

Developing critical ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion: A teacher educator perspective from Ireland

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Abstract

Context

The context for this study is an evaluation of a major development in Initial Teacher Education in Ireland, in which all teacher education programmes were required to provide additional content on inclusive education. As part of a re-accreditation process, teacher education programmes were lengthened and mandatory content on inclusive education was introduced. This provided a unique opportunity for a longitudinal study of the impact of a system-wide innovation to develop more inclusive teacher education, through the Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion project (ITE4I).

Approach

The ITE4I project analysed interview and survey data from teacher educators and from student and newly qualified teachers over a three-year period. A key issue which emerged for the development of more inclusive teachers was the question of how agency and criticality is addressed in teacher education programmes. This paper starts from two framing concepts, namely ‘situated learning’ and ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, to explore a notion of ‘critical legitimate peripheral participation’. To illustrate this, data from interviews with 11 teacher educators at 5 case study sites is re-considered in relation to this concept.

Findings

The notion of ‘critical legitimate peripheral participation’ was found to be helpful in addressing the following themes:

- Tensions in relation to attitudes towards inclusion evident in some school-university partnerships;
- Developing critical reflective practice on placement experiences to enhance the inclusive practices of beginning teachers;
- The role of the ‘co-operating teacher’.

Conclusions

This paper presents the concept of critical ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (CLPP) as a reflective tool to be used in initial teacher education to help beginning teachers in their burgeoning understandings of inclusive practice. The concept was developed through the Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion (ITE4I) project funded by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in Ireland. The CLPP concept uses Lave and Wenger’s (1991) seminal work on ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ and ‘situated learning’. The critical aspect to CLPP has been developed to consider the reflective awareness and agentic possibilities of student teachers’ experiences in school contexts.

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Points of Interest

- Explores how students can be better prepared to become more inclusive teachers with a capacity to continue to develop and innovate in their practice.
- Draws on a study of reform of teacher education in Ireland to add mandatory content on inclusive education. This represented a unique opportunity for longitudinal study of system-wide reform designed to promote inclusive teacher education.
- Highlights the importance of school context in shaping the experiences of student teachers and the need for space for critical reflection on those experiences.
- Builds on sociocultural understandings of learning as participation, by the addition of a critical dimension to previously established theories.

Key words: Teacher Education for Inclusion; Inclusive Education; Teacher Education

Title

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Subtitle

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Introduction

Context is never neutral. It always frames and produces the nature of our experience. In this paper, the focus is upon how context constructs variable experiences of school placement in initial teacher education, and how a useful sociocultural concept such as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) can be developed as a critical lens of use to teacher education, specifically relating to developing inclusive practice. The paper is based on data generated through qualitative interviews with initial teacher education staff (n=11) across five case study institutions in Ireland, through the Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion (ITE4I) project instigated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in Ireland (2018, 2019). Throughout the ITE4I research process, school context consistently emerged as a significant factor in student- teacher and newly qualified teacher (NQT) learning. Learning cannot only be planned for through formal programmes, objectives and outcomes. Learning happens incidentally and through participation. This paper will take a situated learning perspective on developing inclusive practices whilst learning to teach. The premise of the paper is that the context in which one learns has an important formative function on one’s approach to inclusive practice in one’s teaching, and that one requires a critical lens with which to explore the sociocultural context within which one is teaching and learning. The paper deploys a sociocultural theoretical framework, drawing most particularly on Lave and Wenger (1991) to assist us in understanding the complexity of how initial teacher education, the world of the beginning teacher and school culture commingle to produce experience. We do this through the extension of LPP in a critical direction through the concept of critical legitimate peripheral participation (CLPP). This paper also emphasises the connections between student teacher experiences, context and the development of social justice themes and inclusive practices with initial teacher education in Ireland. The paper will introduce ITE in Ireland; describe the context of the wider Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion research study; and it will discuss some international perspectives on the importance of context in ITE experiences. The paper will then explore the key concepts used here, situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation, before introducing the central idea of critical legitimate peripheral participation. After the methodological discussion, the paper will illustrate the conceptual background to CLPP through the presentation and discussion of evidence from the teacher educator interview section of the wider ITE4I study.

Initial Teacher Education in Ireland

Inclusive education is a significant area of interest in Ireland, even more so since Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Article 24(2) which provides for children's rights in terms of access to an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live (NCSE, 2019, p.3). Demographically, the number of students deemed to require support due to learning needs and/or disabilities is estimated at 25-27% (Banks, 2021). Relatedly then, a significant proportion of teacher allocation is also attached to special education provision.

National policy relating to ITE changed significantly in Ireland in 2012 when the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Teaching Council (TC) introduced a re-accreditation process for all ITE programmes in the state. As part of this re-visioning of ITE, programmes became subject to mandatory content regulations (including inclusive education and differentiation) as well as an extension of programme length. This extension of programme length also allowed for the development of broader placement opportunities with an expressed emphasis on diversity. Concurrent undergraduate programmes were extended to four years and consecutive postgraduate programmes were extended to two years full-time engagement that now provides a Masters level qualification to teachers qualifying through the postgraduate route.

The Teaching Council (2017, 14) introduced mandatory content for ITE programmes specifically related to 'Inclusive Education (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc.)'. Further policies and guidelines relating to ITE also prioritise inclusive education/ practices in the context of the teacher education continuum and school placement experiences specifically (Teaching Council, 2011b 2013). The latest iteration of ITE programme standards (Céim 2020) maintains a similar focus on these issues, and of course inclusive education remains a core element.

