Becoming a Teacher:
Students' Experiences and Perceptions of their Initial Teacher Education

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Abstract **Lisa Coady**

Becoming a Teacher: Students' Experiences and Perceptions of their Initial Teacher Education

This research is focused on teacher education students in initial, concurrent teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick (UL). This longitudinal study tracks two cohorts of student teachers from Year Two to Year Four of their undergraduate programme and analyses their experiences during their initial teacher education (ITE).

This thesis begins by examining the need for research on second-level teacher education, outlining evidenced gaps in the existing body of research in the Irish context and highlighting areas that merit further consideration with reference to current policy. The study then presents key data on teaching as a career in Ireland and considers recent developments, which recognise the needs of student and beginning teachers. This is followed by an analysis of the growth of concurrent programmes both nationally and internationally and a synopsis of traditional models of ITE in Ireland. This section of the thesis concludes with a summation of how the concurrent teacher education programmes at UL have evolved since their inception and how changes that have ensued have manifested in terms of programme content and format.

The subsequent literature review begins by appraising the traditional approach to teacher education and trends pertaining to the theoretical underpinning of programmes. It considers how educational theory has been incorporated into teacher education and perceived by student teachers. This is followed by a discussion of the place of educational theory in teacher education and the relationship between both educational theory and the theory of teaching and how these relate to real-life teaching.

This study examines findings from both cross-sectional and longitudinal data and investigates student teachers' perceptions of their needs and requirements during pre-service teacher education and their perceptions of their experiences during teaching practice (TP). The research findings create a profile of the student teachers studying at UL and consider how student teachers' own educational histories, learning styles and academic abilities impact on their experiences. It considers how student teachers see the university and faculty vis-à-vis the reality of classroom life and reveals the gap between the "type" of educational practice advocated by the university and that experienced by students in schools. It investigates the nature and quality of support students receive and whether this support is sufficient to successfully navigate their experiences on TP. Specifically this study maps student teachers' developmental journey through teacher education, encompassing their perceptions of planning and reflection, their experiences within the school environment, their feelings about TP and teaching and overall, their feelings of preparedness to begin full-time teaching.

The work presented in this thesis is entirely my own work. It has not been submitted previously to this or any other institute for this or any other academic award. Where use has been made of the work of other people, it has been acknowledged and referenced.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

I am not a teacher; only a fellow traveller of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead– ahead of myself as well as of you.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

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List of Abbreviations

APT	The Alliance for Professionalism in Teaching
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
ATEE	Association for Teacher Education in Europe
CHoICE	The Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (UK)
ENTEP	European Network on Teacher Education Policies
EPD	Early Professional Development
EPS	Department of Education and Professional Studies
FYP	Final Year Project
HDip	Higher Diploma in Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
IFUT	The Irish Federation of University Teachers
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPP	Induction Pilot Project
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
M&CT	Materials and Construction Technology

M&ET Materials and Engineering Technology

NDP National Development Plan

NIHE National Institute for Higher Education

NQTs Newly Qualified Teachers

NUI National University of Ireland

OECD Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development

PE Physical Education

PGDE Post-Graduate Diploma in Education

PLAs Post-lesson appraisals

QCA Quality Credit Average

Science Science Education

SDPI School Development Planning Initiative

SLSS Second-Level Support Service

SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TNTEE The Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe

TP Teaching Practice

TTA Teacher Training Agency

TUI Teachers Union of Ireland

UCD University College Dublin

UL University of Limerick

ULREC University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

Chapter One: Introduction

Title of the project

Becoming a teacher: students' experiences and perceptions of their initial teacher education.

Description of the project

The purpose of this study is to analyse the perceptions of student teachers and their experiences during their initial teacher education (ITE). This investigation represents teacher education students in initial, concurrent teacher education programmes in the Irish context, and more specifically, at the University of Limerick (UL), where five[1] undergraduate hermeneutic concurrent teacher education programmes are offered by the Department of Education and Professional Studies (EPS).

This longitudinal study tracks two cohorts of student teachers from Year Two to Year Four of their undergraduate programme and analyses their development over that time. This study examines findings from both cross-sectional and longitudinal data and examines student teachers' perceptions of their needs during pre-service teacher education and their perceptions of their experiences at the University of Limerick. It creates a profile of the student teachers studying at UL and analyses how student teachers' own educational histories, learning styles and academic abilities impact on their experiences.

