

Collaborative self-study in higher education: lessons from redesigning school placement during the pandemic

Aoife Brennan^a (aoife.brennan@dcu.ie), Anna Logan^a (anna.logan@dcu.ie), Caitriona Pennycook^a (caitriona.pennycook@dcu.ie), Alan Gorman^a (alan.gorman@dcu.ie) and Dylan Scanlon^b (dylan.scanlon@deakin.edu.au)

^aInstitute of Education, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland; ^bDeakin University, Australia

Contact: Aoife Brennan aoife.brennan@dcu.ie

Abstract

This paper explores how a collaborative self-study of teacher educators in the Republic of Ireland supported pre-service and practising teachers on teacher education programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teacher educators engaged in student feedback meetings conducted online as a replacement to traditional in-school visits, some of which were supported by observation of lesson recordings viewed prior to the sessions. Teacher educators engaged in critical reflection of these feedback meetings individually, guided by a critical incident template, before reflecting collaboratively with colleagues. The redesign of online placement encouraged interrogation of practices among teacher educators and led them to a greater understanding of their practice. Actions that enhanced student learning in relation to placement included adopting a student partnership approach, peer teaching using asynchronous lessons, lesson recordings and adjusting the timing of feedback. This study falls into the broader Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and adds to the body of research exploring the innovative responses and adaptations of teacher education programmes worldwide to school and Higher Education Institution closures during the pandemic. More specifically, this study offers alternative approaches to on-site school placement.

Keywords: teacher education, Covid-19, collaborative self-study, school placement, higher education

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the provision of education worldwide. The impact on teacher education programmes was twofold given the closures and adjustments put in place in both Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and schools (Carrillo and Flores 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). This gave rise to significant challenges with the clinical placements or practicum of such programmes (Mutton 2020). These components, referred to as placement or school placement in the Irish context, are both internationally (Piccolo, Livers, and Tipton 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020) and nationally considered the “fulcrum of teacher education” (The Teaching Council of Ireland 2020a, 7).

The conundrum of maintaining placement in line with programme and teacher accreditation requirements despite Covid-19 restrictions elicited different responses from HEIs worldwide. Some HEIs reported transitions to remote, online teaching whereby pre-service teachers on school placement taught asynchronously and/or synchronously with their host schools (Flores and Gago 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). However, within HEIs there appears to have been disparity regarding possibilities to engage in online approaches to placement during school closures, with such opportunities being available for some but not all pre-service teachers depending on factors such as their host school and their jurisdiction (la Velle et al. 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). Some HEIs replaced teaching components with tasks such as devising schemes of work, professional tasks (la Velle et al. 2020) and producing lessons and materials (Flores and Gago 2020). Other institutions incorporated video recordings of teaching. For example, Barnes et al. (2020) report how pre-service teachers in the USA recorded and self-evaluated lessons they taught to children in their circle of friends and family and obtained feedback from tutors, while la Velle et al. (2020)

describes how pre-service teachers in England recorded themselves teaching a particular concept and received peer feedback.

Overview of the Irish context

In the Republic of Ireland (RoI), the Teaching Council of Ireland (hereinafter referred to as the Teaching Council) was established on a statutory basis in 2006 as the professional standards body for teaching (Gorman and Furlong 2023). Amongst other functions, the Teaching Council is responsible for the accreditation of teacher education programmes, the induction of newly qualified teachers and supporting the ongoing professional learning of teachers (Teaching Council 2023). The Teaching Council has published school placement guidelines which outline the structure, duration and timing of school placement, the role of key stakeholders and appropriate activities and settings (Teaching Council 2021a). These guidelines are in addendum to the revised standards for programmes of initial teacher education (ITE) published in 2020 which contains requirements relating to ITE school placements (Teaching Council 2023). All teachers employed in recognised schools are required to register with the Teaching Council in order to be paid by the State (Department of Education and Skills 2013). A minimum of 50% of school placement tutors must be registered as teachers with the Teaching Council and pre-service teachers must be summatively assessed at least once by a registered teacher (Teaching Council 2020a).

Impact of Covid-19 on teacher education programmes in Ireland

In the RoI, the closure of education settings in March 2020 profoundly affected education at all levels and led to an emergency pivot to remote, online teaching and learning for the remainder of the academic year. Subsequent closures ensued in January 2021 with education providers turning once again to online approaches, albeit in a now more structured and prepared way. Faced with the closures of education settings, teacher education providers

in Ireland were left to their own devices to devise, implement, supervise and assess placement components of programmes as they saw fit. The Teaching Council (2020b) noted that pre-service teachers could engage in a variety of school placement activities as deemed appropriate by individual HEIs for their respective programmes and identified four valid sites of practice given Covid-19 restrictions (on-site in schools, synchronous classes online, asynchronous classes and home-school collaboration). Regarding the assessment of school placement, the Teaching Council (2020b) stated that HEIs could consider a range of options such as microteaching, live streaming, portfolio-based learning and reflective practice. This appears to have provided opportunities for innovation across HEIs in Ireland during the pandemic in relation to placement (Teaching Council 2021b; Young et al. 2022). In the context of this study, we adopt Fuad et al.'s (2020, 3) summary of Smith's (2009) conception of innovation in education as a "new product, new process, new ideas that are shifting the way people view an issue or question by redefining our sense of what is possible."