Therefore, inclusive education became a mandatory element of ITE programmes, although questions needed to be asked regarding the transaction of this policy into practice across the state. Questions regarding programme content, staff expertise/ knowledge, discrete and/or permeated models of provision and impact became a concern of national agencies such as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Teaching Council.

For our research, based on the research questions developed in partnership with the NCSE, the increasing emphasis on inclusive education and diversity was the central focus. Fundamentally, there are now deliberate opportunities, provided by extended and contrasting placement experiences, where student teachers can develop wider, more critical practice in terms of areas such as gender, social class, race-ethnicity and special education needs.

Essentially, school placement and programme content should synergise in terms of developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the inclusive teacher, or more poetically, as Pestalozzi would say, the head, hands and heart of the profession should work together. For the purposes of this article, those connections and collaborations between ITE programmes and schools are self-evidentially important and relations that are worthy of significant time and effort in terms of cultivating appropriate contexts for learning. Hick *et al.* (2018) recognised the centrality of this relationship and the importance of cultivating collaboration between the school placement actors (student teachers, co-operating teachers, HEI staff). For our purposes, it is the importance of cultivating a suitable context for developing knowledge, skills and attitudes relating specifically to inclusive education and valuing diversity. Nevertheless, in the Irish context, it has also been noted that collaboration and communication around inclusive practices in schools are often complex and sometimes variable in terms of teacher experience and engagement (Ní Bhroin and King 2020). In recent years, the complexity of school-university partnerships has also come to the fore in Irish research (Farrell 2021). Indeed, Heinz and Fleming (2019) pointed particularly to the unstable collaborative space in school-university partnerships, and the necessity for forging new identities as learners in initial teacher education. Furthermore, Hanly and Heinz (2022, p.2382) pay specific attention to the student teacher placement experience and found a high degree of legitimate peripheral participation and agency, attributable in part to the extended school placement in ITE in Ireland. What has received less attention is the specific experiences of teacher educators, student teachers and newly qualified teachers in terms of developing inclusive practice in schools as part of their learning journey.

Overview of the Longitudinal Study: The ITE4I Research

This section offers an outline of the major study in order to contextualise the perspective and evidence being developed specifically for this paper. The Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion study presented a unique opportunity to investigate changes in teacher education to promote inclusive practice in two important respects. Firstly this was an evaluation system-wide change, with a substantial focus on inclusive education. Secondly this was a longitudinal research project, enabling study of the process of change over time, from the perspectives of students as they become NQTs, alongside their teacher educators and school partners. Therefore, this paper offers an opportunity for deeper thoughts and proposals regarding how ITE develops critical perspectives, from the perspectives of teacher educators. The research questions (RQs) guiding the larger study were:

1. What are the components of inclusive/special education within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Ireland for primary and post-primary teachers?
2. Do the recent changes to ITE prepare newly qualified teachers to be inclusive as identified by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) Profile of Inclusive Teachers?
3. What are NQTs' experiences of inclusive teaching?
4. What gaps are there in how current ITE programmes prepare student teachers to be inclusive as per the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers and what aspects need to be strengthened to better prepare student teachers to be inclusive?
5. What lessons can be identified from this research for initial teacher education in Ireland and subsequent phases in the continuum of teacher education?

The EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers was used as an orientating document in terms of framing the research questions (EADSNE, 2012). It also informed other aspects of the study, including data analysis and the reporting of findings in the official research reports published by the National Council for Special Education (Authors *et al.* 2018, 2019). This approach provided a common reference point for understanding inclusive practices in teacher education, whilst acknowledging the contested nature of terminology and definitions in this field. The shift in nomenclature of the European Agency from the European Agency for Developments in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) represents this shifting space and the dilemmatic debates around the fields of Inclusive Education and Special Education. The tensions and debates around the field emerged also in the data. The EASNIE profile foregrounds four core values and related areas of competence regarding inclusive teaching: Valuing Learner Diversity, Supporting All Learners, Working with Others, and Personal Professional Development. Also worthy of note here is the fact that the EASNIE profile adopts a wider conceptualisation of inclusive practice, moving beyond special educational needs, and viewing inclusion as a wider values-based concept that addresses issues of class, gender, race-ethnicity, sexuality, religion and any markers of diversity that could potentially produce exclusions on any level within the education system. The particular focus of this paper is upon teacher-educator perspectives on student teacher experiences of inclusive education and draws specifically on research questions one, two, four and five above.

Key Messages from International Research

Initial teacher education for inclusion is a focus of international research in a number of jurisdictions. Largely, the view of international literature on teacher education for inclusion is that ITE has some work to do in developing student teachers so they are better prepared for inclusive practice (Grudnoff *et al.* 2017; Forlin and Chambers 2011; Tristani and Bassett-Gunter 2020). Indeed, the European-wide project, Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) has already offered useful systemic advice about making inclusion a central plank of initial teacher education and teachers' practice more generally (Donnelly and Watkins 2011). Young and MacPhail (2016, 287) direct our attention to the pivotal role performed by the co-operating teacher, as well as the lack of equity of experience for student teachers on placement. Similarly, Heggen, Raaen and Thorsen (2018) conclude that developing the relationship between teacher education programmes and placement settings would be beneficial. Robinson (2017, 176) has emphasised that inclusive teacher education requires the adoption of a complex, multi-modal, collective,

critical theoretical, socially situated, research-oriented and partnership-oriented pedagogic model if it is to advance.

