



## Reconceptualising school placement assessment in initial teacher education: a figural perspective

Audrey Doyle, Marie Conroy Johnson, Dylan Scanlon, Anna Logan, Aishling Silke, Alan Gorman, Aoife Brennan, Catherine Furlong & Sarah O'Grady

**To cite this article:** Audrey Doyle, Marie Conroy Johnson, Dylan Scanlon, Anna Logan, Aishling Silke, Alan Gorman, Aoife Brennan, Catherine Furlong & Sarah O'Grady (2024) Reconceptualising school placement assessment in initial teacher education: a figural perspective, European Journal of Teacher Education, 47:2, 305-329, DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2024.2345904](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2345904)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2345904>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 02 May 2024.



Submit your article to this journal 



Article views: 1597



View related articles 



View Crossmark data 



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles 

## Reconceptualising school placement assessment in initial teacher education: a configurational perspective

Audrey Doyle<sup>a</sup>, Marie Conroy Johnson<sup>a</sup>, Dylan Scanlon <sup>b</sup>, Anna Logan<sup>a</sup>,  
Aishling Silke<sup>a</sup>, Alan Gorman<sup>a</sup>, Aoife Brennan<sup>a</sup>, Catherine Furlong<sup>a</sup> and Sarah O'Grady<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Institution of Education, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland; <sup>b</sup>School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Waurn Ponds, Melbourne, Australia

### ABSTRACT

In the context of the COVID-19 restrictions and the pivot to online teaching and learning, teacher educators were forced to consider new spaces for School Placement and the assessment of these new sites of practice. This paper explores the process of the redesigning of the assessment of school placement components from the perspective of ten teacher educators across five teacher education programmes in one university. Hybridity theory, 'third space', and configurational sociology allowed us to understand who and what influenced the redesigning of assessment practices. The three themes relating to assessment included: (i) A network of interdependent relationships influencing teacher educators' reimagining of assessment processes; (ii) The influence of external interdependent relationships and context(s); and (iii) The role(s) of assessor for the teacher educator. We explicitly argue for the need to continue to advocate and advance these practices to 'build Initial Teacher Education back better'.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 August 2022

Accepted 21 March 2024

### KEYWORDS

Assessment; teacher education; school placement; configurational sociology; hybridity theory

## Introduction

School placement (SP) is central to the professional preparation of pre-service teachers (PSTs) in initial teacher education (ITE) (The Teaching Council 2020a; OECD 2021) and in Ireland, it is designed by responding to criteria set down by The Teaching Council (2017, 2020a). Pre-covid, the traditional SP consisted of the PST being offered a number of classes to teach in a school setting commensurate with their level of learning on their ITE programme. The PST was supported and guided by a cooperating teacher or Treorai<sup>1</sup> in school and then assessed by a Higher Education Institute (HEI) SP tutor via the evaluation of a SP portfolio consisting of teaching, assessment, and reflective documents; an appraisal of their professionalism over the course of the placement; and an assessment of a PST executed lessons onsite in the school. The latter activity was followed by a short, formative person-to-person chat. At the end of the placement period the SP tutor agreed a summative grade for the PST with their cooperating HEI tutor encompassing the

---

**CONTACT** Audrey Doyle  [audrey.doyle@dcu.ie](mailto:audrey.doyle@dcu.ie)  Institution of Education, Dublin City University, Ireland

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

activities as set out above. In the context of the repeated closure of education settings on foot of COVID-19 restrictions and the pivot to online teaching and learning, school assessment visits were no longer tenable. An extensive redesign of SP modules and associated assessment components were required. The groundwork for such changes had already been proposed by Zeichner (2010) who heralded the need to create hybrid spaces in teacher education where academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning. The pandemic had offered an opening to reimagine how SP might now proceed.

This paper is interested in focusing on the process of assessment of SP and how a redesign of that assessment in ITE might operate within a '*third space*' (Bhabha 1994, 2004, Zeichner 2010). Using this concept, we can gain a deeper understanding of the (potentially limiting) relationship between the HEI (in this case, ITE) and the school as the primary spaces for the assessment of PSTs' practice. This binary conception of HEI and school as separate spaces for assessment of practice was challenged when face-to-face activities in both HEIs and schools were not an option due to HEI and school closures. Teacher educators were forced to consider new spaces for assessment of practice. The '*third space*' represents 'a hybrid terrain where different perspectives can be straddled, the difference between the two negotiated, recombined and extended (Lewis 2012, 32). It initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (Bhabha 1994, 1).

This research draws on the experiences of ten teacher educators across five ITE programmes in one university to examine the extent to which the process of assessment of PSTs' practice was enabled or restrained to move into this '*third space*'. The focus offers one example from the (Name of programme removed for review purposes) which proffers an explanation of *what* redesign happened to SP; *what* shape the new assessment took; and *who or what* influenced this assessment in the online '*third space*'. Consequently, the research question asked: *Who and what influenced the move into the '*third space*' of the process of SP assessment practice in ITE programmes in one institution because of COVID-19?* We begin this paper by outlining the theoretical framework based on hybridity theory, third space and configurational sociology.

## Theoretical framework

### ***Hybridity theory and '*third space*'***

Hybridity theory and '*third space*' is rooted in Bhabha's (1994, 2004) analysis of cultural identity and colonisation where the '*third space*' is one, which spans the 'in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures ... [and] the consequent ability to negotiate the difference' (Hoogvelt 1997, 158). In ITE, the third space centres mainly on a hybrid space emerging between university and school boundaries, and challenges accepted wisdom and enables new possibilities (Lewis 2012). Zeichner (2010) describes a number of US hybrid spaces that aim to connect university-based courses for PSTs' education and their field experiences off-campus. Constructing such spaces in teacher education, he claims, 'involves an equal and more dialectical relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge in support of PST learning' (p.92).

The online environment can act as a tool that has the possibility of expanding the present space of SP. Over the last decade, many HEIs have successfully used a succession of technological advances to reach out to students who are distance learning, out in the field or engaged in lifelong learning (Murtagh et al. 2023, Palmer et al. 2015, Keengwe and Kidd 2010). Donlon (2019) highlights that online environments:

Include a more sustained and dialogical engagement between student-teacher and tutor throughout the duration of the placement, enhanced levels and quality of support that tutors can extend to student-teachers while on placement and more productive face- to-face communication between tutors and students (p.1).

This dialogic space can probe, construct, and assess skills, attitudes and pedagogical judgements that need to be further explained and interrogated. Moran's (2018) study of PSTs and secondary school students concluded that, 'Digital third spaces and online collaborative networks can serve as viable sites for authentic field experiences when face-to-face partnerships are difficult' (p.233). The lens of hybridity theory and the third space will assist this study to examine the extent to which the assessment of PSTs' practice is able to move into the 'third space'. Under this over-frame, a specific focus will be placed on who and/or what influenced how far it was possible to move into the 'third space' in re-imagining and re-designing assessment practices. To achieve this objective, the theoretical framework of configurational sociology as the lens through which the researchers can explore the complexity of the assessment redesign process will be utilised.

### ***Configurational sociology***

Configurational sociology allows us to acknowledge, focus on, and explore the people who make action(s) (influenced by their interdependent relationships). Norbert Elias (1978) developed a concept of a figuration, or a network of interdependent relationships, for such exploration. Elias argued that people can only be understood within their networks of interdependent relationships, and we should understand associated action (*the what*) with the influence of such interdependent relationships (van Krieken 1998). The complexity of a figuration is emphasised when we consider the layers of interdependent relationships. In other words, a figuration consists of face-to-face and non-face-to-face interdependent relationships both past and present, recognised and unrecognised (Green 2002). Social processes, for example, educational processes and political processes are also included within these figurations. Two interconnected concepts associated with a figuration are: (i) power and (ii) habitus. Power, which is central to a figuration, can be seen as 'a structural characteristic ... of all human relationships' (Elias 1978, 74) and not something one holds. Power is not static but rather places people in powerful positions. As such, power balances are unbalanced and relationships 'within figuration are seen as both enabling and constraining depending on the location of power' (Keay 2010, 231). Habitus is constructed through a person's figuration (Elias 1978). Habitus is a personality structure that is so deeply habituated that it can be considered 'second nature', which influences human action (Mennell and Goudsblom 1998). We drew on these three inter-related concepts: networks of interdependent relationships, power and habitus to understand who and what influenced the re-imagining and re-designing of assessment practices in ITE.