In the HEI in question, alternative methods for placement were implemented across teacher education programmes (Table 1).

Table 1. Alternative methods of placement for the academic year 20/21.

Programme	Dyad	Teacher Educators	Alternative methods of placement*
Graduate diploma for qualified teachers	1	Kate Jade	☐ Students working in own schools ☐ One recorded lesson submitted per placement block (x 3) ☐ Submission of online planning
B.Ed Post-primary - Humanities	2	Patricia Clodagh	☐ Yr 1-4: Online placement teaching peers with synchronous/asynchronous & asynchronous lessons
B.Ed Primary/Professional Master of Education Primary	3	Emmet Shane	☐ On-site placement across all year groups (unsupervised) ☐ Submission of online planning

B.Ed Post-primary languages	4	Frank Conor	☐ Online placement ☐ Submission of online planning/tasks
<u>Bachelor of Early Childhood Education</u>	5	Stephanie	☐ Yr 1-4: Online placement modules with submission of planning/tasks ☐ Yr 4: Online/on-site (unsupervised) depending on the setting
B.Sc. Education & Training		Paula	☐ On-site placement across all year groups (unsupervised) ☐ Submission of online planning/tasks

**All programmes involved the submission of planning and other tasks depending on the programme and year of study. Students were supervised and/or received feedback from teacher educators in the form of feedback meetings or professional conversations.*

During the initial school and HEI closures in March 2020, students did not undertake placement but rather had to complete tasks such as submission of planning for tutor feedback. For the following academic year (20-21), schools were able to accommodate students scheduled to complete placement across all but two programmes but no on-site tutor visits took place due to Covid-19 restrictions. Where students could not be accommodated on-site, students engaged in remote placement. All students had to submit planning online and were encouraged to evaluate and reflect on their lessons using prompts outlined at the end of lesson plan templates (Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper 2001). Supervision was in the form of individual, online feedback meetings and/or professional conversations.

While video responses were elicited by some teacher education providers in the RoI, (Teaching Council 2021b), in the HEI in question, the use of live streaming or recording of pre-service teachers' lessons in schools was not authorised by faculty management given the concerns of key stakeholders and the variability and disparity surrounding the interpretation of General Data Protection Regulation. However, video recordings remained possible for students on a graduate diploma for qualified teachers within their own schools who were engaging in an additional specialised teaching qualification. These students were also encouraged to reflect

on their lessons and lesson recording using reflective prompts outlined on the lesson plan templates before the feedback meeting with the tutor.

Harnessing new practices to improve teacher education

Given the transformation of education worldwide due to the pandemic, it is now important to critically reflect on the responses of education settings and harness the new practices that can enhance and optimise teacher education going forward (Carrillo and Flores 2020; Piccolo et al. 2021; Young et al. 2022). Many studies have documented creative and innovative approaches adopted during the pandemic, in particular novel uses of technology (Carrillo and Flores 2020; Ferdig et al. 2020). An Irish study conducted by Young et al. (2022) identified areas for readdressing placement, such as the use of online assessment, portfolios, improved reflective practice, enhanced mentoring role of tutors and classroom teachers and the development of communities of support. An Irish-Australian study conducted by O'Gradaigh et al. (2021) found a place for a hybrid model of school placement comprising virtual observation and traditional in person school visits. This study claims that virtual live-streaming technology, which facilitates insight into classroom teaching in real-time, offers flexibility, particularly in relation to geographical constraints, and claims that it may be a more ethical and fairer assessment method which provides the same support to students regardless of their location. Environmental benefits, timing of feedback and facilitating the development of a strong bond between tutors and pre-service teachers were cited as other advantages of this model.

The current study

Much research has been conducted to document the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teacher education (Flores and Swennen 2020). While many studies have explored the experience of teacher educators during the pandemic, they often tend to focus on aspects of their experience of teaching online in higher education (e.g. Cutri et al. 2020; Murray et al.