Throughout international research in the field of ITE and inclusive education, the complexity and challenges presented by the lived reality of the student teacher, and indeed the NQT, in the classroom are foregrounded (Mintz et al. 2020). This article also foregrounds this sense of developing inclusive practice within teacher education as a social activity infused with the development of critical theoretical perspectives through reflective practice. Reflective practice in ITE has been interrogated regularly and there is a growing consensus that reflection needs to extend below the surface and become an embedded practice rather than a tool of ITE programmes (Beauchamp 2015). Similarly, Rowan et al.'s (2021) systematic literature review highlights the importance of developing critical perspectives in initial teacher education for inclusion. Ireland has already made significant moves in terms of making initial teacher education a research-orientated endeavour, bringing the worlds of the practicum and research closer together where ITE would be concerned with the development of student teachers as researchers and lifelong learners (Teaching Council 2017, 14).

Contextual influences on the experiences of beginning teachers have been documented as influential in the learning pathways of the workforce (Gleeson et al. 2015; Zeichner and Tabachnik 1985). Indeed, teacher socialisation has become an increasingly pivotal area of inquiry in research into beginning teachers' experiences, particularly in relation to school placement (teaching practice) (Caires, Almeida and Vieira 2012; Britzman 2012). Flores (2020, 3) has emphasised the necessity to consider context in conjunction with teacher characteristics and professional learning opportunities in the preparation of teachers for the classroom. Across research on teacher education the dichotomy between school-based practice learning and academic learning in teacher education institutions has been the source of some scrutiny (Walton & Rusznyak, 2020; Zeichner, 2010). In some jurisdictions there has been growing interest in developing the primacy of the practicum in teacher preparation (UK, USA, Australia are examples), whilst others have opted for deeper professionalisation through extended programmes, research-informed practice, critical reflection and the commingling of theory and practice in the classroom (Ireland, Portugal, Denmark, Norway are examples). Regardless of approach, the contextualised experience of placement is a central element of initial teacher education programmes throughout the world.

Robinson (2017, 176) emphasised that placement experiences and pedagogic frameworks need to be underpinned with support for intellectual development and critical thought in the pursuit of developing inclusive practice amongst student teachers. Du Plessis et al. (2020), using a similar sociocultural framework recognised the complexity inherent in bringing together the world of initial teacher education and workplace learning in the form of school placements and beginning teachers' work. Gaikhorst et al. (2020, 315), citing Williamson, Apedoe and Thomas (2016), forward the idea of context-consciousness mindset for teaching which emphasises the inextricable nature of learning and context in student teacher experiences. This emphasis on context and a focus on the critical faculties of the student teacher as situated in a learning environment, is the central focus of our paper here

In this paper, we consider how context plays an important role in the formative aspect of inclusive teaching practices amongst student teachers and NQTs in Ireland. In doing so we apply the theoretical perspective of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation to the world and work of the student teacher. The next section explains these framing concepts in more detail.

Two framing concepts

Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)

Jean Lave's seminal work on the situated and entwined nature of participation and learning offers us an important perspective on how context powerfully contributes to the experience of all learning. Wherever people engage for substantial periods of time, day by day, in doing things in which their ongoing activities are interdependent, learning is part of their changing participation in changing practices (Lave, 1996, 150). Lave and Wenger (1991, 33) emphasise that there is no activity that is not situated and that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. This is important in the sense that we cannot separate the person, their learning and the context within which this learning happens. We need to treat learning as mutually constitutive within a variety of contexts. This perspective is relevant to the

process (and product) of all learning and is therefore relevant to learning to teach and to the learning of the beginner teacher – the foci of this paper.

Some research on teacher education, and traditionally teacher educators, emphasised a separation between the workplace/ placement setting and the setting of the university/ academic institution. As different sites of learning, the former was often viewed, especially by the student teacher, as more realistic, meaningful and valuable than the latter. Historically, one could also argue that the system of teacher education functioned to privilege the learning within the academy over that within the workplace. The assumption in this traditional divide is that the university/college-based site of learning is about academic knowledge and understanding, while the workplace site is one of the applications of that knowledge and understanding. The rationale for such a divisional state of affairs can be understood drawing on Jean Lave's work (e.g. Lave 2008) when she notes the erroneous assumption that learning and using knowledge are distinguished, and, by the same token, the assumption that learning and living can be distinguished and separated. The assumption is that life is temporarily suspended to allow for the acquisition and possession of knowledge and skills. Examples she notes in contemporary society are the distinction between mental and manual labour, and the polarization of academic and vocational curricula, where one is assumed to be special, specialized, even extraordinary, while the other is positioned as just ordinary and mundane.