It considers how student teachers see the university and the faculty vis-à-vis the reality of classroom life. It also examines if schools promote the "type" of educational practice that is advocated by the university and the congruency in the message about teaching that students receive in both arenas. It investigates if student teachers receive the type and level of support they need to successfully navigate their experiences on teaching practice (TP), from both the school and the university and to what extent their TP experiences influence their perception of the relevance of their teacher education programme.

[1] At the time of this research there were five concurrent teacher education programmes offered at the University of Limerick. A sixth programme was subsequently introduced in the academic year 07/08.

Specifically the study maps the student teachers' developmental journey through teacher education, encompassing their perceptions of planning and reflective practices, their experiences within the school environment, their feelings about TP and teaching and overall, their feelings of preparedness to begin full-time teaching.

Relationships between the following independent variables and all other data generated from this study are analysed:

- Gender
- Course of study
- School type attended on TP
- School classification (designated disadvantaged / not designated disadvantaged)
- Overall level of educational attainment
- Academic achievement in modules taken in education
- Teaching practice grade received

Although research exists regarding the needs and experiences of student teachers during their ITE, it remains unclear as to the role teacher educators, colleges of education and schools have to play in relation to student teachers' ability to understand and apply knowledge from their pre-service programme, their support needs and how their specific learning preferences are met.

Hypothesis and research questions

Main aim

The aim of this study is to examine the profile, experiences and perceptions of student teachers on concurrent second-level initial teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick.

Objectives / Key Questions

The objectives and emerging key questions focus on student teachers' experiences during their teaching practice (TP) placements and perceptions of their initial teacher education, with a specific focus on the educational component of their pre-service studies.

1. To examine aspects of the profile of students on concurrent second-level teacher education programmes and consider how these impact on student teachers' learning and development.
2. To investigate student teachers' perceptions and application of models of planning and reflection for teaching, as prescribed by their pre-service programme and explore the extent to which student teachers' utilised these models and practices to benefit their teaching during TP.
3. To examine student teachers' ability to engage with, value and utilise the educational knowledge presented as part of their pre-service programme.
4. To analyse the extent to which student teachers' planning and reflective practices and utilisation of educational knowledge were supported both in college and in schools.
5. To chronicle student teachers' experiences within schools during teaching practice and examine the extent to which they feel prepared to teach.

Rationale for the Dissertation

The limitations of the current research available on teacher education

Exploration of the available readings highlights that research on teacher education programmes in the Irish context, both concurrent and consecutive, and on teachers' views about their pre-service education, particularly with respect to second-level teacher education, is limited. In a comparative paper of teacher education in both England and Ireland Hall et al. commented on how little research they found:

> Following a search of a variety of sources, including the Register of Theses on Education Topics in Universities in Ireland, the authors found little research on pre-service teacher education in the Irish context (1999:210).

They suggest that the lack of research on teacher education in Ireland may be ascribed to the nature of teacher recruitment, initial teacher education and the allocation of government funds to teacher education, which have changed so little over the last few decades (Hall et al., 1999).

Burke (1992), although commenting specifically on primary teacher education, stated that longitudinal studies of teacher education simply do not exist and that the research, which has been carried out has been geared more towards detecting differences in

tactics and / or pupil achievement rather than in teachers' opinions. He maintained that an analysis of the way teachers think about educational issues, of their ability to apply foundation knowledge to the practical problems of teaching, and the overall quality of their decision making would be far more likely to provide a comparative measure of the advantages and disadvantages of both concurrent and consecutive programmes of teacher education (Burke, 1992:153, 154).

A number of papers from UL educationists have been published in relation to teacher education, namely Leonard and Gleeson (1999) 'Context and Coherence in Initial Teacher Education in Ireland: the place of reflective inquiry,' and Leonard and O'Doherty (1998) 'Action Research in Initial Teacher Education,' etc. which provide valuable information on specific areas of initial teacher education, particularly reflective inquiry.

