentoring identified in the literature and a programme will be developed. This programme will then be piloted and evaluated from the perspectives of the University, the cooperating teacher, and the student teacher. Finally the COPET programme will be put in place in co-operating schools when DCU PEB (Physical Education and Biology) students are on second and final year teaching placement.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

Requirements may include involvement in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-taping of events. Getting the participant to acknowledge requirements is preferable.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement	Yes/No
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes/No
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	Yes/No
Are you aware that your focus group will be audio/video-taped?	Yes/No

Involvement in the research is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at anytime. There shall be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research project have been completed. Confidentiality is an important issue during data collection. Participant's identity, or other personal information, will not be revealed or published. Participants will be assigned an ID number, or a pseudonym, under which all personal information will be stored in a secure file and saved in password protected file in a computer at DCU. The investigators alone will have access to the data. Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

COPET booklet



GUIDELINES FOR COOPERATING PE TEACHERS

INITIAL INFORMATION

Prior to the commencement of Teaching Practice, Cooperating Teachers will have knowledge on the following information;

- Who is the student teacher?
- What is the student teacher's knowledge and experience from their PE programme to date?
- What are the universities expectations of cooperating teachers? Paperwork, mentoring etc.
- What are the universities expectations of the student teacher? Teaching time, observation etc.
- What are the dates of the placement?
- When and to whom should cooperating teachers submit post teaching practice documentation?
- Who does the cooperating teacher contact with questions or problems relating to the teaching practice process?

THE ROLE OF THE COOPERATING TEACHER

As a cooperating teacher you can potentially have the greatest influence on the development of the student teacher as a new professional in physical education. This responsibility is a highly significant one and we appreciate your involvement in this University-School partnership. Providing a climate for open and honest discussion of questions and concerns will help to create the growth environment and support system the student teacher needs.

The role of the cooperating teacher can be divided into three main duties;

- (1) guiding and leading the student teacher throughout the teaching experience,
- (2) observing the student teacher and providing feedback and ideas,
- (3) encouraging, supporting and socialising the student teacher into the school environment.

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO ASSIST YOUR STUDENT TEACHER DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

- Make the student aware of the realities, practicalities and constraints of teaching PE in your school
- Highlight for the student the ways in which you organise and manage pupils, time, equipment and resources
- Demonstrate how to introduce and close lessons and create routines within lessons
- Show the student when and how to adapt lessons
- Assist the student to develop strategies for handling difficult situations
- Share ideas with the student on teaching and learning styles
- Act as a sounding board for the student, listening, clarifying and discussing ideas for lessons.

It should be noted that the amount and depth of assistance and guidance required by student teachers will vary. It is hoped that all co-operating teachers will determine the nature of their guidance according to the needs of the individual student.

CHECKLIST FOR COOPERATING TEACHERS

PRIOR TO TEACHING PRACTICE

- Discuss the student's timetable with particular emphasis on schemes of work and pupils previous experiences and knowledge. Arrange classes that the student will take. They should teach at least 14 periods, although this also includes their biology classes.
- Familiarise the student with all available facilities and equipment and also the general format of P.E. lessons.
- Familiarise the student with discipline procedures throughout the school and specific sanctions in P.E. Details of issues such as dress code and rewards will also be useful.
- Ensure that the student is informed about safety regulations and procedures in operation in the school and aware of the location of first aid equipment.
- Introduce the student to all staff with whom s/he will be working where possible.
- The student should observe you teaching PE as this will enable him/her to learn about your expectations and get a feel for the situation.

- Discuss your role as cooperating teacher with the student and arrange when weekly evaluation meetings will take place.
- Discuss with the student teacher their perceived strengths, weaknesses and goals for the placement.

DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

- Particularly during the first week, maintain a presence in the location where the student is teaching.
- Observe at least one of the student's lessons each day and complete a daily observation sheet. If possible, arrange for another PE teacher to observe a lesson from time to time.
- Ensure to meet with the student for the weekly evaluation at the designated time and place. This 20/30 minute period at the beginning/end of each week should present an opportunity to discuss the student's progress, offer advice and assistance and agree areas to focus on for the coming week. The weekly evaluation sheet should be completed during or after this meeting. If unavoidable circumstances mean that the meeting cannot take place, it should be rescheduled for the next available opportunity.
- Encourage the student to observe as many of your lessons as possible particularly when relevant to topics that they are teaching. Students should also be encouraged to observe other teachers and interact with all members of the school community. If the student teacher is observing lessons, s/he should not be passive during this time. Students have been provided with a check list of teaching behaviours to observe and record. They should also be asked for feedback on what they have observed.
- If you recognise that the student teacher is having difficulties, you should discuss any problems with them as soon as possible or during the next weekly evaluation meeting. If the problem is not corrected, the university supervisor should be notified.
- Encourage students to become involved in extra curricular activities while at the same time being mindful of overloading them with work, additional to teaching practice requirements.