In the case of the division across the sites for learning in teacher education, coming to know traditionally involved distancing oneself from that which had to be learned. Lave challenges the notion of knowledge as external (to the knower) and pre-existing in the form say of pre-determined learning outcomes. She would argue that there is no distinction between learning in the teacher education sites we mention here – just different opportunities for learning. What those opportunities are, how they are extended and taken up, or rejected by people is what is of interest to the researcher of teacher learning. How do student teachers change the way they participate in activity – specifically the activity of teaching on school placement and thinking about that teaching? Our study seeks to understand how schools, colleges, curricula function to produce and sanction particular ways of participating and particular ways of being a teacher with reference to inclusion. Therefore, specific questions of interest are: what is available to be learned about inclusion? What knowledge is valued about inclusion? What particular ways of being a teacher are valued? How are student teachers being supported to learn about inclusion and to enact inclusive practices? Conversely, who is being marginalised and how? What are the mechanisms that variously enable and constrain this learning? By engaging with sociocultural perspectives, especially the insights offered by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, we endeavour to debunk the traditional separation of college and workplace learning as an unhelpful false dichotomy that does not serve the wider endeavour for teacher education.

The identity of 'inclusive teacher', gives the holder a perspective on the world which helps one make meaning of the actions of others – in other words, that perspective legitimates and closes off other interpretations of how to act. We are at once hindered and enabled by the scope of our identities. In school placement or for the beginner teacher, what from all the potentially significant things actually become salient for an individual to do depends on one's reading of the situation. As a (peripheral) member of a community of teachers in a school, an individual student teacher contributes to that community through her/his participation as a teacher. S/he negotiates her way in this community by doing and acting based on her own history in this practice for there is no other way of acting except through what she judges to be an appropriate way to act based on her history and take on the context. However, various cultural tools support her decisions and her actions, not least, for instance, the policy and valued practices of the school in which she teaches and her experience of learning about inclusion – all are guides to action (Wenger 2008). What are those cultural tools or artifacts and how do they co-mingle to produce and authorise an inclusive teacher - this is of prime interest to us in this study.

Obviously, some people are better equipped than others to shape their identities in a given situation, depending on their familiarity with it. For some people the struggle to extend their competence in a given situation may be considerable because the tools they bring to their learning appear not to be relevant or meaningful. Lave and Wenger's notion of LPP is a concept about how learners may become thoroughly competent in, barely adopt, or even resist the roles and practices of the various communities they encounter. What is key is that the process of negotiation, discussion, sharing, mentoring is vital. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) argue that participation is enabled when there is an

experience of mutuality by which they mean the opportunity to negotiate and share meanings. It is noteworthy that marginal participation is not peripheral participation as missing in the marginal version is the experience of mutuality and the mutual ability to negotiate meaning.

In developing their helpful concept of LPP, Lave and Wenger discuss apprenticeship learning among various groups and communities - midwives in Mexico, tailors in Liberia, quartermasters in the U.S., American butchers, and non -drinking alcoholics (e.g. Cain 1991). They show that on encountering a community of practice, an individual's limited, though legitimate, peripherality allows them more than mere observation – it offers participation and the opportunity to engage in social action with all the attendant social relations, social hierarchies and agendas, that such action inevitably entails. Over time, legitimate peripheral participation offers opportunities to new members to make its culture of practice their own.

We should also acknowledge some concerns various researchers have expressed about this concept and the work of Lave and Wenger more generally. For instance, Engeström (2007) is critical of both Lave and Wenger when they talk about moving from periphery to centre suggesting that this idea is deeply conservative as it undermines the potential for novelty and expansion in a given practice or activity. He argues that Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) do not locate their communities of practice in the history of real communities/society and that the work 'overlooks the history of oppression' that is so often a feature of hierarchies in workplaces. In similar vein, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) and Kontio (2015) challenge Wenger's notion of community of practice on the grounds that it ignores matters of class and power and the general political dynamics of learning. While Wenger and his colleagues have sought to consider some of the criticisms in their more recent work (Wenger-Trayner E. and Wenger-Trayner, B. 2015 and Wenger-Trayner et al 2019), Kontio (2015) claims that he doesn't go far enough and that the criticisms of his earlier work still apply to his more recent analyses. Nevertheless, we see value in the concept, particularly as we suggest a development that would answer some of these criticisms through the addition of the critical lens.

Developing critical legitimate peripheral participation

Rethinking Lave and Wenger's LPP, this paper suggests a version of legitimate peripheral participation ultimately leading to critical legitimate peripheral participation (CLPP) whereby the learner is empowered to engage critically with their own learning and cultural contexts as they set about developing their own situated professional practice. CLPP allows the teacher to engage their developing criticality, not just relating to the intricacies of pedagogy and classroom engagement but also with wider extant issues concerning social justice, equity and experience amongst diverse school settings. The issue of social justice in teacher education also contributes to an emergent issue within the field. Indeed, as Zeichner (2016) has pointed out, most teacher education programmes declare social justice as a core value within their programmes, but some have fallen short of practicing what they preach. This is the core issue: are schools of education, and indeed schools, enacting the principles of social justice that are so often manifest in their policy documentation and statements of ethos? A perspective such as CLPP allows the student teacher, and indeed the NQT, opportunity to enact their value systems within their school placement experiences, thus developing opportunities for social action within these settings. Perhaps what we are forwarding here is a theory of CLPP whereby the learner is empowered to engage critically with their own learning and cultural contexts as they set about developing their own situated professional practice.