2020; Scull et al. 2020). Research documenting teacher educators' experience in relation to school placement alternatives has been published (e.g. la Velle et al. 2020; Kidd and Murray 2020; Young et al. 2022) but seems to be somewhat limited. Furthermore, there appear to be few collaborative self-studies in this area incorporating teacher educators across all stages of the continuum from early childhood education to further education, particularly in the Irish context. The present study endeavours to address these gaps in the research while also responding to calls for self-studies to contribute to teacher education research (King, Logan, and Lohan, 2019) and more specifically, Berry and Kitchen's (2020, 125) call for teacher educators to engage in self-study of their practice during these times of "radical disruption." More broadly, this study endeavoured to contribute to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), an approach which aims to advance the practice of higher-level teaching and improve its status by systematically investigating, documenting and making public the processes which enable student learning (King et al. 2019). Indeed, an increasing emphasis is being placed on teacher educators engaging in research of their own practice in order to further develop the SoTL (King et al. 2019).

Methodology

This study adopted a self-study approach in which educators sought to examine their own practice in an intentional and systematic way, to add to the body of knowledge of teacher education and explore possible alternatives for future practice (Loughran 2005). Loughran (2005, 174) explains that self-studies can be instigated in response to "questions, problems, tensions and dilemmas" or by a desire to "better understand one's own practices." In this case, Covid-19 and the pivot to the online environment were triggers for ten teacher educators to engage in collaborative self-study as they supported pre-service and practising teachers on teacher education programmes in a HEI in the RoI during the pandemic (Table 1). They

engaged in feedback meetings conducted on the Zoom platform with students in the context of placement supervision as a replacement to traditional site visits, some of which were supported by a video recording viewed prior to the sessions. Teacher educators engaged in critical reflection of these feedback meetings individually, guided by a critical incident template, before reflecting collaboratively with a colleague.

More specifically, each teacher educator formed a dyad with a colleague who was providing support to students on the same or similar programme. They reflected individually on three experiences of engaging in online feedback meetings with students using a critical incident template adapted from Berry and Kitchen (2020; Table 2).

Table 2. Questions on critical incident template

Questions	
1.	What is my experience as I engage in this radically changed model of practice with my students?
2.	What is gained and what is lost by moving from supporting and assessing students in the practicum context to the online space?
3.	Does this change highlight and/or challenge any taken- for-granted assumptions I have about teaching and learning?
4.	What can I learn about my pedagogical practices by observing and reflecting how my students respond to this changed support and assessment context?

They then shared each completed reflection with their partner colleague who read and responded using the prompt questions, posed questions and invited further comments (King et al. 2019). Each dyad then had an online conversation to discuss and summarise key insights from their shared reflection. All the dyads shared this summary document with the other dyads in the research team in advance of an online meeting which was structured around the research questions. The entire dataset including completed critical incident templates, summary documents, audio-recordings and transcripts of online meetings and relevant e-mail correspondence between dyads were analysed using Charmaz's (2014) approach to coding data

supported by the use of NVivo software. Initial coding involved a combination of line by line (labelling each line in the transcript) and incident by incident (labelling the important segments in the transcripts in relation to four research questions which supported the exposure of ‘implicit concerns as well as explicit statements’ [Mordal-Moen and Green 2014, 418]). Following this, there were two levels of focused coding, firstly categorisation of initial codes and then the refinement of the codes into themes at a final full group meeting. This process of generating themes from initial codes involved both data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven (deductive) analysis.

Zeichner (2007) highlights the merits of a self-study approach in contributing to teacher education research while also supporting the learning and growth of teacher educators and improving their practice. However, Zeichner (2007) also highlights the limitations of this approach in teacher education, notably the detachment of self-studies from mainstream research and how self-studies often aim to contribute either to improving practice or furthering theoretical understanding. This self-study addressed these limitations by aiming to connect the findings to teacher education research and by having the dual goal of building on and contributing to the collective knowledge in the area of teacher education and improving practice, as recommended by Zeichner (2007). Furthermore, in line with Zeichner’s advice (2007), this study aimed to locate research within program, institution and policy context.

This self-study encompassed the key characteristics and quality indicators for self-study research identified by LaBoskey (2004, 817) as it was “self-initiated and focused,” with the aim of improving practice. Furthermore, it was interactive involving collaboration between colleagues and used multiple qualitative methods to gather different perspectives. Finally, researchers were committed to submitting this research for dissemination for critical review

and validation based on trustworthiness. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the HEI's Research Ethics Committee.