## The context of ITS and SP in Ireland

Primary and post-primary ITE in Ireland is located in state-funded HEIs, with the exception of one private, for profit provider. Concurrent (undergraduate) and consecutive (post-graduate) programmes are reviewed and professionally accredited by the Teaching Council of Ireland, which is the statutory professional standards body for the teaching profession in Ireland. The current reconceptualised framework for ITE stems from the Council's policy on the continuum of teacher education (The Teaching Council 2011) and updated Council documents relating to standards for ITE (2020a); procedures for programme accreditation (2021b); and guidelines specifically relating to school placement (2021a). Requirements in relation to ITE programme structure and associated credits are set out in Table 1.

Hall et al. (2018) acknowledge that 'the ultimate responsibility for the ITE programme, including the SP element, lies with the HEI' (p.32) but also note that 'schools are viewed as central, experienced teachers are encouraged to serve as cooperating teachers (CTs) and school-HEI partnerships are essential to this agenda' (p.20). The roles and responsibilities of the HEI and school personnel are set out in the *Guidelines on School Placement* (The Teaching Council 2021a) and in *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (The Teaching Council 2020a). During the placement period, the PST works with a HEI-appointed school placement tutor whose role it is 'to support and mentor student teachers and evaluate their practice while on placement' (The Teaching Council 2020a, 5) and a school-based cooperating teacher (referred to under the Irish title of *Treoráí* which translates as 'guide') who 'supports and guides the student teacher during his/her school placement experience. In a post-primary setting, a student teacher may be placed in a number of different classes and may, therefore, collaborate with a number of different *Treoraithe* [plural of *Treoráí*] across a number of subject areas' (The Teaching Council 2020a, 6). While the concept of HEI-school partnership and a *shared vision for school placement* are espoused and developed in Council policy and related documents (The Teaching Council 2020a, 2021a), in-school *Treoraithe* [cooperating teachers] do not have a formal role in the

**Table 1.** ITE programme balance (The Teaching Council 2020a).

	Consecutive Programmes Minimum 2 years (120 ECTS)		Concurrent Programmes Minimum 4 Years (240 ECTS)	
	Primary	Post-Primary	Primary	Post-Primary
Foundation and Professional Studies (Minimum ECTS specified)	50% (60 ECTS)	50% (60 ECTS)	55% (132 ECTS)	25% (60 ECTS)
School Placement (Minimum ECTS specified)	40% (48 ECTS) (24 weeks)	40% (48 ECTS) (24 weeks or equivalent)	25% (60 ECTS) (30 weeks)	25% (60 ECTS) (30 weeks or equivalent)
Subject Disciplines				50% (120 ECTS)
Discretionary Time (Maximum ECTS specified)	10% (12 ECTS)	10% (12 ECTS)	20% (24 ECTS)	
Tréimse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht <sup>2</sup>	4 weeks (2 blocks of 2 weeks)	As per curricular subject requirements	4 weeks (2 blocks of 2 weeks)	As per curricular subject requirements



supervision and evaluation of PSTs (O'Grady 2017). Commentators have expressed concern that the system is based on 'loose informal partnership ... potentially impacted by wider competing policy agendas, driven by performativity in HEIs and schools' (Gorman and Furlong 2023, 208) and that 'the level of partnership and sharing of professional responsibility for placement between colleges and schools which the Council had envisioned has yet to materialise' (Clarke and O'Doherty 2021, 65).

## Assessment in teacher education

The centrality of assessment in HEIs has emerged as one of the most important challenges since the pivot online during Covid-19. It was incumbent on ITE programmes to respond to the changing needs due to COVID-19 restrictions (Kumar 2020). What this response required was a level of re-imagination to construct new authentic sites of practice through redesigned learning outcomes/experiences and a reconceptualisation of assessment. For PSTs, the application of their learning in an on-site SP was no longer feasible due 'to the collapse of classroom spaces and school walls with teachers and learners moving swiftly to technological environments and e-spaces' (International Educational Assessment Network 2021, 3). The turn to a 'third space' for placement – the hybrid space – required new technological knowledge and skills alongside content and pedagogical knowledge (Mishra and Koehler 2006). An investigation by Mottiar et al. (2022), in the wake of COVID-19 noted in their 'Typology of Assessment Responses to Covid-19' some HEI's were either *reacting* by moving their assessment online; were *adaptive responders* who modified assessments slightly for the online space; were *opportunists* who used the pandemic to implement strategies they had already considered; or were *committed innovators* who ongoingly look to innovate assessment strategies and continue to do so. Their research found that in the altering of any assessment, decisions need to be made around pedagogy, practical considerations and the availability of support.

Most ITE programmes in the (name of ITE provider removed for review) moved their SP<sup>3</sup> to an online format where PSTs constructed synchronous or asynchronous lessons. This change was actioned by ITEs across the globe as the main process of redesign of SP (Watermeyer, Crick, Knight and Goodall 2021). Our paper situates itself in this redesign but brings a lens to the network of interdependent relationships that were at play in the assessment process.

The introduction of a 'viva' on some programmes as one element of an online assessment indicated the new priority and value that the HEI was willing to place on supporting the learning and development of the PST (Medland 2016). There seemed to be a shift from the historic focus on a single summative examination at the end of a module to certify a student. This traditional approach encourages the perception of assessment as quantifiable and promotes an environment of competition and comparison (Boud 2022). The pivot to the online space was a catalyst to a multiplicity of formative and summative assessment approaches, which offered an expanded range of different purposes to ensure effective support for each student. The network of interdependent relationships had changed for the PST. PST's had little access to a cooperating teacher who had previously acted as one of the most powerful influences on the quality of the PST teaching experience (Weiss and Weiss 2001, 134) so they needed further support from their HEI tutor. The new purposes of assessment were to scaffold learning for the PST in the new online site of

SP through feedback (Boud and Molloy 2013) but also to ensure a fair, valid, and democratic process of certification whereby the power of both HEI tutor and PST voices were heard.

The 'third space' took the structure of an online interview between the PST and tutor in the form of a viva, presenting the opportunity for in-depth, formative dialogue to take place about a specific asynchronous/synchronous lesson. If we take one concurrent programme as an example, the (Name of programme removed for review purposes), there is a clear spiral of learning with a concentration on particular skill sets of progression over the four years of the programme. The following [Table 2](#) below offers an overview of the progressive skill set that a PST engages with over the course of the four-year programme. The skill sets listed align with the Learning Outcomes of the different yearly modules, the theme of the placement module for the year, and Teaching Council *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (The Teaching Council 2016).

The assessment of the acquisition of skills by a HEI SP tutor demands not only an in-depth pedagogical understanding of what a PST should know, understand and be able to do but an assessment literacy of expected standards and norms. HEI SP tutors and teacher educators needed to keep abreast of research and policy innovations (Popham 2009), so any redesign of assessment had to be accompanied by the professional development of both. One of the challenges of this assessment reimaging process was/is the low levels of teacher educator assessment literacy (Young, MacPhail, and Tannehill 2022). Young et al. (2022) research, which explored teacher educators' perceptions and use of assessment, found that many teacher educators did not explicitly make the connection between pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (i.e. instructional alignment). Their research reinforces the need for assessment literacy professional development opportunities for teacher educators. Interestingly, the data for their research was gathered before the pandemic and the move to the online space, which encouraged/pushed a need to rethink and redesign assessment practices in ITE. This, alongside the introduction of *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (The Teaching Council 2020a) which recognises teacher educators' critical role in the (re)development of ITE programmes, may have created an unbeknown perfect storm in addressing Young et al. (2022) concerns. MacPhail (2020) suggested, 'The pandemic could profoundly change teacher education for the better, supporting the notion that 'necessity really is the mother of invention'(p.53).

## **The assessment redesign**

Pre-Covid 19 restrictions, the assessment of SP on the (Name of programme removed for review purposes) consisted of two formative micro teaching experiences in Years 1 and 2 of the programme along with in-school placement over the four years ranging from two weeks in Year 1 growing to twelve/thirteen weeks in Year 4. The summative assessment of SP incorporated assessment of the PST's e-portfolio for the duration of the placement experience; their level of professionalism; and supervised lessons by university tutors in the school context (one in each of the two subject areas in Years 1–3 and two in each of the two subject areas over the long placement in Year 4). As a result of Covid-19, the new placement experience for first, second and third years was fully online via the Teaching Online Placement (TOP) where students planned synchronous/asynchronous lessons and