Central to informing the CLPP concept is addressing issues of equity and equality through the practice of initial teacher education. Cochran- Smith et al. (2016) raise some salient points for our work in this field through their Project RITE (Rethinking Initial Teacher Education for Equity). Their work, like ours, addresses the importance of addressing issues loosely defined as diversity where the central consideration is impacting upon the opportunities to learn and achieve for students coming from poverty, marginalised communities in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, gender, (dis) ability. Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) forward two ideas of particular relevance here; the idea of researching 'patterns of practice' and their delineation of the six facets of the 'practice of equity', namely:

- (1) *selecting worthwhile content and designing and implementing learning opportunities aligned to valued learning outcomes;*
- (2) *connecting to students' lives and experiences;*

- (3) *creating learning-focused, respectful, and supportive learning environments;*
 - (4) *using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching;*
 - (5) *adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for professional engagement and learning;*
 - (6) *recognizing and challenging classroom, school, and societal practices that reproduce inequity.*
- (Cochran-Smith et al. 2016, 71)

The focus here will be upon facets 3, 5 & 6 of this framework. Throughout our research on ITE in Ireland, the focus upon social justice and equity emerged as more or less a constant theme across institutions, programmes and the resulting data. Placement experiences and the importance of context, along with programme content, emphasised the necessity for student teachers to become active and aware education professionals through experiencing diversity, recognising and challenging injustice in their placement experiences. Evidence suggests this is achieved through developing contrasting placement experiences for student teachers; placing reflective practice at the centre of the student teacher learning experience, and developing an orientation towards becoming empowered as agents of change within their developing careers in the wider education system.

Methodology

The research design was longitudinal, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Data collection and analysis was planned through a series of phases:

Phase 1 (Sept. – Jan. 2016): Analysing ITE Programme Content

- Scoping review of literature
- Documentary analysis (30 programmes from 13 ITE providers)
- Teacher educator survey (N=21)

Phase 2 (Feb. – Aug. 2016): Understanding the ITE Student Experience

- Student teacher survey (N=430) and interviews (N=47)
- Teacher educator interviews (N=11)

Phase 3 (Sept. 2016 – Aug. 2017): Understanding the NQT Experience (1st year)

- NQT1 survey (N=122) and follow-up interviews (N=20)
- School principal interviews (N=13)

Phase 4 (Sept. 2017 – May 2018): Understanding the NQT Experience (2nd year)

- NQT2 survey (N=38) and follow-up interviews (N=23)
- School principal (N=8) interviews

This paper focuses on data from the teacher educator interviews in Phase 2, which were based in part on our analysis of ITE programme documentation and teacher educator survey responses in Phase 1. Documentation relating to some 30 programmes (out of 59 nationally) from 13 ITE providers (out of 19 in total) was obtained with the support of the Teaching Council. These were primarily standard proforma submitted for re-accreditation, with module outlines appended in some cases; in addition, reviews of these submissions published by the Teaching Council were analysed, together with the criteria used for re-accreditation. The documentary analysis started from a typology derived from the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers, to examine how and where inclusive teaching is represented within ITE programme documents.

A survey of teacher educators was conducted at the same time, to collect initial data on the range of views expressed by teacher educators in relation to issues of inclusive teaching in ITE programmes. The survey was constructed to reflect areas of competence within the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers, and to collect free-text comments. Following piloting, 21 respondents (programme leaders, module leaders, heads of departments) provided complete or near-complete responses giving information relating to 27 programmes from 13 institutions (some survey responses related to more than one programme).

Interviews with 11 teacher educators were conducted at 5 case study sites, selected to represent a range of primary, post-primary, consecutive and concurrent programmes; and to provide a geographical spread of institutions. The selection of participants was purposeful in the sense that we wanted to harvest the perspectives of staff working in inclusive education, special education and in leadership roles within programmes and/or schools of education. All participants in the study were provided with research

information sheets and provided their consent for participation in the study; full ethical clearance for the study was granted by the principal investigator's institution (Log Number: ED/15-16/013). Interviewee roles and case study settings are detailed in Table 1:

Table 1. Teacher Educator Staff Interview Details

Case study staff interviews (n=11)	Case study site description	Roles of interviewees
Case Study A (n=2)	Post-primary: consecutive & concurrent	Head of School Lecturer in Inclusive Education
Case Study B (n=3)	Primary: consecutive & concurrent	Head of School Head of Special Education Lecturer in Special education
Case Study C (n=2)	Post-primary: concurrent & consecutive	Programme Leader Lecturer in Special Education
Case Study D (n=2)	Post-primary: concurrent & consecutive	Lecturer in Special Education Lecturer in Education
Case Study E (n=2)	Post-primary & Primary: consecutive	Programme Leader Lecturer in Special Education