Findings

A redesigning of online placement encouraged interrogation of practices

As school placement moved to the online space the student learning experience required a redesign. While this posed a dilemma for the HEI and in particular, teacher educators who coordinated placement modules, it provided an opportunity for rethinking and disrupting traditional placement practices. Reflecting on this opportunity, teacher educators noted that changes may not have happened without this interruptive move to the online space:

It is very interesting to stand back and reflect on this – something that we have a tendency not to do – we are always in a fire-fighting role and jumping from one challenge to the next limits our capacity to stop and ask what is happening here and why is it happening? (Emmet, Reflection [R]1)

The reimagining and redesign of the placement experience encouraged interrogation of teacher educators' pedagogical and assessment practices. It allowed for reassessment, disruption and questioning of practices and most importantly, and ironically, time to reflect, interrogate, and learn. The following comment from Clodagh captures this:

I think that's a really important thing...the disruption of practices as we knew it but also the disruption of our thinking because of it, and the opportunity that arose out of that... and questioning of things that were deeply rooted in the programme. (Interview)

The move to online placement encouraged consistent reflection on practice among the teacher educators as their pedagogical practices needed to become more responsive to student needs and the context in which they found themselves. The opportunity to collaboratively reflect on the best approaches to support student learning was valued:

The current climate has forced/encouraged us to review and revise our own practice... our pedagogical practices have become more responsive to student needs as these needs have evolved over the course of the academic year. (Frank & Conor, Joint Reflection [JR])

The pivot online triggered a change process which both intentionally and unintentionally enabled collaborative thinking and action. It encouraged innovative practice, such as online peer teaching, the design of remote placement modules and the use of lesson recordings to compensate for the lack of on-site visits. Furthermore, it changed thinking around possibilities and potentialities, and pushed the teacher educators to reflect, work and learn together. The power of such collaboration as a means of moving forward to enable meaningful, relevant and worthwhile practices for student learning emerged. Patricia's words encapsulate the potentialities of this vision:

The initial enthusiasm of working with a 'blank canvas' ... blue sky thinking; the meetings with colleagues which assisted the deconstruction of ideas and challenged thinking in a search for more clarity; the sharing of knowledge in an effort to work in new ways; the building of relationships in a collegial and collaborative way ... a real sense of a professional community at work. (R1)

Reflections on tangible actions to support student learning

Collaborative interrogation of both previous and current practice led to greater understanding of student learning and tangible actions that can support this learning going forward, notably adopting a student partnership approach, peer teaching using asynchronous lessons, lesson recordings and adjusting the timing of feedback.

Student partnership approach to the redesign of placement

The move online not only allowed for collaboration between teacher educators but also between teacher educators and students, enabling a level of student partnership which supported the teacher educators to reflect on and adapt their practices to meet the students' needs as a result of collaborating with, and listening to, students. Involving students in the redesign of placement and giving them control of their learning appears to have had many benefits in terms of student motivation, engagement and outcomes. For example, on the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education programme, some students were able to engage in on-site placements while others had to engage in online placements. Students were supported to engage in a variety of assessment approaches suited to their differing placement contexts. Stephanie explained that by listening to students' ideas and supporting them to work on these initiatives, the results were beyond their expectations:

This really motivated students and they have excelled in their final year placement and are producing work well above the standard we have witnessed prior to Covid-19 ... the more we work with students and give them control of their learning the more engaged they become... when given responsibility and a voice students thrive. (R1)

Similarly, Shane reflected on a student partnership approach that worked well on the primary ITE programmes. The placement coordinators met with student representatives from each year group in advance of school placements to address concerns and suggestions they had. He noted that:

We have been very democratic in our engagement with both students and staff and involved them in every step of the consultative and planning journey. It has thrown up a series of issues, the most notable being the need for a more engaged national strategic plan in relation to the delivery of initial teacher education. (R1)

These insights appear to have impacted teacher educators' intentions for practice going forward:

I am re-thinking placement and would like to set up focus groups with students to consider what they would like to get out of placement and what form of assessment they think would benefit their learning and practice. (Stephanie, R1)

Peer teaching using asynchronous lessons

Teacher educators on a post-primary teacher education programme introduced a six week "Teaching Online Placement" (TOP) (Donlon et al. 2022) which involved peer teaching using asynchronous lessons and an explicit focus on planning learning objectives and assessment (Table 1). This required students to first prepare asynchronous lessons and share one such lesson with a group of peers for feedback, after which they taught peers in an asynchronous online lesson and received feedback from both peers and tutors. Planning and teaching of asynchronous lessons encouraged an amalgamation of teaching, learning and assessment in the learning experience and sparked innovation and creativity because lessons could be re-watched for reflection and self-assessment. The use of asynchronous settings to encourage students' reflection, creativity and innovation in their teaching practice was advocated:

I think the power of the asynchronous lesson is that they can sit and watch back.... They can again look at the overall lesson ... it's there, it's coming back to them and the creativity! I really think that this year was the one year that I felt that in terms of creativity and innovation in the lessons ... that those buttons were being pushed. (Clodagh, Interview)

A second dyad also noted the potential benefits of incorporating online peer teaching into placement modules in the future. While their programmes did not incorporate such elements, these teacher educators felt that online peer teaching could enable 'early' cohorts of pre-service teachers to develop a solid foundation in lesson planning and fundamental teaching skills such as assessment and differentiation without having to cope with the challenges of being in a school. Students could then build on this foundation and develop classroom management and behaviour management skills when in schools.