The limitations of the research that is currently available on teacher education are manifold. Firstly, much of the research is geared at looking at specific areas of teacher education and not at student teachers' opinions of their teacher education or aspects of their development as teachers. Secondly, existent studies are not generally longitudinal in nature. Thirdly, most of the available research in teacher education in the Irish context is focused on primary teacher education (Burke, 1992 & 1997; Killeavy, 2001; Drudy, 2006). Finally, the studies relating to second-level teacher education are predominately focused on the Higher Diploma in Education (HDip) as the main provider of second-level teacher education (Heinz, 2008; Lodge et al., forthcoming; Lodge et al, 2005; Drudy, 2004; Killeavy, 1999) or have been exclusively conducted after the students have entered full-time teaching (Leonard & O'Doherty, 2002; Killeavy, 2001; Irvine, 1986).

While there is some research which examines the profiles and experiences of primary level student teachers and those of student teachers of the higher diploma as outlined above, nothing of a similar nature has been produced in relation to second-level student teachers' experiences of concurrent teacher education programmes.

The need for research on second-level teacher education programmes

In his 1992 paper, 'Teaching: Retrospect and Prospect' Burke makes the point that in the Irish context, research on teachers' educational experiences is lacking: 'There is a

lack of high quality follow-up studies comparing graduates of both types [consecutive and concurrent] of teacher education programme or, indeed, of any form of teacher education' (Burke, 1992:153).

This need for research on student teachers' experiences of their pre-service teacher education has not gone unnoticed and in the last decade a growing awareness has been observed in educational circles as to the lack of high quality studies in this area, which analyse the way teachers think about educational issues and their ability to apply foundation knowledge to the practical problems of teaching. This shift is evident in current research projects such as a joint UCD, TCD and NUI Maynooth study which assesses the needs of pre-service and newly qualified teachers and the needs of the post-primary sector (Lodge et al., forthcoming) and a recent fully funded PhD post in NUI Galway, looking at current practices in consecutive second-level teacher education in Ireland (Heinz, 2008).

In 1995, the White Paper *Charting our Education Future* referred to the absence of a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher education programmes. Although it did not comment on the merits or otherwise of the Higher Diploma in Education (HDip), the Paper pointed out that some disquiet has been expressed as to the adequacy of this programme in preparing graduates for a career in teaching. It recommended a systematic review of all types of second-level teacher education by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which would guide future decisions for teacher education (White Paper, 1992:124).

Reviews of teacher education both at primary and second-level were announced at the annual conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick in 1998. It was anticipated that these reviews would be completed within six months (Flynn, 25/08/98) and would contribute significantly to research on teacher education in Ireland. Although the findings of the *Review on Primary Level Teacher Education* (The Kellaghan Report) were presented to the then Minister for Education and Science Michael Woods on April 9th 2002, the recommendations of this review have yet to be implemented. The Kellaghan Report made specific recommendations regarding the re-conceptualisation of teacher education and suggested that re-structuring of teacher education at primary level 'should be informed by current understandings' (Kellaghan, 2004:17; Kellaghan, 2002).

The *Report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education* (The Byrne Report) although officially published in 2002 was only made publically available in October 2005 (www.irlgov.ie/edu 3/10/05). This report strongly emphasises the need for research on second-level teacher education which it states has been neglected and 'is deserving of more concentrated attention' (Byrne, 2002:17). The Advisory Group asserted that there is a 'need to initiate and maintain ongoing research into teacher education' both nationally and internationally and recommended that a national centre for research in teacher education should be established and should seek to form links with similar centres around the world (2002:17). Consequently, one of the Advisory Group's main recommendations was that 'research should be carried out on beginning teachers to determine the efficacy of initial teacher education programmes' for second-level teachers in an Irish context (2002:14).

The OECD Report *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers,* also comments on the lack of existing research on pre-service teacher education in many of the OECD countries and states that 'in many countries there are extensive research gaps concerning teachers, their preparation, work and careers' (2005:15). The report asserts that research of this nature is highly important for improving and refining the knowledge base for teacher policy and is also imperative as a means of introducing new and more up to date information into schools and to ensure that teachers connect more actively with relevant knowledge as it comes to light (OECD:2005). Within the same context the OECD (2005) comments that policy formation 'would benefit from more extensive monitoring and evaluation of innovation and reform' at all phases of teacher education and that by identifying successful factors of teacher education, be they particular programmes, components of programmes or dissemination methods, countries would be better placed to create and sustain effective strategies of teacher education (2005:14-16).