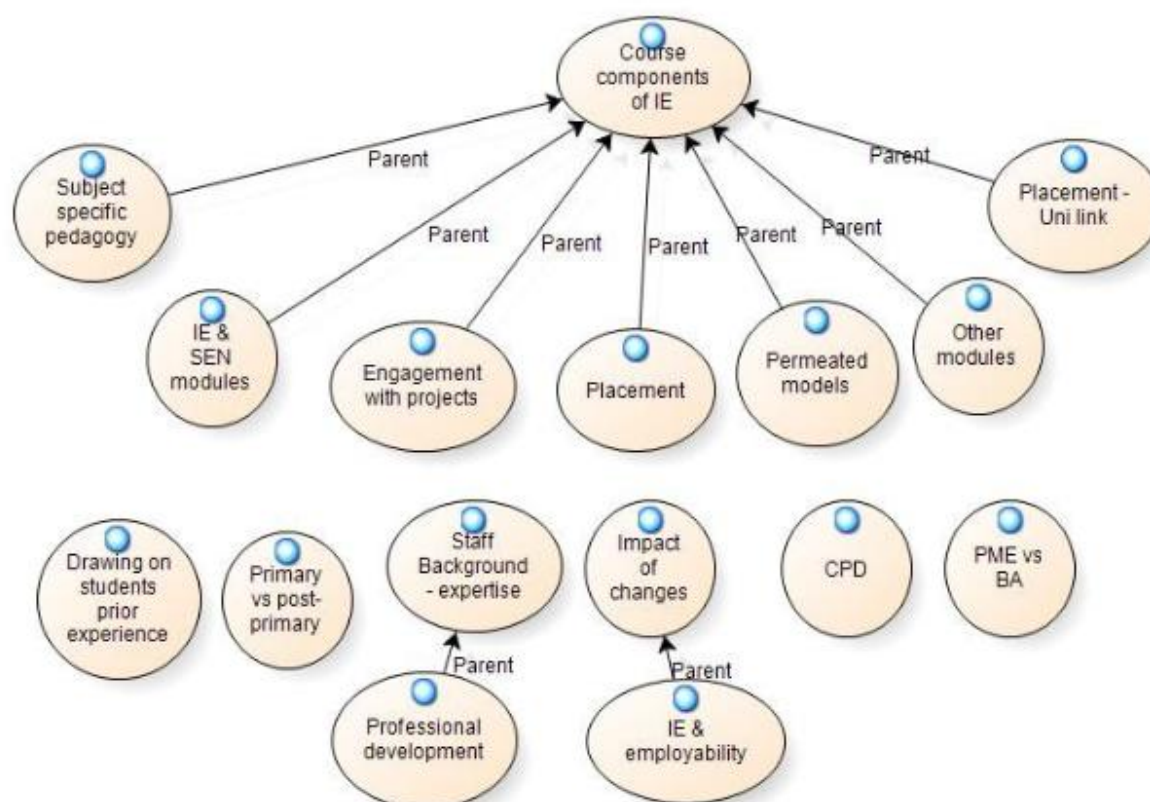
The interviews sought teacher educators' views on issues of inclusive teaching and ITE in Ireland; on the impact of the extension and reconceptualization of ITE programmes; their responses to emergent themes and issues arising from both our survey of teacher educators and the documentary analysis; together with their reflections on aspects of the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers. The teacher educator interview semi-structured schedule focused on:

- general investigations of ITE and inclusion in the Irish context
- opinions and evidence of impact stemming from the extension of ITE programmes in Ireland
- emergent themes and clarifications from the programme leader survey
- emergent themes and clarifications from institutional and programme specific documentary analysis
- elements of the EASNIE 'Profile of Inclusive Teachers'

Phase one of the research drew our attention to particular features of each case study site; the semi-structured nature of the schedule allowed for probing questions that were specific to each site, based on findings from the documentary analysis, the programme leader survey and emergent ideas from the student interviews. The EASNIE profile was a specific focus of the interview schedule in terms of exploring translations between policy and practice, learning from practice and the constraints and affordances of the recently changed landscape of ITE in Ireland.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised before uploading to *NVivo* for coding. This involved a process of thematic coding by two researchers, based on *a priori* codes derived from the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers, together with themes identified from the student interviews. The process of identifying themes in order to generate sub-codes and new codes was recorded in *NVivo* memos, providing evidence and points of discussion within the team for the decisions made and our methodological rationale. This process resulted in a coding 'tree' that was shared with the research team in order to allow different views to emerge. While time consuming, this process was necessary in examining our theoretical stance and the analytical possibilities it engendered, adding rigour to the analysis. Figure 1 illustrates the additional coding nodes used:

Figure 1 Staff interview coding nodes used in addition to EASNIE profile nodes



In summary, data analysis was conducted using a priori codes drawn from the EASNIE profile as well as through developing inductive codes on an iterative, constant comparative basis throughout the wider longitudinal study. The qualitative data were initially analysed through the NVivo programme and further thematic analysis was also conducted by the researchers. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process was used to crystallise key themes across the dataset. The quotations and extracts below are used to illustrate these themes as they are relevant to the formation of the concept CLPP. For the analysis below, the additional lens of views on placement experience was cast upon the data. A full discussion of coding nodes and analysis processes are available in the ITE4I Phase One Report. The evidence used below is being used to explicate the concept of CLPP here rather than providing a systematic presentation of all the available evidence.

Findings: demonstrating CLPP in practice

Tensions in relation to attitudes towards inclusion evident in some school-university partnerships

Throughout the staff interviews, a tension between the messages being constructed by the HEIs around inclusive practice and the messages being constructed by some co-operating teachers and schools in the placement experience emerged as an important theme. One initial teacher educator (Case Study A) commented that:

they go out to the schools and they get a different message.

She described this message from schools as relating to children with SEN as 'they shouldn't be here' and described situations where some children are 'excluded from class, from certain subjects'. One interviewee pointed to the narrowness of viewpoint and practices in what she described as elite settings with narrow cohorts with didactic and excessively exam-focused approaches to education. This is damaging from the perspective of the formative function of these school placements upon student teachers growing professional identities. This data stream emphasised the breadth of knowledge, skills

and attitudes in existence across the spectrum of school-types in Ireland. Schools, both primary and post-primary, display variable values regarding ethos, inclusivity/exclusivity and democratic principles around access, participation and benefit, according to the staff surveyed and interviewed in this study.

