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Partnership or prescription: a critical discourse analysis of HEI-school partnership policy in the Republic of Ireland

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ABSTRACT

The Republic of Ireland has witnessed a transformative reform agenda in teacher education, stemming from internal trends, increased emphasis on supranational ranking indicators, and recommendations from national and international reviews of existing teacher education. As part of this reform agenda, the Teaching Council of Ireland has espoused models of higher education institution (HEI)-school partnerships, crystallised in *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Teaching Council, 2020) and *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021). Using critical discourse analysis, we unpack how language is directed to two key partners within the policies, namely higher education institutions and schools. Findings unpack a range of agendas at play that are undermining the notion of partnership, including how language can displace the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. We conclude with a call for further critical policy research in teacher education, given the wider policy and political influences at play. This paper offers a theoretical-oriented framework that can support a critical reading of such policies.

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Introduction

Teacher education programmes, both nationally and internationally, have been in the reform spotlight for the last two decades influenced by increased globalised competition that promotes “higher social and economic expectations” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, 2005, p. 7). National policy agendas in the Republic of Ireland are increasingly determined by the international setting of standards and benchmarks (Lynch et al., 2012; Solbrette & Sugrue, 2014) and initial teacher education (ITE) has not been immune to these agendas. With the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006, as a statutory, regulatory body, with a role in the review and accreditation of teacher education, ITE has experienced a plethora of changes. The school placement experience has been revised to include an increase in the time which students are required to spend in schools, and a movement from higher education institutions (HEIs) autonomously led programmes to a partnership model between both stakeholders. This is crystallised in two policy documents: *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Teaching Council, 2020)

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and *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021). Given that these are the key policy documents for HEI-school partnerships in the Republic of Ireland, they will be the central focus of this research. While a number of studies have attempted to unpack the issues and dilemmas in relation to HEI-school partnerships in the Irish context, the research to date has had a strong leaning towards empirical data. We acknowledge the importance of capturing the experiences of those actors engaging in this process and on occasion we draw on such data, predominantly from a recent commissioned study on school placement in the Republic of Ireland (Hall et al., 2018), to support our analysis. We set out to extend on this active HEI-school partnership research agenda by moving this research into the critical policy field. While Ball (1990) has lamented on the paucity of critical educational policy research, the field has widened over the past four decades (Rogers, 2004). That said, as teacher education internationally remains under a constant policy spotlight (Ball, 2016; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Helgetun & Menter, 2020), there is a need for a research agenda that questions the processes underpinning established policy agendas in this field (Biesta et al., 2021). In setting out to do this, we are engaging in policy activism (Yeatman, 1998). As teacher education researchers and practitioners, we are exploring the language of policy and the mechanisms at play in relation to how the concept of partnership has become a policy reality. The next section will set the scene for the analysis by outlining the theoretical perspectives and associated dilemmas relating to the HEI-school partnership process, situated in the socio-cultural context of teacher education reform in the Republic of Ireland.

Unpacking partnership in ITE

Definitions of partnership are vague (Brinkenhoff, 2002) and the key social actors involved tend to use the term “to reflect their own, distinct, interpretations and motivations” (Lucio & Stuart, 2004, p. 421). A partnership implies mutual benefit for the parties involved. Partnerships are deemed critically important in learning approaches, which emphasise experiential learning. Thus, university-workplace partnerships are common. The mutual benefit being that the university gains an authentic learning environment. The partner gains new theoretical knowledge for current problems, employee training, or tangible outcomes of student’s work-based projects (Rogers, 2011).

The concept of partnership in ITE is used to describe the variety of ways of organising the collaboration/partnership between a teacher education institution and the school communities where student teachers undertake their practicum. In the context of teacher education, the term partnership is used as if there is collective agreement on what constitutes a partnership and more particularly what a good partnership looks like. Goodlad (1991, p. 59) defines a HEI-school partnership as a “planned effort to establish a formal, mutually beneficial inter-institutional relationship.” Ideally, partnerships are intended to strengthen the link between theory and practice and between schools and teacher education institutions, to counter fragmentation for student teachers and to contribute to professional learning for all involved in the triadic relationship (Perry et al., 1998). Three main models of partnership dominate the teacher education literature; complementary, collaborative, and HEI led. The complementary model is frequently regarded as a “separatist one” (Smith et al., 2006, p. 149) whereby the college, university or school are seen as having distinctive, separate yet complementary responsibilities.