Even if Covid-19 is no longer an issue... there may be benefits to incorporating online peer teaching as part of School Placement modules going forward. Students can continue to develop their planning and preparation skills, and their general teacher skills in an online environment. (Frank & Conor, JR)

Recording of lessons in schools

Lesson recordings in schools were used as part of the pivot to online placement on one programme for students on a graduate diploma for qualified teachers. Students recorded a lesson with their class for the tutor to view and were encouraged to view it for the purposes of reflection. Several benefits of using lesson recordings emerged. Firstly, the recording of the students' teaching was acknowledged as a means of improving students' feedback literacy encouraging them to observe, reflect, and engage in self-assessment of their own teaching.

That's something that came up again and again in our reflections was... that empowering of the students to think about their own teaching to reflect on it, and the recording adds so much more. (Kate, Interview)

Secondly, it was found that lesson recordings can enhance professional dialogue through reflection and inquiry. Teacher educators found that with lesson recordings, conversations with students were richer than they were pre-Covid-19 and allowed for a deeper level of reflection as students were able to watch their own teaching, unlike the traditional model where a live lesson is observed on-site.

For me, the massive potential gain from this is the recording. I think this going forward can form the basis for a very productive kind of dialogue between students and tutor. (Kate, Interview)

Thirdly, teacher educators found that the video recordings somewhat mitigated the lack of in person school visits, in particular the lack of personal contact and contextual information. Regarding the tutor-student relationship one stated:

I am concerned about the lack of personal contact and how this might impact on the students' experience. At this stage it feels to me that the online space impedes that interpersonal communication that feels critical to the practicum tutor- student relationship but having a video recording mitigates that somewhat (Kate, R1)

Viewing the video recordings provided teacher educators with a flavour of the context in which the student was teaching. This helped teacher educators to initiate a dialogue with students and

somewhat counteracted the loss of contextual understanding given that the teacher educator could not visit the student on-site. Video recordings were noted as being useful going forward:

Nothing can compare to actually being on site in the school/college setting as that really provides insight into the context and the nature of the learning needs. Having said that, a lesson recording is a good alternative and potentially useful going forward as part of the practicum. (Kate, R1)

Furthermore, lesson recordings seemed to ‘re-balance’ power between teacher educators and students. On school visits, it was usually the teacher educator entering the student’s teaching space and this was disrupted by the students now entering the teacher educator’s Zoom meeting room. Viewing the video recording and using it as a support for critical reflection helped to recalibrate the power balance back toward the students.

The value of the student recording their own practice... for me that did shift that power balance considerably... we were then able to engage in that critical conversation together... So, it was a rebalancing. For me, that was really, really powerful. (Jade, FG).

Adjusting the timing of feedback

Teacher educators found benefits to having a time delay before students received feedback. This emerged on an ITE programme which required students to submit plans for which they received feedback at a later time but prior to their online Zoom meeting. As opposed to providing immediate feedback after a lesson on-site, as happened prior to Covid-19, these teacher educators found that this set up allowed for a more supportive dialogue where the student felt more comfortable and familiar with the feedback and had time to reflect critically on it.

A student was more focused on what's going on.... my own personal experience is when a lesson is over and you're debriefing and you're meeting the student...the student is so relieved that the whole thing is over...they're not even hearing half the stuff... it is more like a monologue rather than a dialogue...They had time to critically reflect on what was being presented. (Shane, FG)

Similarly, students on a graduate diploma for qualified teachers submitted planning in advance of a Zoom meeting along with a video recording of their teaching and received feedback prior to this meeting. Teacher educators on this course also found benefits of the timing of such feedback, such as making more efficient use of time during meetings with students and making such meetings more structured and focused.

I am reaffirmed that providing the feedback report in advance is very useful to frame the tutorial meeting and to ensure a more efficient use of time as it reduces the time needed to explain the feedback in detail. (Jade, R2)

Discussion

The impact of Covid-19 on teacher education

As was the case worldwide, the pandemic and the emergency pivot to online remote learning prompted teacher educators in the HEI in question to reflect on and interrogate their practice in order to optimise student learning. The findings of this study add to the body of literature documenting the impact of the pandemic on the provision of teacher education and alternative methods for placement that were used for example, peer teaching with asynchronous lessons and video recordings in schools. It also highlighted the merits of adopting a student partnership approach for the redesign of placement and adjusting the timing of feedback.