**Table 2.** Overview of the skills developed for SP in the (name of programme removed for review purposes).

Skill set	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th year
Professionalism, Ethical Standards & Critical Reflective Practice	Introduced in first year	Expanded in second year	Expanded in third year	Expanded in fourth year
Planning & Preparation for ...	Previously: Classroom lessons & microteaching Covid Experience: Synchronous lessons	Previously: Classroom lessons & microteaching Covid Experience: Synchronous & Asynchronous lessons	Previously: Classroom: Covid Experience: Synchronous & Asynchronous lessons	Previously: Classroom: Covid Experience: It was hoped to have classroom but changed to Viva Preparation for synchronous & asynchronous lessons also
Development of content knowledge, skills and values	Previous: Schemes of Work Covid Experience: Building a Unit of Learning in both disciplines	Previous: Schemes of Work Covid Experience: Building 2 Units of Learning in both disciplines	Previous: Schemes of Work Covid Experience: Building a range of Units of Learning across both disciplines for 6 week block	Previous: Schemes of Work Covid Experience: Building a range of Units of Learning across both disciplines for 12/13 week block
Teacher Communication Skills	Main focus of first year	Further expanded in second year	Further expanded in third year	Further expanded in fourth year
Teaching and Learning Methodological Skills	Introduced in first year	Main focus of second year	Further expanded in third year	Further expanded in third year
Classroom and Lesson Management	Previous: Introduced in 1st year Covid Experience: Online lesson management	Previous: Expanded in 2nd year Covid Experience: Online lesson management	Previous: Expanded in 3rd year Covid Experience: Online lesson management	Further expanded in fourth year
Formative & Summative Assessment	Introduced in 1st year	Main focus of second year	Further expanded in third year	Further expanded in fourth year
Inclusive Practice	Introduced to first years	Further expanded in second year	Further expanded in third year	Main focus in fourth year
Culture & Context	Introduced in an online experience	Expanded to a two week on school site observational and team-teaching experience	Further expanded observation and team-teaching on school site for two weeks	Further expanded observation and team-teaching on school site for three weeks
E-portfolio and reflective practice	Introduced to first years	Further expanded in second year	Further expanded in third year	Creativity expected in fourth year

taught lessons to their peers synchronously online. The redesign of SP saw each year group in Years 1–3 engaged in different iterations of TOP which necessitated a redesign of the learning outcomes, new skill sets, and support offered.

The new assessment process was supported by new rubrics and feedback instruments to capture the 'third space'. The rubric focused on two main themes: (i) professionalism and (ii) preparation and planning. For the new 4th-year assessment, the tutor would first access the e-portfolio of lesson planning belonging to the PST, choose a lesson they wished to discuss and set up a viva via a Zoom meeting for forty-five minutes with the PST. The areas of discussion ranged from the PST's professionalism; preparation and planning; knowledge of content; teacher communication skills; classroom and lesson management; teaching and learning methodologies; assessment of, for and as learning; inclusive practice, their e-portfolio and the myriad of feelings and beliefs of the PST underpinning their work. The PST was encouraged to ask questions and offered the space to explain their professional decisions. Following the meeting, the tutor would fill in a *Teacher Skills Observation Instrument*, offering formative feedback on the different areas discussed. They would then re-meet with the student to engage in dialogue about the feedback and to progress the skill set forward. Whilst it is very difficult to balance the power relations in such a discussion, tutors were advised to give the PST space to voice their response and any concerns. A summative grade would be decided by the tutor at the end of placement and after they had followed the progress of the implementation of the feedback. This grade was an agreed grade awarded the PST's tutors and encompassed an evaluation of professionalism over the course of the placement; E-portfolio contents; and the vivas carried out via Zoom.

Developing and changing assessment in ITE is a highly challenging process (Priestley et al. 2021). Globalisation has fuelled the demand for the HEI to produce teachers who can educate pupils to become contributors to the world economy and marketplace (Bates and Townsend 2007). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has turned their attention to assessment as an instrument to procure such a demand. In their *Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Synergies for Better Learning* (OECD 2013), there was a shift from the traditional approach to a more expanded understanding of assessment. They argue that 'Authentic, valid and reliable evaluation and assessment, those which lead to the improvement of educational practices at all levels and lift student learning, are central to establishing a high-performing education system' (p.3). Assessment has moved to a format that is real, contextualised, and problematised, i.e. applicable to the 'real-world' (Villarroel et al. 2018). The hybrid space of the Online Viva opened the potential for the PST to look to their past planning, discuss it in the present, and see new possibilities for their future application to the real world of the classroom. It allowed for more than observation of content and planning. The dialogue tried to move beyond the binary of theory and practice to a new space – 'third space' - the understanding and interplay of knowledge, skills, environment and relationships between student and teacher. The move to the third space for placement required the creation of an assessment and feedback process that centralised the formative element rather than the summative. It positioned relationships involved in the assessment as a central component in the process of eliciting, interpreting, and using evidence of learning to make decisions about the future needs of the student (Black and Wiliam 1998).

## Methodology

This investigation is situated in qualitative research and adopted a self-study approach (Loughran 2007). Using a qualitative method, the research focused on enhancing the



educator's professional practice through collaborative interactions with others. Self-Study is defined by LaBoskey (2004) as 'self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and, it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness' (p.1). Educators seek to research their practice by documenting and making it explicit, thus improving and validating their own professional knowledge and expertise and simultaneously adding to the knowledge base.

The participants of this study were purposively sampled (Bryman 2012) through invitation by the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning. Ten teacher educators were included. These ten teacher educators taught across five-teacher ITE programmes in a variety of settings, each of which had an element of SP or 'settings' embedded. All ten had a range of teaching experience from early career to established academics. The research occurred in two phases. In phase one, the 10 teacher educators were placed into dyads (five groups) whereby they:

- (i) Individually reflected on, documented and evaluated their experiences of providing online support for placement;
- (ii) Engaged in mutually supportive professional conversations about this with their partner; and
- (iii) Discussed and summarised their experiences and the emerging key insights from their shared reflection, recorded on Zoom

Phase 1 consisted of three written reflections and three recorded meetings per dyad. In phase 2, all dyads shared a summary document with the research team in advance of online meetings. Recorded full group meetings were used to discuss commonalities and differences across dyads. An external individual (Author X) was recruited to conduct data analysis of all written and recorded data in order to provide a critical, detached perspective. Data was analysed using Charmaz's (2014) approach to coding data (initial, focused, and theoretical). In the initial coding phase, all data was coded through an incident-to-incident technique. The codes represented the participants words to limit analyst interpretation. In the second phase of coding (focused), categories and sub-categories were constructed through a selective and conceptual manner (Weed 2009). These categories and sub-categories were then presented to the authorship theme which allowed a conceptual discussion on theoretical frameworks which best explained the data. Through this discussion and following coding (phase three – theoretical coding), theoretical connections were made between 'third space'/figurational sociology and the constructed data. As a result of the data analysis on assessment, three themes were constructed which will be discussed below. Ethical approval for the study was granted by Higher Education Institute's research Ethics Committee.

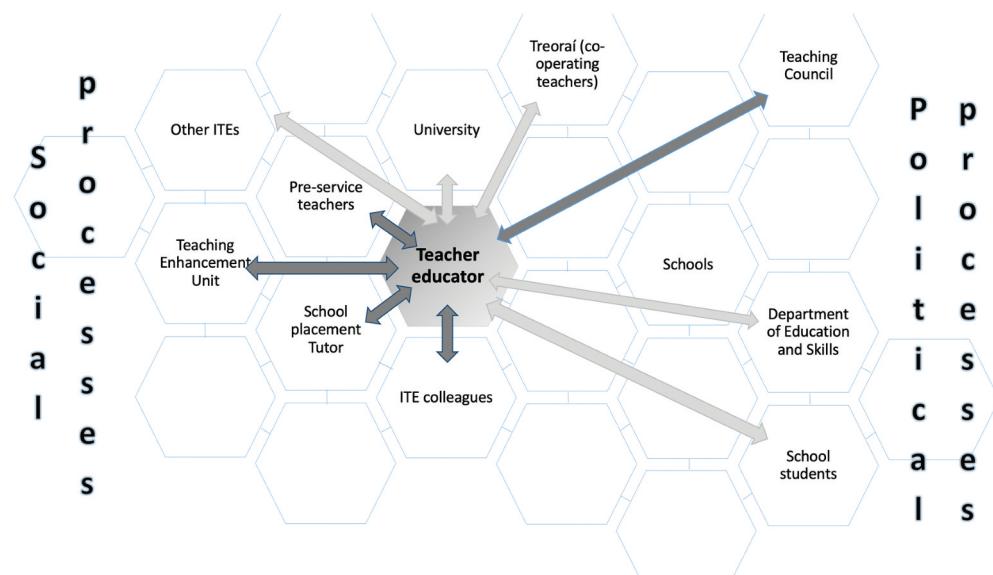
## Findings

The three key themes emerging from the research included: (i) A network of interdependent relationships influencing teacher educators' reimaging and redesigning the assessment processes; (ii) The influence of external interdependent relationships and context(s); and (iii) The role(s) of assessor for the teacher educator in relation to the PST. These three themes will be outlined before moving onto a discussion and considerations.