At the launch of the OECD Report (2005) the then Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin spoke of a need to address 'a number of important issues and challenges currently impacting on the teaching profession' (2005:1). One of the issues highlighted specifically was initial teacher education. She queried the relevance of current teacher education programmes at all levels and the appropriateness of the current focus on academic studies in pre-service teacher education. With specific reference to primary teacher education she stated:

> I would question whether the range of content covered on pre-service programmes has adequately kept pace with the changing demands that now face teachers…I have concerns that the focus of provision has shifted too far towards academic studies at the expense of core teaching methodologies, teaching practice and the wider educational science skills (Hanafin, 2005:3-5).

The Minister spoke of the OECD Report (2005) and other publications such as The Kellaghan Report (2002) and The Byrne Report (2002) as providing the backdrop for the belief that 'there is a strong case that we now need to re-configure the content of some of our pre-service programmes' (Hanafin, 2005:4). Coupled with this she commented that if we are to ensure that Irish teachers are fully equipped with the skills needed to teach in modern Irish classrooms then 'we now need to interrogate the current models of initial teacher education in the context of the changing classroom environment' (2005:5).

In the current climate of societal change the need for research on initial teacher education has become a priority both nationally and in the broader international context. It is felt that findings from this research study will contribute significantly to ameliorate the lacuna in research on concurrent second-level teacher education in the Irish context. It will also inform the international situation, where it would seem although much more research has been carried out, second-level teacher education remains an under-represented area (Merseth, et al., 2008).

> Over the past two decades or so, pre-service teacher education has had unprecedented attention in England both from policy-makers and researchers (Hall et al., 1999:210).

Contrary to the recommendations of the Holmes Group (1986) undergraduate concurrent teacher education programmes have not been eliminated and replaced entirely by post-graduate courses. Rather the number of concurrent teacher education programmes is increasing both nationally and internationally (OECD, 2003). Consequently there is a need for research that can add to and inform arguments made in support of either model of teacher education. This research project will contribute to our understanding of concurrent teacher education within a specific context and location regarding the calibre of student teachers involved in the concurrent programmes at UL and the ability of these students to interrelate elements of their formal teacher education with their teaching practice. It will also demonstrate students' perceptions of the

adequacy of the duration and frequency of teaching practice and the data generated will indicate students' levels of confidence in advance of embarking on their teaching career.

This research will also have an impact on how we provide initial teacher education for concurrent teacher education students with respect to student profile and the sequencing and the placement of modules within concurrent programmes. Furthermore, as it looks at the structure and content of the concurrent programmes, specific to the University of Limerick, it is intended that this research will inform future reviews of the education component of the programmes at the University of Limerick.

As it is now accepted that after a few short years in the field, many teaching graduates lose their dedication, idealism and high level of commitment to teaching and instead describe themselves as being stressed and "burned-out", must we not consider whether the current system of teacher education is contributing to this drift? Obviously inadequate support for beginning teachers and a lack of appropriate early career development must take its toll on the profession. A coherent induction programme may well provide a link between ITE, schools and continuing professional development (CPD) and thus contribute to the improvement of all systems of teacher education (Buchberger et al., 2000; Sugrue et al., 2001). Coupled with this every year more and more suggestions are put forth on areas that need to be included in the already front-loaded and overcrowded pre-service teacher education programmes. The fact that it is continually suggested that more needs to be addressed during ITE reflects our inability to institute adequate systems of induction and CPD. We are at the point where we must distinguish between those areas and topics that are genuinely necessary at pre-service level and those which might be more appropriately included in a well-organised induction programme (Cremin, 2004). It is now incumbent on policy makers to 'draw on the current pilot projects on induction in the formulation of a general policy of teacher induction' and on research on teachers' experiences of their ITE (Coolahan, 2003:56). Within our current educational environment, which has spawned a number of professional development initiatives such as the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the Second-Level Support Service (SLSS), the concept of programmatic continuing professional development for teachers has been established. This framework of CDP has raised teachers' expectations of being supported throughout their teaching lives. It is feasible and realistic to expect that governments will invest more in developing and retaining effective teachers and consequently teachers will be

provided with the opportunity to engage in their professional development in a structured and on-going manner. Following on the calls made by the OECD (2005), Coolahan (2003) and Byrne (2002) on the need for research on the appropriateness of the content of pre-service programmes within this emergent continuum of teacher education, we clearly need to identify what student teachers deem to be the most relevant to their needs and also areas of ITE courses that might be more productively placed within induction and CPD programmes.