Experience of teacher educators

The findings give insight into teacher educators' experience of alternative models of school placement adopted during the pandemic across several teacher education programmes. Through individual and collaborative reflection, insights were given to the experience of teacher educators as they interrogated and redesigned placement and specific actions they took such as adopting a student partnership approach and the utilisation of lesson recordings. Focusing on these experiences and actions from the perspective of the teacher educators led to interesting findings in relation to the impact on student learning but also in relation to the power balance as felt by the teacher educators.

Furthermore, this study shows the value of teacher educators sharing their experiences and reflecting on these collaboratively in a self-study approach. The rich findings demonstrate how sharing experiences and engaging in reflective dialogue collaboratively can help teacher educators to gain new insights and understandings about their practice (Brennan & Gorman, 23; Ní Bhroin et al. 2020). This collaborative reflection in addition to individual reflection is supported by Hoban (1996) who warns against relying on individual reflection alone, arguing that individuals may be unable to be objective in the interpretation of their practice and may require exposure to different perspectives that extend beyond their own understanding and experience.

Responses: Reactive and/or innovative

Reflecting on the responses of teacher educators, we argue that they were both reactive and innovative, a concept captured by Adelowatan (2021) who argues that new coping strategies were developed by institutions in the form of innovations. The alternative approaches to school placement that arose from the critical engagement of teacher educators to improve the situation were innovative as they shifted the sense of what was possible regarding school placement (e.g.

Smith 2009) and provided improved results than would have been the case otherwise (e.g. Fuad et al. 2020). Furthermore, such approaches have the potential to be sustained post-pandemic, as has been the case for two programmes which have retained elements of teaching peers online and a student partnership approach. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2020) found that changes made by ITE leaders in their study were innovative as they improved previous practice rather than just offering an emergency and temporary solution and reported new ideas that could potentially be classed as sustainable pedagogical innovations. Furthermore, as appeared to be the case in the present study, Ellis et al. (2020) reported how these leaders operated at a level that extended beyond simply coping dutifully and being pragmatic.

Challenges and successes in sustaining innovation

While it was and is intended that some of the innovative changes adopted during Covid-19 would be retained in the HEI in question post-pandemic, the return to the "norm" restricted the capacity of teacher educators to engage in such innovation. One notable challenge was the requirement for the HEI in question to engage in Teaching Council reaccreditation from September 2021 which involved a hugely significant workload for the teacher educators. A second significant challenge was that policy did not shift to support the retention of innovative approaches to school placement. In the RoI, teacher education remains tightly controlled by Teaching Council policy which has not been revisited in light of innovations introduced during the pandemic. While the Teaching Council lauded alternative approaches in the School Placement Innovation report (Teaching Council 2021b), this has not transferred to Teaching Council policy nor has there been any reference made to alternative approaches to school placement in the revised Guidelines on School Placement published in 2021 (Teaching Council 2021a). Furthermore, no support has been offered to HEIs to continue with innovative approaches.

Despite this, in the HEI in question, changes have been sustained across teacher education programmes to varying extents. The use of online platforms for submission of documentation and provision of feedback for school placement has been retained by many programmes. While not all programmes maintained alternative innovative approaches to placement, one programme continued to use TOP which involves online peer teaching while another programme retained aspects of a student partnership approach. Discussion of innovation continues within the HEI in question on how these approaches could be used, particularly on the graduate diploma for which the constraints of Teaching Council accreditation do not apply. This shows the impetus among teacher educators for retaining the approaches, particularly in the context of sustainability, in relation to time, travel and the environment.

Limitations and future research

There were several limitations to this study. Firstly, this study is a case study of one HEI and so further research would be required to explore the proposed actions among other HEIs. Secondly, it took place in the unprecedented context of a global pandemic and an emergency pivot to remote, online learning. More research would therefore have to be conducted to determine if the same findings would emerge and if the proposed actions would be as effective in a 'normal' context. Furthermore, this study did not consider students' experience of the alternative methods to placement nor was their experience of engaging in the feedback meetings with teacher educators explored. Future research could therefore focus on student experiences of the alternative placements and feedback meetings. Finally, while the cross-sectoral findings encompassing a number of teacher education programmes added a great richness to the findings of this study, some changes and actions that worked well for the placement components of some programmes, or indeed years of study, might be specific to that

programme or year of study. While such specificities were beyond the scope of the current study, future studies could address this and explore students' experience of such changes and actions.

Conclusion

Through collaborative self-study, teacher educators interrogated their experience and practices during Covid-19 and reflected on ways to improve their practice and student learning. A key finding of this study was that the redesign of online placement encouraged interrogation of practices among teacher educators and led them to a greater understanding of their practice. Furthermore, collaborative reflection enabled the identification of tangible actions to improve teacher educators' placement practice and student learning, notably the potential of a student partnership approach, peer teaching using asynchronous lessons, the recording of lessons in schools and adjusting the timing of feedback. These findings add to the broader body of knowledge of teacher education and contribute to the SoTL.