### **Theme 1: a network of interdependent relationships influencing teacher educators' reimaging and redesigning the assessment processes**

This theme explores the complexity of the figuration which the teacher educator inhabits, and the supporting, constraining, encouraging, and/or discouraging interdependent relationships which advanced and/or hindered the development of assessment practices. This theme provides the 'big picture' before delving into an exploration of the wider external interdependent relationships (theme 2) and the internal interdependent relationships (theme 3).

Figure 1 was constructed to visualise a teacher educator's figuration in the reimagining and redesigning of assessment practices as it emerged from the findings of the study. The teacher educator is located in the middle of the Figure and each hexagon around the teacher educator represents a group of interdependent people, for example, PSTs, SP tutors and module co-ordinators. Some of the interdependent relationships emerging from the data are stronger than others (denoted by the shade of the multi-directional arrow), for example, PSTs who the teacher educator interacts with on a daily/weekly basis. Some of the interdependent relationships are face-to-face (i.e. the hexagons beside the teacher educator, e.g. HEI colleagues) and others are non-face-to-face (i.e. the hexagons further away from the teacher educator, e.g. Teaching Council). The hexagons on the circumference of the Figure are open-ended to represent the many other interdependent relationships, which are not captured on this Figure. Social and political processes (OECD, 2021) are ever-present, and this is captured on both the left- and right-hand side of the Figure. Similar to Scanlon et al. (2020) work, this Figure explicates the complexity of the situation in which the teacher educator inhabits, in that the teacher educator is only one element in this complex situation and this figural outlook 'can give a deeper



**Figure 1.** A network of interdependent relationships influencing teacher educators' reimaging and redesigning the assessment process as they emerged from the findings of the research study (frame adapted from Scanlon et al. 2020).

understanding of the extent to which the teacher [educator] (as one person) has on this process' (p.15).

As the teacher educators engaged in a reimagining of assessment practices in response to the move to the online space, it might be assumed that the teacher educator had agency over this process. However, this was not the case (see [Figure 1](#)). Multiple interdependent relationships influenced the teacher educators' actions in this redesign process (and in some cases, an unbeknown influence). For example, PST's, a face-to-face interdependent relationship in the teacher educator's figuration, influenced this process, as one participant recalls:

'I found myself in a position having to develop alternative assessments for students and communicating this out. This was very challenging as students felt aggrieved and pushed back complaining of additional workload'. [P10]

As we work through the following two themes, other examples of influential interdependent relationships on the redesigning assessment process are evident. We now focus on themes two and three which delve deeper into these influencing interdependent relationships at an internal (i.e. strong face-to-face interdependent relationships) and external (i.e. non-face-to-face interdependent relationships) level.

### ***Theme 2: the influence of external interdependent relationships and context(s)***

An examination of the data for who/what influenced the re-imagining and re-designing of the assessment of placement unearths the influence of a number of external interdependent relationships and contexts at play. With the closure of schools, the whole question of context and structures around the assessment of placement came to the fore. Heretofore, assessment of placement, particularly in the latter years of ITE programmes, was firmly rooted in the school context with HEI SP tutor supervisory visits to school classrooms being the predominant mode of assessment.<sup>4</sup> Guidance Notes were issued by (the Teaching Council [2020b](#)) in August 2020 and outlined some of the new modes of assessment which HEIs had implemented over the previous five months. The new sites of practice and learning now included (i) on-site teaching and learning in schools (subject to public health advice and guidance from the Department of Education); (ii) synchronous classes live online; (iii) asynchronous teaching and learning; and (iv) home-school collaboration. These new structural and contextual changes highlight how teacher educators' non-face-to-face interdependent relationships, e.g. public health sector, Department of Education, and the Teaching Council (i.e. the hexagons further out on [Figure 1](#)) very much influenced the teaching context and the possibilities (or not) of reimagining and redesigning assessment practices. Opportunities arising from the new structural and contextual changes were commented on by (P6) who highlighted that new partnerships were possible with practising teachers in the online context:

... [school] teachers [working as tutors] ... came on board with us this year that we wouldn't have had before ... we couldn't avail of that in the onsite space because given their full teaching timetable, the likelihood of them getting out to supervise a student in a different school, it's very tight ... but where they could engage online with our students [supervising students teaching peers via synchronous and asynchronous lessons] and bring[ing] that day to day knowledge with them, the students were benefiting from that.

It can be seen therefore that partnerships which did not emerge previously were now possible in the 'third space' of the online context. The changed structures also allowed more possibilities for partnership and professional learning in the triadic partnership of HEI, school and pre-service teacher in this 'third space':

... they [practising teachers] brought some of what they were learning about new Junior Cycle,<sup>5</sup> ... they [also] remarked ... that they in turn learned a huge amount themselves. So, ... that partnership, ... our practice going forward could link into that and try and maybe get more out of the benefits of that too and it will benefit everybody at that wider professional learning community [level].(P6)

One non-face-to-face interdependent relationship, which heavily influenced the redesigning process, was the Teaching Council given their prominent role in ITE. This research highlights how events and new forms of assessment of placement overtook national policy and the need for this to be addressed going forward. Referring to Teaching Council documents published during the pandemic, *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (The Teaching Council 2020a) and *Guidelines on School Placement* (The Teaching Council 2021a), P6 reflects:

... one line in the Céim document refers to 200 hours direct teaching time in the school<sup>6</sup> and that has become so outdated now even though it was published in 2020 ... there's a need to come back not just at our [teacher educator] level, but to come back nationally to that document and to look at it, you know, the experience that we've been through and that it's not just about direct teaching in the classroom, it's this new medium of online as well, that this needs to be included in that document and there needs to be ... like this hybrid model that we're working with now

Another teacher educator takes it further when she talks about the need for events and subsequent research to point the way at a national and global level:

I think the school has moved out beyond even the school to this globalised idea. So, ... we have to prepare them for this, and to continue with a normative approach that school placement is them going into a school is ... irresponsible ... , I think, the problem with the students is they're caught ... because there's a whole limited space for them there. They're caught in the old way of thinking about what a teacher is and now we need to move them to a whole new way of thinking. (P5)

However, while some participants noted that school personnel '*enjoyed this new approach and have asked if we would consider using it going forward*'(P10), there were instances where political and public policy restrictions came into play; other constraining non-face-to-face interdependent relationships. On the one hand, P5 observed, '*... the pandemic, while it threw up many challenges, provided us with opportunities that might have taken years to negotiate but for the situation we found ourselves in. It did ... leave us a blank canvas to allow our imagination to run free*'; difficulties arose in trying to negotiate with schools to accommodate online placement citing reasons of trade union objections and GDPR restrictions. Schools were willing to allow final year students allocated on staff to teach online via the school platform but were not willing to allow students to be supervised online by HEI tutors. We can see here that the teacher educator is enabled and constrained by the multiple face-to-face (e.g. colleagues and schools) and non-face-to-face (e.g. trade unions and teaching council) interdependent relationships in their redesigning processes.



The issue of partnership and the difficulty of '*navigating the terrain of multiple stakeholders*' (P8) which this participant lists as schools, DES, Teaching Council, Teacher Unions, staff and students amongst others – all influential interdependent relationships in a teacher educator's figuration – prompts a call for '*a national coherent and comprehensive strategy for the delivery of SP within ITE programmes that binds stakeholders together*' to move HEI-school partnership from '*operating in borderland territory*' (P8). (P7) concludes that:

Until players, particularly those with agency in the field, are around the table talking meaningfully about actualising this partnership between schools and ITE providers the 'dream' will never become a reality. The issuing of mandates is never going to work leaning to bureaucratic compliance at best and disengagement at worst. (P7)

### ***Theme 3: the role(s) of assessor for the teacher educator***

This theme 'zooms in' on the teacher educator at the centre of the figuration who was suddenly tasked with developing new sites for placement. During this pivot, they not only reimaged new sites but also had to develop processes that would assess and evaluate the PST as they engaged with the new online placement experience. Central to this theme was the changing role and identity of the teacher educator as assessor as they confronted new purposes, processes and practices for assessment in the third space:

The student's capacity to focus on their professional practice and to situate that practice in this alternative setting has altered my thinking .... I now realise that a very real and meaningful teaching and learning experience has taken place, however it is the student's experience and not the learner's [pupil's] experience. This has encouraged me to approach the alternative assessment in a different way by acknowledging the assessment as relevant not just as an alternative to what was previously delivered but relevant to students' professional development regardless of external circumstances. (P3)

This participant notes that the new assessment in the form of the viva, switches the focus onto the professional choices and judgements made by the PST and the pedagogical and theoretical purposes for these choices. Data highlight that this new site of practice caused '*a disruption to ways of thinking but which encouraged transformation and new learning*' (P6). There is acknowledgement from participants that the online site of practice offers growth in the PST's identity as teacher as it offers them a space to verbalise not only their epistemological understanding but their ontology of education. It responds to '*the changing needs of the twenty-first century student and the emerging role of the teacher as a professional*' (P5). The assessment of this new site was a source of concern for teacher educators who desired that '*assessment must be re-thought*' (P9) and '*there is scope to permanently change the "visit" as the key assessment into something more student directed and professionally reflective and proactive*' (P9). In this rethinking, assessment standards needed to continue to be '*authentic*' (P4) and to '*try to safeguard the integrity of the SP module and the "teaching experience" for students*' (P4). This onerous task of changing the assessment engaged the teacher educator in the communication of the new changes not only to the students involved but also to tutors – a strong, face-to-face interdependent relationship in the teacher educator's figuration.