Within this model, no systematic attempt is made to bring these two dimensions into an integrative dialogue, rather the onus is placed on the student to meaningfully connect and integrate the learning from these two separate contexts. Sachs (2003, p. 66) describes the collaborative model as a “two-way model of reciprocity” whereby each has a legitimate role to play in student learning and a contribution to make to the professional learning of the other. Core to this model is the collective commitment to develop a programme of initial teacher education where students are exposed to different forms of education knowledge. No one body of knowledge is privileged, rather teachers are seen as having an equally legitimate but different body of professional knowledge from those in higher education. Students are aided and supported to utilise their learning in the professional setting to critique what they learned within their coursework and vice versa, and in so doing to build their own body of professional knowledge (McIntyre, 1991). Within a HEI led model of partnership, the HEI provides overall leadership for both the HEI and school delivered elements of the ITE programme. In so doing, they take responsibility for overall planning and defining of approaches to school placement learning and assessment. Contact between the two remains limited. Furlong (2013), while documenting three partnership models, argues that the HEI led model tends to be most dominant because schools are primarily focused on children’s learning. An early example of this was the Oxford Internship Scheme developed in the mid 1980s, the purpose of which was to build an integrated bridge between instruction at the HEI and the students’ experiences and guidance while on placement. It was anticipated that through critical reflections, students would be supported in developing the skills to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. In parallel, the Holmes Group (1986, 1990) in the US, developed teacher education partnership models whereby universities and schools jointly developed modules specifically designed for the coherent integration of both theory and practice. While the creation of several successful partnership models and programmes have been documented since then, many argue that partnership between ITE providers and schools remains largely ineffective (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2006). Zeichner (2010) suggests that the weak integration of schools’ contributions to teacher education remains a reason for their lack of success, due in the main to the ITE providers and schools inhabiting separate worlds. Taylor (2008) agrees, arguing that the on-campus and practicum components of teacher education programmes will remain disjointed while they are taught or overseen by educators who have little ongoing meaningful communication with each other. Leadership and dialogue are vital with the creation of a shared vision being key (Sachs, 1999), but how that should happen remains contested (Clarke et al., 2014; Douglas, 2012).

The Irish policy context

Until 2006, ITE providers, universities, and colleges of education alike (collectively now referred to as HEIs), had exercised institutional autonomy in relation to the design, content and delivery of their teacher education programmes, with little state intervention except at primary level where the Department of Education determined entry numbers and requirements in English, Irish and Maths. Alongside the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006, an intensification of this state intervention and regulation in teacher education was also observed in the introduction of the prescriptive national

policy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People* (Department of Education and Skills DES, 2011). Referred in short as the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, the impetus for this policy was to address the underperformance of Irish students in Literacy and Numeracy compared to their international peers. One key target from this policy was to extend the duration of ITE programmes. The policy required that additional time would be provided to allow student teachers to develop the skills and pedagogical content knowledge in dimensions that are deemed pivotal for effective teaching and learning in Literacy and Numeracy. Solbrekke and Sugrue (2014, p. 12) argue that this intervention was largely influenced by a drive for international competitiveness with teachers and HEI-based teacher educators “being blamed” for the decline in standards.

One of the central remits of the Teaching Council is to implement a review and accreditation of ITE programmes. This approach to accreditation is unique and distinguished from the existing academic accreditation processes conducted by the universities. Since September 2012, and in line with *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011, 2017), to retain their professional accreditation from the Teaching Council, all undergraduate concurrent programmes of initial teacher education, must be of four years’ duration. The main pillar of the policy is school placement with the Teaching Council calling for the development of “new and innovative school placement models . . . using a partnership approach, whereby HEIs and schools actively collaborate in the organisation of the school placement” (Teaching Council, 2011a, p. 15). Students are required to spend a minimum of 24 weeks in schools, representing 25% of their ITE programme (Teaching Council, 2011b).