This study supports Berry and Kitchen's (2020, 123) claim that self-study has "important contributions to make in these times for documenting the experiences and insights that come from radical educational change." Indeed, many studies have been conducted since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic to document, critically reflect on and explore the impact on teacher education. Furthermore, both nationally and internationally, teacher educators are being prompted to reflect and examine their practice and teacher education programmes, in particular in relation to placement (Donlon et al. 2022; Flores and Gago 2020; Gorman & Hall, 2023). In the HEI in question, it is encouraging that several programmes have retained innovative approaches adopted during the pandemic and that teacher educators see the promise of such approaches in terms of sustainability. However, this study highlights the need

for clear policy that supports HEIs in developing and sustaining innovative approaches to school placement. Finally, this paper offers a model for teacher educators and HEIs to harness the benefits arising from the pandemic and proposes concrete actions that could enhance teacher education programmes in the future.

Acknowledgements

We thank our colleagues in the Higher Education Teachers Supporting Placement Online (HETSPO) research team: Marie Conroy Johnson, Audrey Doyle, Catherine Furlong, Jane O'Kelly, Sarah O'Grady and Aishling Silke for their engagement with us as participant researchers in this self-study and for their valued contribution throughout the project including data collection and analysis.

This work was supported by the Dublin City University Institute of Education collaborative research funding award scheme.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

References

- Adelowotan, M. 2021. "Educational Innovations for Coping Up with Covid-19 Situation in South African Universities." *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 95:139-615.
- Barnes, R., Hall, R., Lowe, V., Pottinger, C., and Popham, A. 2020. "Lessons from an Online Teacher Preparation Program: Flexing Work Experience to Meet Student Needs and Regulators' Requirements in the United States." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (4): 528-535. DOI:10.1080/02607476.2020.1802203.

- Berry, A., and Kitchen, J. 2020. "The Role of Self-study in Times of Radical Change." *Studying Teacher Education* 16 (2): 123-126. DOI: [10.1080/17425964.2020.1777763](https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2020.1777763).
- Brennan A., and Gorman, A. 2023. "Leading Transformative Professional Learning for Inclusion Across the Teacher Education Continuum: Lessons from Online and On-site Learning Communities." *Professional Development in Education*. DOI: [10.1080/19415257.2023.2238717](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.2238717) .
- Carrillo, C., and Flores, M.A. 2020. "COVID-19 and Teacher Education: A Literature Review of Online Teaching and Learning Practices." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (4): 466-487.
- Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cutri, R. M., Mena, J., and Whiting, E. F. 2020. "Faculty Readiness for Online Crisis Teaching: Transitioning to Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (4): 523-541. DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2020.1815702](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1815702)
- Department of Education and Skills. 2013. "*Circular 0025/2013: Requirement for Teachers in Recognised Schools to Register with the Teaching Council*." Dublin, Ireland: Department of Education and Skills. <https://assets.gov.ie/24521/9e0e6e3887454197a1da1f9736c01557.pdf>
- Donlon, E., Conroy Johnson, M., Doyle, A., McDonald, E. and Sexton, P. J. 2022. "Presence Accounted For? Student-teachers Establishing and Experiencing Presence in Synchronous Online Teaching Environments." *Irish Educational Studies* 41(1): 41-49. DOI: [10.1080/03323315.2021.2022520](https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.2022520)

- Ellis, V., Steadman, S., and Mao, Q. 2020. "Come to a Screeching Halt: Can Change in Teacher Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic be Seen as Innovation?" *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43(4): 559–572. [Doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1821186](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1821186)
- Ferdig, R.E., Baumgartner, E., Hartshorne, R., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., and Mouza, C. eds. 2020. "Teaching, Technology, and Teacher Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stories from the Field." Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/216903/>.
- Flores, M.A., and Gago, M. 2020. "Teacher Education in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic in Portugal: National, Institutional and Pedagogical Responses." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (1): 1-10. [DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2020.1799709](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1799709).
- Flores, M.A., and Swennen, A. 2020. "The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Effects on Teacher Education." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (4): 453-456. [DOI: 10.1080/02619768.2020.1824253](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1824253).
- Fuad, D.R.S.M., Khalip, M., and Yusof, H. 2020. "Innovation in Education." *Journal of Educational Research and Indigenous Studies* 2 (1): 1-11.
- Gorman, A., and Furlong, C. 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. [DOI: 10.1080/1359866X.2023.2177139](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2023.2177139)
- Gorman, A., and Hall, K. 2023. "Exploring the Impact of an Online Learning Community to Support Student Teachers on School Placement." *European Journal of Teacher Education*. [DOI: 10.1080/02619768.2023.2232943](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2023.2232943)