It is acknowledged within an era of increased awareness of diversity in learning styles and school populations, as well as the explosion of the knowledge society amplified through pupils' access to IT, that the skills, knowledge and competence required for the practice of teaching have shifted (Killeavy, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2005a). The OECD (2005) has argued that the teaching profession is a key mediating agency for society as it endeavours to deal with its current changing needs. But the teaching profession must have the correct knowledge, skills and education to cope with the many and varied challenges that our society now faces (OECD, 2005:27). As it is anticipated that the Teaching Council will regularly review the standards of skills, competence and knowledge required for the practice of teaching in Ireland the availability of up-to-date research in this area is essential.

Research which provides baseline data on student teachers' perceptions of their ITE and examines their levels of preparedness and confidence to undertake the task of teaching in modern Irish schools, will make a clear contribution to the national debate on pre-requisite skills, knowledge and competence required for the practice of teaching.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is set out in seven chapters. **Chapter 1** provides a description of the project and outlines the research questions. It also identifies the rationale for and originality of the current study. **Chapter 2** focuses on setting the context of the research, charting the growth of concurrent teacher education programmes both nationally and internationally. The chapter begins by presenting an account of teaching as career in Ireland, followed by a discussion of recent developments that recognise the needs of beginning teachers. This in turn provides the basis for discussion of the traditional approach to teacher education and the particulars of teacher education at the University of Limerick.

Chapter 3 maps literature relevant to the development of teacher education programmes and trends pertaining to the theoretical underpinning of programmes. The chapter begins with a discussion of the structure of traditional programmes. This is followed by a consideration of the role of educational theory within teacher education and an analysis of changes in the conceptualisation of the place of educational studies within teacher education.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach adopted for the current research. The research design is detailed and the research instrument described, as well as the selection of the study cohorts, methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Demographic data describing the study cohort are provided and compared to the overall teacher education cohorts from which participants self-selected in order to provide a context for the research findings.

Chapter 5 outlines the findings in relation to the research questions. A profile of student teachers studying at the University of Limerick is detailed. Student teacher characteristics are documented and relationships between student gender, course of study, academic attainment and students' experiences of and learning within the programme are presented. Student teachers' perceptions of planning and reflection, their experiences of both their programme and the teaching practicum and their feelings about teaching are documented.

Chapter 6 focuses on a discussion of key research findings at both a macro level, applicable across the broad spectrum of teacher education and a micro level, specific to the University of Limerick. The implications of the acknowledged profile of student teachers are considered, as are their impact on student teachers' subsequent development, both personal and professional. A proposal in relation to how teacher education should adapt to meet the apparent needs of student teachers is also constructed. Finally in **Chapter 7**, some recommendations and conclusions will be offered to the thesis. A bibliography and accompanying appendices follow chapter 7.

Table I overleaf, presents the structure of the following thesis in graphical form, divided into chapters and subsequent sections.

Table I: Structure of thesis

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Introduction	**Context**	**Literature Review**	**Methodology**	**Findings**	**Discussion**	**Conclusions**
Project title	Teaching career in Ireland	Established ITE structures	Approach to the study	Demographic profile	Student teacher profile	
Project description	Recent developments	Policy solutions	Research design	Perceptions of planning and reflective practices	Student teacher development	
Hypothesis and research questions	The growth of concurrent programmes	Re-thinking teacher education	Phase One: quantitative & qualitative research	Experiences of the school community	Consideration specific to UL	
Rationale	The traditional approach	Meaningful educational theory	Phase Two: qualitative research	Experiences of ITE		
Structure of thesis	Teacher education at UL		Limitations of the research	Feelings about TP and teaching		

Chapter Two: The context for an in-depth examination of teacher education

Introduction

Within this chapter, the author hopes to identify the impetus for the current study drawing from relevant literature and will highlight the originality and significance of this study within the current Irish educational perspective. The following areas will be considered:

- Teaching as a career in Ireland
- Recent developments that recognise the needs of beginning teachers
- The growth of concurrent programmes internationally and nationally
- The traditional approach and the status quo in Ireland
- Teacher education at the University of Limerick

Teaching as a career in Ireland

The status of teaching

> In Ireland we have a particularly strong tradition of valuing teaching and education (Drudy, 2001:363).