The Teaching Council consists of 37 members. The majority are teachers – 16 elected and six teacher union nominees. The Minister for Education nominates five members, two of whom are nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and IBEC. The three other members are drawn from the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN) and Department of Education Inspectorate and the for-profit teacher education provider, Hibernia College. The parent-bodies for both primary and post primary have one member each and the school management bodies have four members in total. Its significance as a policy site derives in part from the fact that it is charged with the remit to regulate the quality of initial and continuing teacher education, and to issue criteria for the accreditation of all ITE programmes. The Teaching Council represents a forum where HEI providers of teacher education are represented alongside other stakeholders in which policy is formed through a process of negotiation and power sharing. From a policy analysis perspective, the composition of the Teaching Council is noteworthy as HEI-based teacher educators have “lost influence” (Smith, 2013, p. 81) Initially, HEI-based teacher educators were to comprise 33% of the Teaching Council whereas they now represent 10% of the Teaching Council. Smith (2013) maintains that this can be explained by the fact that they were not explicitly represented during the talks on the format of the Teaching Council. Smith (2013) also argues that HEI-based teacher educators appear to have missed out on the opportunity to engage fully in the debates that led to the establishment of the Teaching Council and the accompanying legislation which gave the Teaching Council a comprehensive teacher education remit. This remit, it must be noted, left HEI-based teacher educators at a considerable disadvantage in negotiating further teacher education policy.

Methodology

This paper takes a critical discourse analysis approach (CDA) to analyse the two policy documents: *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Teaching Council, 2020) and *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021). From a philosophical position, we draw on the definition of Luke (2019) where language is important in social processes and is used as a mechanism to shape institutional, globalised, political and organisational agendas. CDA examines the discourse of power in policies and unpacks how policies are products of a struggle between “contenders of competing objectives, where language, or more specifically discourse, is used tactically” (Fulcher, 1989, p. 7). Thus, the primary aim of CDA is to closely analyse texts that are influential to a given society, particularly texts that are deemed politically or culturally influential. Fairclough (2004) offers a seminal framework for CDA, which integrates three levels of analysis; the text; the discursive practices of the text, specifically the process of the production (the writing) and consumption (reading) of the text; and the social context that is related to the text (Fairclough, 1993). In uniting these three levels, CDA moves beyond recognising text as semantic, revealing propositions and meaning presented in written and spoken texts, including words and phrases that are directly or indirectly considered by the writer (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2003).

In conducting CDA, there are key factors that should be considered. First, the selected text should not be described in exhaustive detail, rather the features of the text that are most interesting from a critical perspective should be examined. In this paper, our analysis is guided by the overarching research focus, specifically how the concept of HEI-school partnership features in two key policy documents in the Republic of Ireland. Second, while there is no dominant approach to conducting CDA, approaches that offer close textual analysis are useful to allow for an in-depth analysis of how language is used within the selected text. Within this paper, we adopt Fairclough’s approach to modality in our analysis of the policy documents. Analysis of modality is concerned with the tone within the text, specifically how writers or speakers position themselves when they present statements, raise questions, make demands or offers. Thus, analysis of modality explores the degree of authority or certitude that is held by the writer of the text. “How one represents the world, to what one commits oneself, e.g., one’s degree of commitment to truth, is a part of how one identifies one- self, necessarily in relation to others with whom one is interacting” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 167). In the context of this research, through close reading of two policy document, we pay close attention to two types of modalities (Fairclough, 2004):

- Epistemic modality, which deals with the statements, assertions or predictions put forward in a text. Within this research, the statements, assertions, or predictions made by the Teaching Council in relation to HEI-school partnerships will be examined.
- Deontic modality, which indicates demands, expectations, desires, and offerings. This analysis will identify how demands, expectations, requests, and offerings are put forward by the Teaching Council in relation to HEI-school partnerships.

To unpack the modality within texts, Fairclough (2004, p. 168) explains that “archetypical markers of modality are ‘modal verbs’ (‘can, will, may, must, would, should,’ etc.)”

Table 1. Levels of commitment in epistemic and deontic modality (Fairclough, 2004).