- Hoban, G. 1996. “*A Professional Development Model Based on Interrelated Principles of Teacher Learning* (Unpublished PhD).” University of British Columbia, Canada.
<https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0054954>
- Kidd, W., and Murray, J. 2020. “The Covid-19 Pandemic and its Effects on Teacher Education in England: How Teacher Educators Moved Practicum Learning Online.” *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (4): 542-558. DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2020.1820480](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1820480)
- King, F., Logan, A., and Lohan, A. 2019. “Self-study Enabling Understanding of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: An Exploration of Collaboration among Teacher Educators for Special and Inclusive Education.” *Studying Teacher Education* 15 (2): 118-138. DOI: [10.1080/17425964.2019.1587607](https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2019.1587607)
- la Velle, L., Newman, S., Montgomery, C., and Hyatt, D. 2020. “Initial Teacher Education in England and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities.” *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (4): 596-608. DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2020.1803051](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1803051).
- LaBoskey, V. K. 2004. “The Methodology of Self-study and its Theoretical Underpinnings.” In *International Handbook of Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*, edited by J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. L. LaBoskey, & T. Rusell, 817-870. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Loughran, J. 2005. *Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Understanding Teaching & Learning about Teaching*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- Mordal-Moen, K., and Green, K. 2014. “Neither Shaking nor Stirring: A Case Study of Reflexivity in Norwegian Physical Education.” *Sport, Education and Society* 19 (4): 415–434. DOI: [10.1080/13573322.2012.670114](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2012.670114)

- Murray, C., Heinz, M., Munday, I., Keane, E., Flynn, N., Connolly, C., Hall, T., and MacRuairc, G. 2020. "Reconceptualising relatedness in education in 'Distanced' Times." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (3): 488-502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1806820>
- Mutton, T. 2020. "Teacher Education and Covid-19: Responses and Opportunities for New Pedagogical Initiatives." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (4): 439-441.
- Ní Bhroin, Ó., O'Brien, S., Balfe, T., Brennan, A., and Pennycook, C. 2020. *Report: Quality Assessment System of In-Service Teacher Training provided by the Education and Teacher Training Agency (QA-INSETT-ETTA)*. Ireland: Dublin City University.
- Ó Grádaigh, S., Connolly, C., Mac Mahon, B., Agnew, A., and Poole, W. 2021. "An Investigation of Emergency Virtual Observation (EVO) in Initial Teacher Education, in Australia and Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Irish Educational Studies* 40 (2): 303-310. DOI: [10.1080/03323315.2021.1916561](https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.1916561).
- Piccolo, D.L., Livers, S.D., and Tipton, S.L. 2021. "Adapting Student Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparison of Perspectives and Experiences." *The Teacher Educator* 56 (3): 229-249. DOI: [10.1080/08878730.2021.1925382](https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2021.1925382).
- Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., and Jasper, M. 2001. *"Critical Reflection for Nursing and the Helping Professions: A User's Guide"*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scull, J., Phillips, M., Sharma, U., and Garnier, K. 2020. "Innovations in Teacher Education at the Time of COVID19: An Australian Perspective." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46(4): 497-506. DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701)

- Sepulveda-Escobar, P., and Morrison, A. 2020. "Online Teaching Placement during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chile: Challenges and Opportunities." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 43 (4): 587-607.
- Smith, K. 2009. *Innovation in Public Education: Problems and Opportunities.* San Francisco, CA: New Schools Venture Fund.
- Teaching Council. 2020a. "*Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education.*" Maynooth: The Teaching Council. <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/ite-professional-accreditation/ceim-standards-for-initial-teacher-education.pdf>
- Teaching Council. 2020b. "Guidance Note for School Placement 2020-2021." Maynooth: The Teaching Council. https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/news-events/latest-news/10-08-2020-guidance-note-for-school-placement-2020_.pdf
- Teaching Council. 2021a. *Guidelines on School Placement: Revised Edition.* Maynooth: The Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council. 2021b. *School Placement Innovation Report.* Maynooth: The Teaching Council. <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/teacher-education/school-placement-innovation-report-2021.pdf>
- Teaching Council. 2023. "About the Teaching Council." The Teaching Council. <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/website/en/about-us1/about-the-teaching-council>.
- Young, A.M., Ní Dhuinn, M., Mitchell, E., Ó Conaill, N., and Uí Choistealbha, J. 2022. "Disorienting Dilemmas and Transformative Learning for School Placement Teacher Educators during COVID-19: Challenges and Possibilities". *Journal of Education for Teaching* 48 (4): 459-474. DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2022.2082274](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2022.2082274).

Zeichner, K. 2007. "Accumulating Knowledge Across Self-Studies in Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 58 (1): 36–46. [DOI:10.1177/0022487106296219](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106296219).