A lecturer at case study site B commented that they were:

at the mercy of you know schools being there open to take students in and the schools are at different places on the learning curve in relation to this as well and some are way ahead of others in terms of [inclusive] practices and so forth and so you would be worried that there would be exposed practices that you wouldn't be promoting.

This type of commentary emphasises the variability of experiences and practices that student teachers might be engaged in during their placement experiences. Similarly, a lecturer in case study site C commented that:

If the school doesn't have an inclusive I suppose vision, and it doesn't have to be perfect, but if it doesn't even have that vision well then I think that makes it very difficult for our students to work within that type of environment

Indeed, the emphasis across the staff interview data was that the placement setting made a very important contribution to student teachers in terms of the development of their attitudes, skills and knowledge relating to inclusive practice.

Developing critical reflective practice on placement experiences to enhance the inclusive practices of beginning teachers

Critical reflective practice remains an extant focus in ITE but a significant finding from this study is the importance of threading together inclusive practice and reflection in terms of the learning experiences of the student teacher. Throughout the programmes researched here, there is strong evidence of reflective practice as a core element of all programmes, with a varying level of focus on issues of inclusive education. A lecturer in case Study site C commented that reflective portfolios:

provide space for students to deconstruct their own understandings and to engage with their perceptions and attitudes towards others and towards the world, so I would see those as two very strong spaces.

Indeed, this sense of criticality through deconstruction and developing one's own stance in relation to issues such as inclusive education featured very strongly throughout the staff interview responses. ITE staff recognised the deep, embedded and formative nature of critical reflective practice for developing attitudes, skills and knowledge regarding inclusion. Teacher educators saw this as supported by opportunities for students to explore these issues in their research projects. For example, at Case study E, the Programme Leader noted the popularity of inclusion as a research topic, but saw these developments as a 'happy accident':

I think there's more of a focus there on teacher as researcher, and many of our graduate student teachers, as we call them, many of them are actually exploring and researching inclusive practices or general educational needs, or special educational needs.

The co-operating teacher

Another variable within the placement experience is that of the co-operating teacher. This person plays an important formative role in the experiences of the student teacher. Very often, research participants commented on the positive influence a co-operating teacher could have on the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitude towards inclusive practice. Nevertheless, this was not always the case, and the converse also emerged as a real possibility within this research. One staff interviewee (Case Study C) made the centrality of the co-operating teacher role very clear:

that it really depends on the type of cooperating teacher that they have, so how informed they are, that's the big thing, so that would be the first thing, so you know their own training, their own perspective on working with different groups of children

Conversely, student teachers reported to staff members their awareness around less- inclusive practice amongst some co-operating teachers in some settings:

You would hear stories... you know what I'm talking about, like you know there are certain exclusive strategies that are happening in schools and our students do talk about it.

There were also reports of situations where co-operating teachers were seen as undermining student teachers attempts to develop more inclusive practices, for example:

one of the students was using really creative methodologies ... in her classroom and to engage all the students and the teaching practice supervisor came out who didn't understand this at all and failed the student.

Therefore, there is also evidence for developing criticality amongst student teachers of their placements and co-operating teachers with whom they are working. The co-operating teacher, their perspectives and practices regarding inclusive practice, contribute to the learning trajectory of the student teacher in very significant ways. Again, the co-operating teacher is a vital contextual variable in the student teacher placement experience.

Across the dataset, there was a positive response to the recent changes to teacher education stipulations regarding the necessity for student teachers to undertake placements in contrasting settings. The development of two placement experiences has been largely positive in terms of developing inclusive practice. ITE staff reported that students get the opportunity to experience different placements with their own unique challenges and therefore emerge as better prepared than previous student teachers in this regard.

Team teaching and access to experience in support teaching settings are advocated by the programmes in some case study sites. Having said that, the head of school in case study site A did report that about 20% of student teachers had some difficulty in accessing support teaching experience in schools. Similarly, case study site B reported a strong focus on developing contrasting placements, however, they did also state that they had recently dropped a two-week special school placement from the programme due to time constraints and difficulty sourcing the placement for all students. Anecdotally, it was suggested that the reason for this was one of trust relating to the inexperienced student teacher in learning support/ resource settings. One interviewee (staff, case study A) commented that:

they are developing quite well in that the two school placements help, the two years helps... you know, so the capacity for giving a broader range of experiences is there... two placements help, two years help [referring to PME], part of what happens in teacher education should be inclusive education'

This is an important point in the narrative and debate surrounding ITE programme extension here in Ireland. The evidence generated here does support the fact that the extension has led to an increased focus on inclusive education, both in terms of course content and placement experiences, and most particularly in terms of the opportunities to experience contrasting schools, cultures and climates.

Discussion

According to the findings from this analysis, the importance of placement context is an element of teacher education worthy of further development. Areas such as mentor teacher education, critical consciousness of the student teacher in the placement setting, and familiarity with the centrality of inclusive education in teacher education, and indeed wider education policy, are important to develop within the Irish education system. CLPP as a concept allows for processes of recognising and addressing tensions around inclusive practice in schools from a social justice perspective. The development of this intentional criticality helps to align the experience of the student teacher directly with Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) and the 'practice of equity' framework, whereby student teachers are intentionally lent agency in their reflection on, and analysis of, their school placement experiences. It has emerged here that placement experiences are complex negotiations for student teachers where a diverse range of influences converge in practice, necessitating a conceptualisation such as CLPP to allow the student teacher to explore and understand the context within which they are learning to teach. It should also allow student teachers to develop their own pathways and hopefully, aligning with Strom and Martin (2015, 269), demonstrate how small escapes can build to greater, even transformative, changes in our education system.