There was a recognition amongst the participants that the PST was entering a profession that had changed considerably due to curricular reform, technology innovation and Covid-19. All believed that change in relation to SP was imperative and '*a new lens*' had been needed even before the pandemic. Data illustrated that the focus of this new form of SP had to be about '*building stronger relationships*' and a more democratic power balance with the PSTs in order to '*create a better understanding of the role of the teacher, rather than the staged observation and conversation that occurred previously*' (P1). This desire is captured in the concern of one of the participants in their reflection on how the new assessment space online might work:

Arts education talks about disembodied spaces . . . Is this what I am experiencing as I plan for the tutorial? Is this how the students will feel about it? How will the Zoom tutorial feel? Will there be the kind of connection that I usually hope to have based on the shared experience of having sat in the teacher's school, in a space they provided for me and read their notes before spending time in their classroom observing them teach? Heading into an anonymous Zoom room feels very different. I set up the room so there might be a shift in the power, balance versus the traditional face to face tutorial when I am a visitor to the teacher's space? It seems to me that I will need to be even more conscious of/focused on giving power to the teacher. Initially, I planned to email a draft report to the student in advance of the tutorial and start by asking my usual questions: Well how do you think that went [lesson]? What is your response to the feedback? Those questions are not quite right for the online space so I will need to plan the wording/opening remarks carefully. (P5)

What was emerging was the idea that the online space was a shared space between the PST and tutor, and it belonged to them both. The interdependent relationship between the PST and the teacher educator was one of the strongest influences on the process of assessment change. The consideration of the professional and personal needs of the PST had both a freeing and restricting influence on their decisions.

The role of the tutor came under scrutiny during this period and the growing conflict of roles that a tutor now had to carry out. Previously, a tutor would go on a site visit and offer feedback in a conversation at the end of this visit. One participant questioned, '*our whole approach to placement visits*' (P10) and asked:

Are we creating unnatural environments to assess a student's learning? Does this form of assessment reflect a true account of a student's abilities? Should we be focusing more on the level of mentoring they receive in a setting?'. (P10)

In the new sites of placement, the teacher educator experienced a growing complexity around defining the role of the tutor as assessor. Data posed the question as to how the tutor can navigate the role of assessor alongside the role of mentor. The context of the pandemic placed PSTs away from their usual support of classmates, cooperating teachers and school – which also indicates the complexity in this situation when we consider the overlapping figurations of PSTs and teacher educators. They were isolated and their main connection with the university in relation to placement was the tutor. This changed the emphasis of the role of the tutor to one of mentor and precipitated a more pastoral care and '*empathetic*' (P3) orientation.

... the role of tutor is, in and of itself, a complex one. On one hand, the tutor must monitor and assess the activities, performance and development of a student teacher during a SP

period; on the other hand, the tutor must also mentor the student, by providing formative feedback and advice. I ask myself, where does/should the balance lie in terms of where one role stops and another begins? (P4)

Throughout the narrative, the escalation of the role of tutor as mentor occurred due to the need to support and '*bolster up*' (P6) student teachers in the new sites of practice. One participant observed: '*The role of the tutor offered much more scaffolding than before . . . . This year there was an ongoing connection between emails and zooms*' (P5). The dearth of social connection in the new sites of placement inspired not only an ongoing social presence from the tutor but far more time and encouraging formative feedback:

It is one thing that became very clear in both remote and physical placement, the level of the mentoring a student receives on placement directly impacts on their learning and overall experience. They need support and supervision when on placement. (P10)

One of the modes of assessment adopted in the third space in the form of a viva online with the PST tried to bridge the social gap. These viva conversations were to be a mix of both formative and summative assessment:

The intention of the conversation was to assess the students' professional practice (with a greater emphasis on planning in this case) and to engage the student in a discussion about the rationale for their chosen teaching and learning activities. (P3)

There was consensus in data that these professional conversations were a powerful form of assessment and needed to continue after the COVID-19 pivot. The engagement in dialogue with a student teacher offered a space whereby the tutor was '*struck by the level of planning and preparation and consideration involved*' (P3) and their ability to '*reflect on practice*' (P10). During these online conversations, the tutor could assess not only knowledge but also the PST's understanding of their '*craft*' (P5) and identify their '*art*' (P5) and creativity. This mode also allowed for individual as well as group conversations and tutors were amazed at the engagement of the students as part of a team. The new site of placement valued '*working collaboratively in teams*' rather than individualised practice and reflection.

Working in isolation is no longer feasible. The focus to date for the assessment of SP has been individual - the final mark attained by the student teacher is based on individual preparation and planning, individual practice, individual self-reflection. Values are always reflected in assessment and we have valued individual assessment to this point. The benefit of students engaging with input in relation to teamwork and reviewing the benefits of working collaboratively in teams cannot be underestimated. (P5)

In this case, the emphasis is placed on the strong interdependent relationship between teacher educator and PST.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge an underpinning strong interdependent relationship in the teacher educator's figuration in this redesigning process – other teacher educators. The possibilities of extended partnership were recognised between the teacher educators working on different programmes within the HEI, who because of the need to move and make changes quickly, worked together, shared practice and, as a consequence benefitted from an extended community of practice. One comment highlights this in particular, when (P9) states that she '*would hate for us to go back into our silos*'. This, again, highlights how we can operate and use strong interdependent

relationships to our advantage (while also recognising how they, and other interdependent relationships can limit such processes).

## **Discussion and considerations**

The aim of this paper was to explore the redesigning of the process of assessment of SP and figuralional sociology allowed us to focus on the network of 'who' and 'what' occupied that reimagining process. The following discussion explores the SP third space in relation to:

- (a) The opportunities and challenges it faced in relation to the network of interdependent relationships in the process of assessment change for SP.
- (b) The opportunities and challenges digital technology offered to a new assessment process in creating a third space.
- (c) The opportunities and challenges for connecting to the policy and political space.

### ***The network of interdependent relationships in assessment for SP***

The OECD, in their review of ITE (2021), stated that countries are rethinking the role of field experience in school and should adopt a broad vision of initial preparation for teaching. The traditional approach no longer meets the needs of PSTs in an era of globalised and digital teaching, learning and assessment. A 'third space' (Bhabha 1994, 2004, Zeichner 2010) for placement – an online context – was/is needed. This digital space was external to both the university and the school, and this was a space to be constructed by teacher educators, centralising the PST in the development of their professional identity, influenced by their numerous interdependent relationships through a reimagining process.

During this reimagining phase, and emphasised by the findings in this paper, immediate social relationships in each ITE programme became the centre of activity. While influenced by numerous face-to-face, non-face-to-face, recognised and unrecognised interdependent relationships, the strong interdependent relationships recognisably influenced this reimagining process (i.e. PSTs, other teacher educators, and tutors as the teacher educator interacted with these groups of people on a daily/weekly basis). The practising teacher as tutor was a new role in this interdependent relationship and for the first time in Ireland the practising teacher engaged in the assessment of the PST in the third space. Morrison (2008) argues that a complex system is highly pragmatic and that in the process of a system evolving itself from within, 'it is the local circumstances that dictate the nature of the emerging self-organisation' (p.20). As there was no immediate response from political agencies (i.e. non-face-to-face interdependent relationship), this pause offered a creative space for self-organisation and the teacher educator turned to their strong interdependent relationships (i.e. PSTs, other teacher educators, and tutors). What emerged from these dialogues was the centrality of the needs of the PST as they entered into the third space. It was not just digital competency but an understanding of the pedagogical and personal implications of this new space (Donlon et al. 2021). The PST was partaking in professional practice and engaging in learning to take on the role and identity of the teacher in a time of great disruption.