AFTER TEACHING PRACTICE

- Complete the return TP questionnaire and TP report form to the following address;
 Dr. Sarah Meegan,
 School of Health & Human Performance,
 Dublin City University,
 Dublin 9.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT TEACHER DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

When they are in school, students should conduct themselves in a professional manner.

- Students should plan and organise pupils' learning in consultation with cooperating teachers and university supervisors.
- Students should have a positive attitude and be ready to engage in the teaching process. Students should be ready to assist their colleagues and pupils.
- Students should dress appropriately and in keeping with the school's requirements. When teaching P.E. students should wear DCU polo shirt.
- Students must be polite and courteous to staff and pupils at all times. They should be on time for all classes. They should plan to arrive a minimum of 20 minutes before school begins.
- Students must ensure that they are aware of the sanctions and discipline policy in the school and take advice on its implantation.
- Students must be aware of the safety regulations operating in the school and be familiar with special safety requirements in P.E.
- Students must report any absence to:
 - the school, in accord with the school's policy. If no policy exists, students should phone the principal directly (NOT the PE teacher), before 8am15-30 minutes before the school day begins on each day of absence
 - the university

AN OVERVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR PE

1 PLANNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Should have lesson plan ready ■ Lesson plan should be clear, have aims/objectives outlined, content of lesson should support the achievement of these aims/objectives. Should also be short statement on how they will <u>assess</u> whether objectives have been achievement ■ Content should be appropriate; Safe, maximise activity and involvement, learning must occur <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Warm-up ■ Main activity ■ Cool Down
2 TEACHING AND LEARNING
<p>Instruction and Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are pupils kept 'on-task' during the lesson? – do the pupils do what they are asked to do and are they actively engaged in the activity ■ Are instructions/explanations given clearly? ■ Are demonstrations given, where appropriate, to supplement instructions? And are these demonstrations explained/broken down to enhance understanding. ■ Does the teacher listen to what pupils have to say, and do they respond appropriately? <p>Management of Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Has the student got a safe 'equipment zone' ■ Is the equipment organised for the lesson i.e. enough footballs/rackets. If cones are needed are they used. If cones are used are they laid out before the lesson when they could have been? ■ Was the teaching environment organised very well, or Is time wasted organising the teaching environment when it could have been organised more effectively? <p>Management of Pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If pupils drift 'off-task', how well does the teacher deal with it, how do they get the class/pupil back so that they are actively engaged in the lesson again? ■ If pupils misbehave, how well does the teacher deal with it? ■ Is the teaching environment safe throughout, how well does the teacher deal with any problems that arise? <p>Monitoring and Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does the teacher actively observe what is happening in the lesson and do they make adaptations/changes where appropriate- Teaching V Crowd Control! ■ Do they assess as they go – mainly questioning and observation- is it evident that they are assessing learning
3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
<p>Critical Reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How insightful are there previous reflections – do they inform future teaching? ■ In the evaluation they should be identifying changes they would make in the next lesson (teaching and learning, instruction, pupil/equipment management etc) ■ Were these changes evident in the lesson you saw, or were past mistakes repeated? <p>Professional Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Professionalism (time keeping, appearance, manner) during the episode you saw

TEACHING PRACTICE- DAILY OBSERVATION SHEET

STUDENT TEACHER	SCHOOL
ACTIVITY	COOPERATING TEACHER

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT	UNSATISFACTORY
Lesson Planning					
Practical Preparation					
Management of Resources					
Introduction to Lesson					
Organisation of drills/games					
Transition between activities					
Progression of pupil learning					
Catering for mixed ability					
Timing/pace of lesson					
Positioning around room/area					
Dealing with off task behaviour					
Use of demonstrations					
Use of voice					
Engaging pupil's interest					
Attention evenly distributed throughout group					
Creation of learning atmosphere in lesson					
Observation and fault correction					
Use of Q & A					
Use of Assessment					
Conclusion of the lesson					
Interaction with pupils					

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

TEACHING PRACTICE-WEEKLY EVALUATION SHEET

STUDENT TEACHER	SCHOOL
ACTIVITY	COOPERATING TEACHER

KNOWLEDGE, TEACHING AND UNDERSTANDING – including **understanding the J.C.P.E. curriculum, progressions** within and across lessons, and displaying a **competency in a variety of activities**.