Epistemic Modality		Deontic Modality	
High Level Example	<i>He certainly opened the window.</i>	High Level Example	<i>You must open the window</i>
Medium Level Example	<i>He probably opened the window</i>	Medium Level Example	<i>You should open the window</i>
Low Level Example	<i>He possibly opened the window</i>	Low Level Example	<i>You can open the window</i>

Table 2. Research Design (adapted from Jørgensen & Phillips, 2003).

Phase	Description
Research Problem	Unpacking policy implications of HEI-school partnership policy in the Republic of Ireland
Research Question/s	How does the concept of HEI-school partnership feature in two key policy documents in the Republic of Ireland?
Choice of Material	Primary data focuses on the two policy documents <i>Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education</i> (Teaching Council, 2020) and <i>Guidelines on School Placement</i> (Teaching Council, 2021)
Analysis	Close textual analysis of language choices within the selected policy documents, with a specific focus on the forms of modality employed.
Results	Convey meaning applied to language choices in the policy documents, and offer interpretations by examining the wider context and conditions in which the documents have been produced (linking back to the contextual setting within this paper)

Furthermore, when analysing modality within texts, the level of modality should also be considered. Fairclough (2004), extending on the work of Halliday (1994), highlights that “in modalised clauses, both epistemic and deontic, one can distinguish different levels of commitment to truth on the one hand and obligation/necessity on the other.” In epistemic modality, modal adverbs are useful when analysing the level of commitment, while in deontic modality, participial adjectives are common (Fairclough, 2004). Table 1 provides illustrative examples of different levels of commitment.

Fairclough (2004) also draws attention to other markers of modality. Within written texts, these may include mental clauses e.g. *I think*, statements that are expressed in a hesitant, tentative, or assertive tone, and attributions that are made by the writer to other individuals or parties in lowering or raising level of commitment. The use of person and pronoun can also act as markers. Fairclough (2004) marks the distinction between subjectively and objectively marked modalities, signalled using pronoun and person in text e.g., *I think the window is open* (subjectively marked modal) and *the window is open* (objectively marked modal). The first-person plural pronoun *We* can also provide a marker as “the power of making statements on behalf of others, or indeed on behalf of ‘all of us’ ... is a power which has an uneven social distribution, and is important for identification” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 171).

While there is consensus that there is no fixed procedure in conducting CDA, Jørgensen & Phillips (2003) present a six-phase approach, which aligns with the underpinnings of Fairclough’s approach to CDA. This approach includes an emphasis on text, the discursive practice of texts, and the social practice of texts. As the analyst moves through each phase, they can do so recursively, moving back and forth where appropriate. They also advise that the research design should be tailored to meet the needs of the study. In doing this, we have adapted this approach. Specifically, it is now tailored to five phases (see Table 2) as the transcription phase in the existing framework is not required.

Findings

This section focuses on the analysis of the two selected policy documents to unpack how the concept of HEI-school partnerships feature. Our analysis is guided by the approach to CDA put forward in the methodology, specifically focussing on the workings of epistemic and deontic modalities in the language directed to HEIs and schools.

Guidelines on School Placement

Guidelines on School Placement (Teaching Council, 2021) is a glossy colourful document and is pitched towards a range of partners, but mainly to schools and HEIs. A drive towards partnership building is the central theme in this policy document. A persuasive tone is evident in a range of statements about the importance of school placement in ITE, underpinned by HEI-school partnerships, and the Teaching Council positions these guidelines as being pivotal in this regard:

These guidelines are underpinned by three key assumptions about the benefits of reconceptualising the school placement experience: it will enhance the school placement experience for student teachers, it will enrich learning outcomes for both current and future pupils, and it will deepen the professional satisfaction and improve the status of teachers (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 5).