As indicated in the findings, there was a shift across the five programmes to formative assessment practices and a move away from a predominantly summative approach. Globally, there has been a paradigm shift in assessment practices (Baeten, Struyven, and Dochy 2013) transforming from a culture of objective and standardised tests towards the use of formative assessment (Villarroel et al., 2018). Whilst other countries have made momentous traction in the use of formative assessment in SP (Birenbaum et al. 2015), the pandemic offered a space in this Irish institute to join this developing trajectory. Assessment policy had long been viewed as a weakness in the Irish education system (Hall and Kavanagh 2002, Looney 2006, 2018). Formative assessment attempts to support the PSTs' learning of a complex range of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, and dispositions as they begin to emerge in their identity as teachers. The assessment in the third space became more authentic with a greater focus on the interplay between their real world of professional planning and formative assessment. It linked knowledge and skills with the new everyday world of teacher planning and practice of synchronous and asynchronous lessons. Through the professional conversations and feedback between tutor and student teacher (Matthews et al. 2021), it contextualised the lesson and probed the decisions and judgements made. It problematised different aspects of the lesson so that reflection could take place on the pedagogy proposed. The third space closed the gap on the binary between theory and practice as it approached planning as something that is alive, ongoing, and very context driven. It required the use of higher-order skills and knowledge and the use of reflection. It privileged critical reasoning, judgement, evaluation, and creativity (Bloom, Masia and Krathwohl 1964). The role of the tutor moved from 'judge' to augment mentoring and the recognition that the usual support offered to the student teacher had changed (Hopper 2001).

These 'new' reimagined assessment practices should be fore fronted moving forward in ITE and not revert to pre-pandemic practices. The focus has become the PST themselves and the developing of their professional identity as a teacher. A new rethinking of how we can build triadic partnerships between the school, HEI and the PST so that a valid picture of practice can emerge is now an important consideration going forward. We concur with MacPhail (2020) and Campbell et al. (2021) in deeming 'this current moment in time ... as a chance to shape the future to create ... a "new normal"' (p.5). To return to traditional placement experiences alone and ignore the digital 'third space' and changes in assessment would facilitate the loss of opportunities, which emerged during COVID-19 and opened up a new dimension for authentic partnership and communities of practice with practising teachers. The opportunity for practising teachers to engage as online tutors of PSTs and the emergent benefits in professional learning for all stakeholders came about because of individual teachers involving themselves in such work outside of the traditional structures. It is reasonable therefore to infer that while 'navigating the terrain of multiple stakeholders' (P8) proved difficult and threw up obstacles; the shift in the power balance within the ITE figuration allowed for the transfer from institutional power to that of individual change agents (Brown, White and Kelly 2021). This acted as an enabler of professional learning partnerships in a digital space, which were not possible to such an extent heretofore.

### ***The opportunities and challenges the digital technology offered to a new assessment process in creating a third space***

The third space moves SP into the arena of digital technology and the challenges of navigating the virtual space. The success of the process of assessment for SP depended on the ability of the teacher educator, PST, and HEI tutor to have the knowledge, skills and understanding of the technology, as well as the ethical wisdom to ensure it remained a safe space of dialogue for the PST (Carretero, Vuorikari and Punie 2017). The process of assessment in the third space focused on the PST's professional identity and preparation and planning. The digital technology of Zoom opened a new space that allowed the PST to be the centre of the dialogue and reflection. It disturbed the hierarchical approach to tutoring and moved it more into the space of mentoring. Mentoring is a personal-professional relationship between the PST and tutor, and traditionally it focussed on one learner and one teacher in the relationship (Mullen and Klimaitis 2019). The third space suggests that both PST and tutor are learners in the process. Beutel and Spooner-Lane (2009) explain that the success of mentoring relationships lies in the skills and knowledge of the mentors; yet this also necessitates developing professional – personal relationships. Both HEI tutor and PST owned the third space, and this helped to rethink the balance of power in this network of relationships. It promotes a richness and depth of understanding of the decisions made by the PST, allowing an exploration of the purposes of these choices and drawing on the learning from the tutors' own experience and practice. The third space championed recursivity of feedback through dialogue, sharing of assessment measuring tools and further dialogue. Doll (1993) advises that recursion aims at developing competence which he defines as the ability to inquire, combine, organise, and use something heuristically. The important thing is 'its frame is open' (p.218). The process of the viva online connected the PST and HEI tutor to future improvement and possibility rather than a final measurement that did not take account of future progress.

The third space is about processes and actions and integrates formative feedback into the heart of its structure. Cope et al. (2021) talk about how the digital space allows for 'ergative orientation' (p.1412) which they describe as work-focused measurement, assembling knowledge from different sources and assessing multimodal knowledge artefacts/as products and processes. The assessment in the third space had this ergative orientation in that the tutor engaged with the different sources of planning and preparation from the e-portfolio, the PST, their own experience, but also drew on the reflective e-portfolio as an artefact of knowledge that the PST had prepared. Other artefacts on offer were the many worksheets, videos, PowerPoint slides, resources and activities that allowed the tutor to glimpse into the educational vision and planning of the PST. The digital space has opened up a new possibility of learning through dialogue, reflection and sharing which offers an avenue for SP assessment that was often lacking. It has the potential to sit beside and enhance the school site visit where the focus is on the practice of teaching, learning and assessment. This research highlights the necessity for a change to how we might now integrate this third space and expand the traditional model of SP. Part of that expansion is understanding the network of interrelationships that both opened up opportunities or challenged the process of change through the digital space.

### ***The opportunity for connecting to the policy and political space***

In advocating for potential educational transformation of the 'third space', we turn to discuss the need for policy advocacy in ITE and detail this need through an example of a non-face-to-face interdependent relationship which was continually referenced throughout the data; that of the teacher educator and the Teaching Council. While this is an Irish contextual example, since the Bologna process, similar structures exist throughout Europe and similar issues may have been experienced. As such, the European teacher education community may learn from this Irish contextual example and engage in policy advocacy in their respective teacher education institutes. The disturbance caused by the pandemic to the ITE status quo saw the emergence of new and innovative practice and assessment in a digital 'third space' before agencies such as the Teaching Council could respond. The ability of events to surpass policy and practice is evidenced in the publication of the revised edition of *Guidelines on School Placement* by the Teaching Council in 2021 in the middle of the pandemic. The absence of reference to PST involvement in teaching, learning, and assessment in the online context is striking in a document, which notes that 'the school-based element should incorporate direct teaching experience of a minimum of 200 hours' (The Teaching Council 2021a 11). Given the changes as a result of the pandemic, there is an urgent need to respond to the needs of PSTs to prepare them for an era, which demands global and digital responses in relation to educational experiences (Ersin, Atay and Meade 2020).

The findings in this paper highlighted school and teacher union reluctance to engage in online placement experiences. It is incumbent on the Teaching Council to ensure PST competency in online teaching, learning, and assessment. If this cannot happen in partnership with schools, there must be scope for the reduction of the 200 hours demanded for direct teaching in the school context in favour of planning and practice for synchronous and asynchronous lessons via HEI means. Examples such as some of the new and innovative online practices set out in the 'School Placement Innovation Report' published by The Teaching Council (2021c) in August 2021 and the online peer teaching example focused on developing PST identity as assessor highlighted in Doyle et al. (2021) must not be forgotten. Online teaching, learning and assessment need to be embedded in placement practice within the Teaching Council 200-hour requirement to guarantee the competency required in 'Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education':

By the end of the programme of initial teacher education, the student teacher will be able to employ relevant technical knowledge and skills of a range of digital technologies including multimedia resources, effectively to facilitate teaching and assessment practices and to aid pupil learning (The Teaching Council, 2020a, 23, s.2.2.17)

Policy advocacy for the 'third space' throughout ITE in Europe is an important challenge in the future. The findings in this research have demonstrated the creativity of the teacher educator in the design of future programmes that respond to the needs of the twenty-first-century pre-service teacher. COVID-19 has presented a space, which encouraged the building of a new identity for the teacher educator through collective and collaborative behaviour within the university. It clearly demonstrated how when unities come together new change can gather momentum and difference is 'negotiated, recombined and extended' (Lewis 2012, 32). It is now crucial to lock-in the possibilities presented in the 'third space' for ITE.

Further research on the development of the 'third space' would be an important consideration moving forward. The limitations of this paper lies in the focus on the teacher educator across the five programmes. Capturing the voices of both the PST and the HEI tutor would offer further insights to the possibilities and challenges that an integration of this online space would need. A comparative study on the experience and practices of other countries might expand the thinking in this space, whilst remembering the contextual, social, and political restraints. As the age of AI begins to make its presence felt in educational assessment, a future 'fourth' space for the assessment of SP is just waiting to be imagined.

Assessment is perhaps the most significant area of opportunity offered by artificial intelligence for transformative change in education. However, this is not an assessment in its conventionally understood forms. AI-enabled assessment uses dramatically different artefacts and processes from traditional assessments ... Indeed, AI could spell the abandonment and replacement of traditional assessments, and with this a transformation in the processes of education (Cope, Kalantzis and Searsmith 2021, 1233).