PLANNING, TEACHING AND CLASS MANAGEMENT – achieving **intended learning outcomes**, provide **clear structures for lessons** thereby ensuring **sound learning and discipline** and identifying and **engaging pupils** who have **special educational needs**.

SAFETY AND ORGANISATION – ensures a **safe learning environment**, both structurally and emotionally and **efficient use of space, equipment and resources**.

ASSESSMENT – **assesses and monitors pupil's progress** systematically including through observation and questioning and provides appropriate **feedback**.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS – including **demonstrating classroom presence, initiative, enthusiasm** and **establishing effective professional relationships** within the whole school community

AGREED TARGETS/AREAS TO FOCUS ON FOR THE COMING WEEK:

POST TEACHING PRACTICE QUESTIONNAIRE

The information provided by you in this questionnaire will enable the School of Health and Human Performance to make changes to improve student learning and competency as teachers.

This information will **not** be used as a form of assessment.

Confidentiality is an important issue during data collection. Participant's identity, their school or other personal information will not be revealed or published.

Read each statement, then ask yourself;

When I think about my student teacher's teaching, I am concerned/not concerned about:

1.= Not Concerned

2.= A Little Concerned

3.= Moderately Concerned

4.= Very Concerned

5.= Extremely Concerned

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Appropriate lesson planning..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | Competence in teaching key skills..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Meeting the needs of different kinds of students..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Maintaining the appropriate degree of class control..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | Challenging unmotivated students..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | Provision of feedback..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | Awareness of safety..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | Professional relationships with pupils and staff..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

TEACHING PRACTICE REPORT

Name of Student Teacher: _____

Name of Cooperating Teacher: _____

Name of School: _____

Dates of Teaching Placement: _____

Number of PE Lessons Taught: _____

Number of PE Lessons Observed: _____

Special Events taking place in the school during the course of teaching practice:

Student Teacher involvement in extra-curricular activities:

Appendix D

Letter from the University to schools outlining teaching practice criteria

For the Attention of the PE Department

2011

The School of Education Studies at Dublin City University offers two undergraduate degrees in initial teacher education, the **B.Sc in Science Education (SE)** and the **B.Sc in Physical Education and Biology Degree (PEB)**.

Initial teacher education has gone from strength to strength over the last decade and we have developed mutually beneficial relationships with a wide range of host schools. Without their support it would not be possible to offer and operate these degree courses.

Our two undergraduate degrees require students to undertake a teaching practice placement in host schools. This occurs in mid to late November in Semester One and from late February to the end of May in Semester Two. Students undertaking the **Science Education Degree** teach a combination of **Maths and Science** subjects. Those undertaking the **Physical Education and Biology Degree** teach a combination of **PE and Biology and junior cycle science**.

We would like you to consider acting as cooperating teacher by hosting one of our student teachers in 2011-12. Our students will undertake teaching practice at the following times this coming year:

2nd Year Science Education (3 week placement Nov 7th to 25th November 2011)

3rd Year Science Education (3 months February 20th to end May 2012)

2nd Year Physical Education and Biology (3 week placement Nov 7th to 25th Nov 2011)

4th Year Physical Education and Biology (3 months Feb 20th to end May 2012)

In order to meet the requirements of the Teaching Council, it is essential that schools agreeing to host a PEB student have in employment a fully qualified PE teacher who is willing to engage with the PEB students while they are on teaching practice. It is also important that the school's PE programme encompasses the range of activities as required within the PE curriculum.

Your Principal/Deputy Principal has been given a form in which to indicate the school's willingness to take a student teacher. This should be completed and returned in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

If you have any queries please contact either myself (7007162) or Madeline McDermott at the Teaching Practice Office (7005229).

Yours sincerely

Dr Majella McSharry
Director of Teaching Practice

Appendix E

Published Papers