In this statement, a high level of certainty is expressed through the modal verb “will,” predicting that the enactment of these guidelines will be influential to the learning of pupils in schools, alongside improving teacher status in the Republic of Ireland. While a tone of certainty is expressed in this statement, there is no specific reference to how the enactment of the guidelines will enrich children’s learning or deepen the status and career satisfaction of teachers. To achieve this, the Teaching Council argues that “it is vital that teacher education programmes and, in particular, the placement experience are actively resourced and supported by all the education partners in pursuit of their shared objectives.” Yet, the use of the third-person pronoun “their shared objectives” implies that the Teaching Council is not included in the “pursuit” of these objectives. Thus, it is unclear who the partners are, what the resources and supports are, and who holds responsibility in the provision of such resources and supports. While certitude and authority are evident in the policy document through the Teaching Council’s use of persuasive and ambitious statements, closer reading of the policy document highlights ambiguity in how the objectives of this policy are to be achieved.

The analysis of the policy document also illustrates how varying levels of deontic modalities are pitched at the various partners, for whom the policy is directed to. A more direct managerial approach is evident in how the Teaching Council communicates with the HEIs within this policy. A high-level of obligation is expressed through the modal verb “will:” “HEIs will provide detailed information for schools in relation to the duration, structure and timing of the school-based element and will support schools in hosting the student teacher” (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 22). Other markers to support this finding include statements such as “at a minimum, this support will include guidance and documentation so that the Treoraí [co-operating teacher] is clear about the HEI’s expectations of the student teacher.” “At a minimum” presents a marker displaying a high level of obligation. The wider analysis of the policy document further strengthens this finding,

given that the Teaching Council explicitly notes that the guidelines will be “an addendum to the Teaching Council’s revised standards for programmes of initial teacher education (ITE), *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*” (2021, p. 1), the mechanism used for the (re)accreditation of ITE programmes. Therefore, how HEIs engage with the guidelines will be placed under an accountability spotlight.

Given that a concern is expressed by the Teaching Council that a partnership approach does not place “an undue burden on schools” (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 5), the deontic modalities for schools are more nuanced. The word “should” features more in how the policy advises schools in relation to their roles in the partnership process: “All student teachers on placement should be assigned a suitable *Treoraí* [co-operating teacher] who is committed to working with and supporting them” (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 14). On occasion, modals of obligation are expressed. The word “will” is used, but features more when the Teaching Council communicates with a range of partners – “HEIs and schools will continue to support each other as they engage in the placement process” (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 8). A range of roles and responsibilities are also put forward for cooperating teachers, school principals and the wider school community. In the case of cooperating teachers, twelve roles and responsibilities are presented, ranging from induction into the classroom, provision of feedback to the student teacher in an “encouraging and sensitive manner,” and supporting the student teacher “in critical reflection on their practice” (Teaching Council, 2021, p. 20). While it is acknowledged that the use of the word “will” features for schools, wider reading of the policy document signals an overarching tone of desirability, rather than obligation. The Teaching Council expresses that it does not wish to place an “undue burden on schools.” Furthermore, the accountability element for HEIs under the guise of (re)accreditation does not apply to schools. Hence, the analysis and inclusion of extracts from the policy documents illustrates differential expectations for the two key partners, as evidenced in the modal approaches employed in this text.

Céim: Standards for initial teacher education

Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (Teaching Council, 2020), hereafter to referred to as *Céim*, is predominantly pitched to HEIs and the policy is presented as “an important point of reference for the Teaching Council, as it reviews programmes of ITE for professional accreditation purposes and for relevant agencies, as they shape and implement education policy in the primary and post-primary sectors” (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 8). The policy is positioned as one that contains a range of “standards” that will be used in the review (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 8). The Teaching Council highlights that these standards have been shaped through a consultative process, involving a range of stakeholders, which embodies “our [stakeholders] collective commitment to quality teaching and learning in all schools for all learners.” While the Teaching Council is explicitly clear on its authority to review and accredit ITE programmes, the standards that will be used for review have been shaped by a wider body with a collective commitment. Thus, the Teaching Council is not solely accountable to the standards that have been set, rather it has been part of a wider stakeholder engagement in the development of these standards.

While less common in this policy document, aspirational statements are presented in terms of the impact that this policy has on education. The policy is positioned as a document that will be of “interest to school leaders and teachers and all who are

involved in promoting high quality teaching and learning in our schools” (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 8). While aspiration is expressed in how this ITE policy will support the school in the promotion of “high quality teaching and learning,” it remains unclear how. Certitude is also expressed in statements specifically dealing with HEI-school partnerships. The policy document states that “student teachers experience a supportive model of placement which facilitates professional conversational engagement between all partners.” The use of verbs “experience” and “facilitates” implies that this is an existing practice, despite the call for resourcing and supporting HEI-school partnerships within *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021). Thus, the modal markers discussed above represent high levels of epistemic modality, namely certainty, certitude, and authority, as evidenced in the selected extracts.