## Conclusion

This paper explored the extent to which the assessment of PSTs' practice was able to move into the 'third space' (Bhabha 1994, 2004; Zeichner 2010) and focused on who and/or what influenced how far it was possible to move. The changes brought about by COVID-19 opened a challenging, but exciting, space for teacher educators to take agency to reform the dominant discourse and practices on placement (Boud and Falchikov 2007). We argue that from this perturbation, an opportunity presented itself for the reimagining of the sites of practice and assessment for the pre-service teacher, i.e. the 'third space'. We explored the 'who' and 'what' of this reimagining process through a figural sociology lens. A figural perspective allowed us to locate the teacher educator in their figuration and explore the multiple interdependent relationships, which influenced this process. By doing this, we highlighted how in the midst of a crisis, teacher educators drew on their strong interdependent relationships. Informed by this finding, we encourage teacher educators to construct and sustainably engage in communities of practice to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment practices across the teacher education continuum. During this reimagining phase, the emergence of a 'third space' shifted power balances between teacher educator and PST and the PSTs' needs were fore fronted. As a result, the third space opened up a new dialogical process in which both PST and tutor were learning through the recursive process of formative feedback. The drawing from different sources of knowledge and artefacts allowed for a better understanding of the choices and decisions being made by the PST and how these might progress into the future.

Recently, the Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education (2020) contended that 'Covid-19 has the potential to radically reshape our world, but we must not passively sit back and observe what plays out' (p.4). There is now a need for policy to mirror new practice and embed the digital 'third space' and varied assessment practices of PSTs into praxis to ensure teacher proficiency for education into the future. This paper highlights the positive assessment practices, which occurred from the influence of pandemic, and we



explicitly argue the need to continue to advocate and advance these practices to 'build ITE back better'.

## Notes

1. The term Treoráí, the Irish word for guide, replaces the term Co-operating Teacher and more accurately reflects the nature of the role of a teacher who supports and guides the student teacher during his/her school placement experience. In a post-primary setting, a student teacher may be placed in a number of different classes and may, therefore, collaborate with a number of different Treoraithe across a number of subject areas (Teaching Council 2021a)
2. Translates from the Irish language as *Period of Learning in the Ghaeltacht*. Areas in Ireland where the Irish language (Gaeilge) is the vernacular are referred to as *Ghaeltacht* areas.
3. The move to the 'third space' also challenged the title of the placement in that it was no longer in a school setting but online. As a result, the placement is now simply known as *professional placement* as this title can incorporate both school and online placements.
4. Guiding documentation from the Teaching Council of Ireland up to this point recommended that for student teachers on Teacher Education programmes 'the school-based element must incorporate, at a minimum, 100 hours of direct teaching which may include some team teaching experience ... [and] will work towards a position where student teachers will gain direct teaching experience in the region of 200 to 250 hours' (The Teaching Council, 2013 12). This was updated by the Teaching Council in 2021 to 'over the full programme, the school-based element should incorporate direct teaching experience of a minimum of 200 hours, which may include some team teaching experience' (The Teaching Council 2021a, 11).
5. The Junior Cycle is a new curriculum framework introduced in 2012 for post-primary schools.
6. The Teaching Council (2020a) *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* notes that 'over the full programme, the school-based element should incorporate direct teaching experience of a minimum of 200 hours, which may include some team-teaching experience'(15).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Audrey Doyle** is an assistant professor in the School of Policy and Practice in Dublin City University and programme chair for the Bachelor of Religious Education with English/History or Music. She lectures across many modules on curriculum, assessment, and research at undergraduate and postgraduate level, contributing to the Doctorate in Education. She is Chair of the Board of a secondary school and sits on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Junior Cycle board.

**Marie Conroy Johnson** is an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Education at Dublin City University and was Director of School Placement from 2016-2022. Marie's research interests include Initial Teacher Education, Curriculum Studies, Assessment, Leadership in Education, Education and the Law, and Faith-Based Identity in Religious Schools.

**Dylan Scanlon** is a teacher educator in the School of Education at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Dylan's research interests include (physical education) curriculum and assessment, physical education teacher education, policy, social justice (pedagogies), self-study methodologies, and configurational sociology.

**Anna Logan** is an Associate Professor in the School of Inclusive and Special Education at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University where she has served as Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning and as Programme Chair. Her main areas of research and teaching interest relate to initial teacher education and continuing professional development for special and inclusive education with a particular focus on blended and online approaches, on communication and language development, teaching and learning, and on collaborative practice including teacher/assistant partnership.

**Aishling Silke** is a lecturer in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the DCU Institute of Education, St. Patrick's Campus. Her research and teaching areas include government policy, advocacy, leadership, mentoring, management, children's citizenship and participation, sustainability, community, and parental involvement within the early years.

**Alan Gorman** is Assistant Professor in the School of Policy and Practice at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University. He is the APF (Area of Professional Focus) leader for Professional Learning and Teacher Education on the Doctor of Education (EdD) programme at DCU. His research interests are in the areas of policy analysis, professional learning and teacher education.

**Aoife Brennan** is an assistant professor and Head of School of Inclusive and Special Education in DCU Institute of Education. Her research focuses on teacher education and professional learning for inclusion.

**Catherine Furlong** is Professor in the School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education, DCU. She is currently the Chair of the BEd and MEd programmes. She lectures in the areas of education leadership and school governance.

**Sarah O'Grady** is Assistant Professor in the School of Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education, Institute of Education, DCU. Her main areas of research relate to initial teacher education, including teacher education policy, curriculum making, and policy analysis and enactment.

## ORCID

Dylan Scanlon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8774-0532>

## References

Baeten, M., K. Struyven, and F. Dochy. 2013. "Student-Centred Teaching Methods: Can They Optimise Students' Approaches to Learning in Professional Higher Education?" *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 39 (1): 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2012.11.001>.

Bates, R., and T. Townsend. 2007. *Handbook of Teacher Education: Globalization, Standards and Professionalism in Times of Change*. Australia: Springer.

Beutel, D., and R. Spooner-Lane. 2009. "Building Mentoring Capacities in Experienced Teachers." *International Journal of Learning* 16 (4): 351–360. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v16i04/46209>.

Bhabha, H. K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. 2nd ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Birenbaum, M., C. DeLuca, L. Earl, M. Heritage, V. Klenowski, A. Looney, K. Smith, H. Timperley, L. Volante, and C. Wyatt-Smith. 2015. "International Trends in the Implementation of Assessment for Learning: Implications for Policy and Practice." *Policy Futures in Education* 13 (1): 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210314566733>.

Black, P., and D. Wiliam. 1998. "Assessment and Classroom Learning." *Assessment in Education Principles, Policy & Practice* 5 (1): 7–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102>.

Bloom, B., B. Masia, and D. Krathwohl. 1964. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: McKay.

Boud, D. 2022. Assessment for Future Needs: Emerging Directions for Assessment Change. Keynote presentation at *International Assessment in Higher Education Conference*, Manchester.

Boud, D., and N. Falchikov, Eds. 2007. *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term*. London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

Boud, D., and E. Molloy. 2013. "Rethinking Models of Feedback for Learning: The Challenge of Design." *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 38 (6): 698–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2012.691462>.

Brown, C., R. White, and A. Kelly. 2021. "Teachers As Educational Change Agents: What Do We Currently Know? Findings from a Systematic Review." *Emerald Open Research* 3 (26). <https://doi.org/10.1108/EOR-03-2023-0012>.

Bryman, A. 2012. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, T., W. Melville, G. Verma, and B. Y. Park. 2021. "On the Cusp of Profound Change: Science Teacher Education in and Beyond the Pandemic." *Journal of Science Teacher Education* 32 (1): 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1046560X.2020.1857065>.

Carretero, S., R. Vuorikari, and Y. Punie. 2017. *DigComp2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use*. Luxembourg: Office of the European Union.

Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Clarke, L., and T. O'Doherty. 2021. "The Professional Place of Teachers on the Island of Ireland: Truth Flourishes Where the student's Lamp Has Shone." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 44 (1): 62–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1844660>.

Cope, B., M. Kalantzis, and D. Searsmith. 2021. "Artificial Intelligence for Education: Knowledge and Its Assessment in AI-Enabled Learning Ecologies." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53 (12): 1229–1245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1728732>.

Doll, W. E., Jr. 1993. *A Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Donlon, E. 2019. "The Use of a Custom-Built Online Environment for Communication with and Support of Student-Teachers During School Placement." *Teaching Education* 30 (1): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2017.1416349>.

Donlon, E., M. Conroy-Johnson, M. Doyle, E. McDonald, and P. J. Sexton. 2021. "Presence Accounted For? Student-Teachers Establishing and Experiencing Presence in Synchronous Online Teaching Environments." *Irish Educational Studies* 41 (1): 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.2022520>.