Developing congruity in the school-university partnership is a field worthy of our attention as it can unlock very significant opportunities for critical reflective practice. Our research revealed that the institutional contexts of schools vary with regard to inclusive practice and as such, we need to think about strengthening the critical participatory opportunities for student teachers in order to develop their agency in the context. White et al. (2020) have suggested similar interventions would be of benefit to all of the actors in ITE, including the teacher educator. Sharma et al. (2021) suggest developing closer partnerships between the institutions to address gaps between theory and practice in inclusive education.

Again, we see CLPP as contributing to this space by allowing for that critical participation to take place with an intentional focus on inclusive teacher education practice.

Similarly, the value of developing transformative perspectives through contrasting placement opportunities emerged in this study. Indeed, by becoming critically aware of the social, cultural, historical and economic contexts, it is suggested here that teacher CLPP becomes a gateway concept that facilitates this learning in a 'context-conscious' approach to initial teacher education (Gaikhorst et al., 2020, 14). What is being forwarded here is that engagement with diversity in context through student teacher placement is centrally important to developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will equip teachers to become transformative professionals, capable of fulfilling the vision for the inclusive teacher foregrounded in the EADSNE Profile of inclusive Teachers (2012).

It is also clear here that the co-operating teacher plays an important role in the contextualised teacher socialisation processes at play in the placement experience. Here again, we suggest, the awareness of the student teacher through CLPP is vital to allow one to engage with the experience in a critically reflective manner, and therefore facilitating the development of student teacher agency. Cooperating teacher – student teacher relationships exist as complex and culturally situated phenomena where they can serve, at worst as reproductive cultural gatekeepers, and at best as agents of cultivating teacher agency and mutual learning. Ó Gallchóir, Flaherty and Hinchion (2019) have unpacked the significance and possibilities of experiences for pre-service teachers in their relationship with the cooperating teacher in an Irish context. Of significance for us here is the potential for developing the relationship and the understandings of cooperating teachers and student teachers in the advancement of inclusive practice using a concept like CLPP. For example, Flores et al. (2016) even go so far as suggesting that the cooperating teacher and student teacher develop closer partnerships to realise their transformative potential.

Lastly, the space of reflective practice has become a core aspect of teacher education programmes and one where inclusive education should be an explicit focus of attention. Similar to McGarr and Emstad (2020), we posit the centrality of reflective practice to social justice and developing CLPP amongst student teachers, rather than the creeping accountability agenda that can sometimes be attached to reflection in initial teacher education. Reflection is ubiquitous within ITE programmes and it is something that could develop through the deployment of CLPP, where there is overt and deliberate awareness of socio-cultural contexts, as well as the impetus for critical exploration of context that would serve to develop the potential for more inclusive practices. In this sense, we see CLPP as a process through which reflective practice can become a deeper, embedded practice rather than, as Beauchamp (2015) has described previously, as 'a tool' which remains closer to the surface of practice in ITE.

Underpinning all of the findings from this paper, of course, is the centrality of power, particularly, the various disparities that exist in terms of the triad of teacher-educators, co-operating teachers and student teachers. Zeichner (2021, p.3) highlighted how we need to remain cognisant of the authenticity of these relationships and the implicit nature of partnership hierarchies, allied with hierarchies of knowledge about whose knowledge counts in teacher education. Similarly, Hanly and Heinz (2022) recognised that key aspects relating to school culture played a very significant role in how student teachers experienced agency in their roles as student teachers and often relationships with colleagues and management, positive and negative, coloured their opportunities to flourish or indeed wither. Ultimately, a concept like CLPP allows for the development of criticality both in terms of one's burgeoning development as a student teacher and indeed in terms of how one could critique intra-school power structures and cultural contexts in terms of how these may influence experience, particularly relating to developing inclusive practices for student teachers.

Conclusion

LPP has been used previously in the context of teacher education as an orientating concept to negotiate tensions in theory and practice, and the functioning of school-university partnerships (Solomon et al. 2017). Our line of argument here has been to extend and apply the original sociocultural concept of LPP in a more relevant way to initial teacher education, through the CLPP idea, in order to embed the interrogation of the sociocultural contexts of initial teacher education experiences. From our point of view in this paper the sociocultural ideas of context, CLPP, identity and agency still have considerable explanatory power and prove helpful in traversing the messy terrain of professional learning aimed at

the promotion of an inclusive classroom and school. Although not the specific focus here, we could also see CLPP as a potentially useful concept for developing what McDaid *et al.* (2023, p.216) have described as being ‘authentically present’ in terms also of the student teacher themselves, that is equally developing agency amongst a diverse teaching profession demographic. What we have forwarded here is a layering of a more explicit critical stance to grapple with the complexity of bridging the rhetoric and the reality of an inclusive pedagogy and social justice in school placement settings through the CLPP concept. Finally, it may indeed be useful for teacher education programmes internationally to explore whether the concept of CLPP can help equip student teachers and, perhaps, teacher educators with the critical tools that would allow for a purposeful focus on developing inclusive professional practice amongst student teachers as they negotiate the various contexts of school placement with an overt and focused lens upon issues related to social justice in school settings.

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