Turning to deontic modality, markers of high-level obligation are evident in the policy document. The Teaching Council draws attention to this, signalling how two verbs “should” and “shall” are to be interpreted. “Where ‘shall’ is referenced, this is a mandatory requirement. Where ‘should’ is referenced, the Teaching Council expresses an ‘ideal’ scenario but recognises that certain challenges may arise in its implementation” (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 8). While it may be implied that “should” expresses desirability, the Teaching Council clarifies how this is to be interpreted: “where the ideal scenario may not be achieved, the provider will be required to explain why (comply/explain process) during the review and accreditation process.” Thus, obligation is also expressed, in the form that the HEI will be “required to explain” why the ideal scenario has not been achieved. The word “shall” appears 92 times in the policy document, while “should” appears 26 times. While “shall” and “should” are predominantly directed to HEIs, the Teaching Council includes a wider national directive, using the modal verb “shall.” Revisiting the statement that “student teachers experience a supportive model of placement which facilitates professional conversational engagement between all partners,” it follows with: “such supports shall include structures at the national level to facilitate quality and collaborative engagement in school placement” (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 17). It is unclear what the “structures at the national level” are, and if this is a statement of obligation or desirability. No further clarity is provided within the policy document.

Discussion

In addressing how the concept of HEI-school partnerships features in the two selected policy documents, three key themes have emerged from our analysis: *Individualistic versus Collectivistic Legitimacy*, *Developing and Sustaining Partnerships* and *Competing Policy Agendas*.

Individualistic versus collectivistic legitimacy

It is evident from our analysis that *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021) is largely endorsing a collaborative model of partnership, underpinned by a social pattern of collectivism. Our analysis shows that HEIs are being directed to, and schools are being encouraged to regard themselves as part of collective norms to not only support student teacher learning, but to improve children’s learning and deepen the status of teachers in the Republic of Ireland. To operate within a collectivist pattern according to Singelis et al. (1995), requires individuals concerned to be willing to give priority to the

collectivist goal or at least regard themselves as equal partners. This push for collectivism seems to be undermined in *Céim* (Teaching Council, 2020). The policy document is primarily pitched towards HEI programme providers and review panels and the directive language is driving individualism, a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives and are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs and requirements. The analysis of the selected policies illustrate a requirement of full compliance of the HEIs. The employment of markers “shall” or “should” illustrate high levels of obligation in terms of compliance, with the threat of non-accreditation if they do not. Schools “should” engage, but neither policy considers any ramification if they do not. A recent commissioned Teaching Council research study on school placement highlights this issue where a HEI research participant expresses concern over the differential treatment of the stakeholders:

At the moment we talk about partnership... it's a one-side partnership. There is no onus, no responsibility for the school to partner with the HEI. Until there is an onus or responsibility... you can't have a partner with only one institution in the partnership! We [HEIs] are doing a lot of flirting and trying to engage but schools can either take it or leave it (Hall et al., 2018, p. 129).

Unequal treatment in policy rhetoric ensures that the individualistic rather than collectivistic legitimacy reigns.

Developing and sustaining partnerships

Our analysis highlights that whilst the Teaching Council acknowledges the need for resourcing in *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021), neither policy considers the full fundamentals of partnership, including resourcing, professional learning and recognition of engagement. Therefore by default fails to consider how partnership can be meaningfully created. The recent commissioned Teaching Council study on school placement flags that this as an overarching issue in the Irish context: “the development of school-HEI partnership is hampered and dominated by the challenge of securing school placements for student teachers and this is an overarching finding of our research” (Hall et al., 2018, p. 14). Partnership participants need to believe that collaboration with one another is beneficial. The value of interactions among potentially diverse participants who “inhabit two largely separate worlds [that] exist side by side” (Beck & Kosnik, 2002b, p. 12) must be legitimised (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The dialectic is enabled when planned opportunities are created for cooperating teachers and HEI-based teacher educators to dialogue, critique and share understandings of both pedagogy and practice. They both “need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers, through ongoing and consistent study, and through deep reflection about their craft” (Nieto, 2003, p. 128). Collaboration, especially when the aim is to build greater trust among partners, is rarely an efficient or unproblematic endeavour. However, the more that organisational participants are involved in the decision process and collective visioning, the more time consuming and resource intensive that process will tend to be (Weiner & Alexander, 1998).