Doyle, A., M. Conroy Johnson, E. Donlon, E. McDonald, and P. Sexton. 2021. "The Role of the Teacher As Assessor: Developing Student Teacher's Assessment Identity." *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 46 (12): 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2021v46n12.4>.

Elias, N. 1978. *What Is Sociology?*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ersin, P., D. Atay, and E. Meade. 2020. "Boosting Preservice Teachers' Competence and Online Teaching Readiness Through E-Practicum During the COVID-19 Outbreak." *International Journal of TESOL Studies* 2 (2): 112–124.

Gorman, A., and C. Furlong. 2023. "Partnership or Prescription: A Critical Discourse Analysis of HEI-School Partnership Policy in the Republic of Ireland." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 51 (2): 198–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2023.2177139>.

Green, K. 2002. "Physical Education Teachers in Their Figurations: A Sociological Analysis of Everyday 'Philosophies'." *Sport, Education and Society* 7 (1): 65–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320120113585>.

Hall, K., and V. Kavanagh. 2002. "Primary Assessment in the Republic of Ireland: Conflict and Consensus." *Educational Management & Administration* 30 (3): 261–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X020303002>.

Hall, K., R. Murphy, V. Rutherford, and B. Ní ÁingléÁingléis. 2018. *School Placement in Initial Teacher Education. Final Report. UCC/DCU*. Maynooth: The Teaching Council.

Hoogveld, A. 1997. *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Hopper, B. 2001. "The Role of the HEI Tutor in Initial Teacher Education School-Based Placements." *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 9 (3): 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260120111996>.

International Commission on the Futures of Education. 2020. *Education in a Post-COVID World: Nine Ideas for Public Action*. Paris: UNESCO.

International Educational Assessment Network, (2021). <https://www.ianetwork.org/>.

Keay, J. 2010. "Being Influenced or Being an Influence: New teachers' Induction Experiences." *European Physical Education Review* 15 (2): 225–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X09345235>.

Keengwe, J., and T. T. Kidd. 2010, 2. "A Study of Students' Learning Styles, Discipline Attitudes and Knowledge Acquisition in Technology-Enhanced Probability and Statistics Education." *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching* 6 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2006.06.003>.

Kumar, P. 2020. "Need to Acquire Democratic Competency by Teacher Educator in Global Scenario." SSRN <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3683468>.

LaBoskey, V. 2004. "The Methodology of Self-Study and Its Theoretical Underpinnings." In *Springer International Handbooks of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*, edited by J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. LaBoskey and T. Russell. Vol. 12. Dordrecht: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6545-3\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6545-3_21).

Lewis, E. 2012. "Locating the Third Space in Initial Teacher Training." *Research in Teacher Education* 2 (2): 31–36.

Looney, A. 2006. "Assessment in the Republic of Ireland." *Assessment in Education Principles, Policy & Practice* 13 (3): 345–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940601035544>.

Looney, A., J. Cumming, F. van Der Kleij, and K. Harris. 2018. "Reconceptualising the Role of Teachers As Assessors: Teacher Assessment Identity." *Assessment in Education Principles, Policy & Practice* 25 (5): 442–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2016.1268090>.

Loughran, J. 2007. "Researching Teacher Education Practices." *Journal of Teacher Education* 58 (1): 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106296217>.

MacPhail, A. 2020. "Time to Really Re-Envisage Teacher Education." *Research in Teacher Education* 10 (1): 53–56.

Matthews, K. E., J. Tai, E. Enright, D. Carless, C. Rafferty, and N. Winstone. 2021. "Transgressing the Boundaries of 'Students As partners' and 'Feedback' Discourse Communities to Advance Democratic Education." *Teaching in Higher Education* 28 (7): 1503–1517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1903854>.

Medland, E. 2016. "Assessment in Higher Education: Drivers, Barriers and Directions for Change in the UK." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 41 (1): 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.982072>.

Mennell, S., and J. Goudsblom. 1998. *Norbert Elias on Civilization, Power, and Knowledge*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Mishra, P., and M. Koehler. 2006. "Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A Framework for Teacher Knowledge." *Teachers College Record* 108 (6): 1017–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00684.x>.

Moran, C. M. 2018. "Learners without Borders: Connected Learning in a Digital Third Space." *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 18 (2): 233–254.

Morrison, K. 2008. "Educational Philosophy and the Challenge of Complexity Theory." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40 (1): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2007.00394.x>.

Mottiar, Z., G. Byrne, G. Gorham, and E. Robinson. 2022. "An Examination of the Impact of COVID-19 on Assessment Practices in Higher Education." *European Journal of Higher Education* 14 (1): 101–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2125422>.

Mullen, C., and C. Klimaitis. 2019. "Defining Mentoring: A Literature Review of Issues, types, and Applications." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1483 (1): 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14176>.

Murtagh, E. M., A. Calderón, D. Scanlon, and A. MacPhail. 2023. "Online Teaching and Learning in Physical Education Teacher Education: A Mixed Studies Review of Literature." *European Physical Education Review* 29 (3): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X231155793>.

OECD. 2013. *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en>.

OECD. 2021. Overview of Teacher Initial Education. [https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducation\\_policies/#!node=41731&filter=all](https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducation_policies/#!node=41731&filter=all).

O'Grady, S. 2017. *Policy, Practice and Partnership: An Exploration of the Perspectives of Post-Primary School-Based Teacher Educators in Relation to School Placement*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. DCU.

Palmer, R. T., F. E. Biagioli, J. Mujcic, B. N. Schneider, L. Spires, and L. G. Dodson. 2015. "The Feasibility and Acceptability of Administering a Telemedicine Objective Structured Clinical Exam As a Solution for Providing Equivalent Education to Remote and Rural Learners." *Rural and Remote Health* 15 (4). <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH3399>.

Popham, W. J. 2009. "Assessment Literacy for Teachers: Faddish or Fundamental?" *Theory into Practice* 48 (1): 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802577536>.

Priestley, M., D. Alvunger, S. Philippou, and T. Soini. 2021. *Curriculum Making in Europe*. UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Scanlon, D., A. MacPhail, and A. Calderon. 2020. "Conceptualising Examinable Physical Education in the Irish Context: Leaving Certificate Physical Education." *Sport, Education and Society* 25 (7): 788–801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1664451>.

The Teaching Council. 2011. *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (Online) <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/teacher-education/policy-on-the-continuum-of-teacher-education.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2013. *Guidelines on School Placement* (1st Ed) (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/ite-professional-accreditation/guidelines-on-school-placement.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2016. *Professional Code of Conduct for Teachers*. 2nd. Online. <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/fitness-to-teach/code-of-professional-conduct-for-teachers1.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2017. *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/ite-professional-accreditation/criteria-and-guidelines-for-programme-providers-march-2017-.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2020a. *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/news-events/latest-news/ceim-standards-for-initial-teacher-education.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2020b. *Guidance Note for School Placement 2020-2021* (Online). [https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/news-events/latest-news/10-08-2020-guidance-note-for-school-placement-2020\\_.pdf](https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/news-events/latest-news/10-08-2020-guidance-note-for-school-placement-2020_.pdf).

The Teaching Council. 2021a. *Guidelines on School Placement* (Revised Edition) (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/ite-professional-accreditation/school-placement-guidelines-updated-march-2022.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2021b. *Procedures for the Professional Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education* (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/ite-professional-accreditation/procedures.pdf>.

The Teaching Council. 2021c. *"School Placement Innovation Report"* (Online). <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/teacher-education/school-placement-innovation-report-2021.pdf>.

van Krieken, R. 1998. *Norbert Elias*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Villarroel, V., S. Bloxham, D. Bruna, C. Bruna, and C. Herrera-Seda. 2018. "Authentic Assessment: Creating a Blueprint for Course Design." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 43 (5): 840–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2017.1412396>.

Watermeyer, R., T. Crick, C. Knight, and J. Goodall. 2021. "COVID-19 and Digital Disruption in UK Universities: Afflictions and Affordances of Emergency Online Migration." *Higher Education* 81 (3): 623–641. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00561-y>.

Weed, M. 2009. "Research Quality Consideration for Grounded Theory Research in Sport & Exercise Psychology." *Psychology of Sport & Exercise* 10:502–510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.02.007>.

Weiss, E. M., and S. Weiss. 2001. "Doing Reflective Supervision with Student Teachers in a Professional Development School Culture." *Reflective Practice* 2 (2): 125–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940120071343>.

Young, A. M., A. MacPhail, and D. Tannehill. 2022. "Teacher educators' Engagement with School-Based Assessments Across Irish Teacher Education Programmes." *Irish Educational Studies* 43 (2): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2022.2061562>.

Zeichner, K. 2010. "Rethinking the Connections Between Campus Courses and Field Experiences in College-And University-Based Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 61 (1–2): 1–2). 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>.