Competing policy agendas

Partnership is also rendered problematic by competing policy agendas impacting on the professional responsibilities of both teachers and HEI-based teacher educators. New policies do not compete on a neutral playing field. The foregoing analysis highlights that *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council, 2021) and *Céim* (Teaching Council, 2020), introduced in the shadow of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011, 2017), sit within a globalised policy arena where the push for performativity is writ large at the top of both national and international agendas (Ball, 2016). While it is expressed by the Teaching Council that an “undue” burden is not placed on school, neither policy addresses wider competing demands. In fact, our analysis illustrates that the high level of obligation expressed in both policies compounds this issue. In most universities today, preservice work is not as highly regarded or rewarded as post graduate work, research, and publishing. “As a result, faculty often give lower priority to preservice course instruction; and practicum supervision, the rationale and expectations for which are often vague, tends to receive the least attention of all” (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a, p. 81). The resultant factor of these two policies is that it potentially leaves HEI-based teacher educators struggling in an arena of competing and conflicting discourses and professional identities (Furlong & O’Brien, 2015; Kennedy & Doherty, 2012). They are now caught between the obligations made within these policies and wider teaching, research and service commitments. In addition, classrooms have arguably become public spaces for test score production, as the publication of standardised test scores in the areas of literacy and numeracy is now required by policy directive (DES, 2011, 2017). Adding the responsibility of working with preservice teachers, to the other roles performed by cooperating teachers, complicates their primary role of teaching children (Hall et al., 2018). With such demands, alongside the absence of appropriate support, classroom teachers may not function as teacher educators in ways expected by the HEIs or indeed the policy makers. Thus, different actors present different problem definitions that indicate varying values and belief systems.

Conclusion

The CDA presented in this paper illustrates how the Teaching Council has set an agenda for the standardisation of HEI-school partnerships. However, it is also evident that the Teaching Council treats HEIs and schools differently, which is evident in the analysis of the language choices employed in both policies. While schools are being encouraged to partake in partnership, HEIs are being directed to. Unequal treatment in policy rhetoric ensures that the individualistic rather than collectivistic legitimacy reigns. This analysis illustrates that there is ambiguity in relation to the necessary support and structures to develop partnership. The resultant factor is a loose informal partnership between HEIs and schools (Burke, 2009; Conway et al., 2009; Harford & O’Doherty, 2016). The process of partnership building is also potentially impacted by wider competing policy agendas, driven by performativity in HEIs and schools. Our analysis aligns with earlier observations of Ball (2016, p. 1052) where the production of these policies can arguably be seen as a move towards a “more functionalist/technicist version” of teachers and HEI-based teacher educators, a mechanism that is eroding and displacing their autonomy. While

this analysis focuses on one component of initial teacher education, it showcases a “small, separate, often double-edged” move that is:

Joined up, or beginning to be joined up, within a unifying discourse of standards, quality, skills, competences and improvement ... linked to a set of economic necessities ... they represent a change in the relations of power between teachers and the state (Ball, 2016, p. 1052).

Thus, with the prevalence of neoliberal reforms in education policy, educators need to position themselves to critically engage with research that examines the development and enactment of policy (Ball, 1990, 2016; Biesta et al., 2021; Rogers, 2004; Taylor, 2004; Yeatman, 1998). We contend that there is a need therefore for the establishment of a critical research policy community in teacher education to ensure that all have the capacity to critically examine current and future policy development in this field. We conclude that this paper provides a theoretical framework for education policy analysis that can offer a more critical reading into policy, moving beyond the mere semantic to illuminate more fully the purpose, power and politics at play.

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