There is much literature to support the assertion that in Ireland teachers have and continue to be held in high esteem and that traditionally the profession has been well regarded. The *Country Background Report for Ireland* (Coolahan, 2003) compiled for the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) observed that even when teachers did not benefit from their current good conditions and salaries, there was great esteem for the nature of their work and their role in the community. This favourable public perception has been linked to the profession's traditionally religious roots, which instilled public confidence in and respect for teachers and solidified their standing as the backbone of the community (Drudy, 2001).

Recent studies have highlighted that second-level teaching seems to be held in a lower regard than primary teaching. Nonetheless, the proportion of students intending on applying for some form of teacher education programme compares favourably with other third-level course choices (Drudy et al., 2005). The OECD analysis surmises that

'teaching is one of the most highly regarded professions by the public' and media commentary has reiterated that teaching is still a prized carer, its attractiveness having remained constant over the last decade (Coolahan, 2003:6; Flynn, 2003:61).

Trends in teacher numbers

The number of teachers in Ireland has shown a gradual and steady increase over the last two decades, a pattern mirrored at recruitment level (Heinz, 2008; Drudy, 2006). The most recent figures from the Department of Education and Science (DES) highlight that in 1996/1997 there were 21,035 primary level teachers, a number which grew to 29,534 in 2006/2007. Therefore a 40% increase in the number of primary teachers was observed within the ten-year period 1997-2007. At second-level, DES statistics show the number of teachers rose from 23,238 in 1996/1997 to 26,317 in 2006/2007, an increase of 13% per cent, less than half that experienced at primary level in the same period (Ireland, 2007:4; CSO, 2007:43).

According to Coolahan, the greater percentage increase in the number of primary teachers is due to the shortage of qualified teachers experienced at primary level in the 1990s. Increases in teacher numbers overall are a result of efforts to improve pupil-teacher ratios and to allow for the provision of specialist teacher services and learning supports within schools (2003:17). These efforts have born fruit and the rise in teacher numbers has been accompanied by a decline in pupil teacher ratios. In the period 1997-2007 the primary level pupil-teacher ratio dropped from 22.3:1 to 16:1 and the second-level pupil-teacher ratio dropped from 16:1 to 13.1:1 (Ireland, 2007:5). While the enhanced economic conditions of the late 1990s and 2000s clearly brought marked improvement, these ratios have still remained high by international standards and one wonders how the current economic climate and evident educational cut backs will affect the advances made (Coolahan, 2003:7-18).

Teacher retention

In relation to teacher retention, all available documentation indicates that this has not been a major issue within Ireland and that there is no evidence of a major outflow from the teaching profession here as has been witnessed in other countries. There is however, an acknowledged dearth of data on teacher retention and only in disadvantaged schools has a definite exit rate been recorded, with almost 10% of teachers leaving annually (Tye and O'Brien, 2002). It is now accepted however that the vista of teacher retention

is changing and is closely related to three specific factors; educational and career opportunities available to teachers, the availability of permanent teaching posts and salary levels (Coolahan, 2003).

Our recent economic development has provided a greater variety of job opportunities and as a consequence, it is alleged that some graduates have been enticed away from teaching by the higher salaries and better prospects on offer. Coupled with this, more flexible working arrangements and the option of career breaks for teachers means that some who take breaks do not return (Coolahan, 2003:48). This may currently be balanced by downward economic trends, which have limited the career paths open to graduates who are more likely to be tempted by the notion of job security that teaching offers.

Job security has traditionally been a key factor in attracting graduates to teaching. However, it is irrefutable that the relatively low number of permanent teaching positions available is a disincentive for young teachers in committing to a life long career in teaching. Again, although there is a lack of research-based evidence supporting this assertion, a recent analysis suggests that after a number of years in temporary employment, in any number of different schools the notion of security diminishes. Accordingly, teachers find in difficult to establish themselves due to the transient nature of their position and disillusionment can set in, which results for many in a decision to exit the profession (Coolahan, 2003:27&28).

It has also been noted that salary scales have a connection with retention and when salary levels drop this can lead to disenchantment and affect retention levels. While this has been experienced in Ireland, much has been done in the last decade to align teacher salary scales with relevant equivalents. Recent OECD data (2005) illustrates that Irish teachers are relatively well paid by international standards and rank 7th highest out of 27 countries surveyed (2005:372). The comparatively high salary is thought to reaffirm the traditional status of teaching in the public mindset, to aid retention and is likely to be an influencing factor in the year on year increase in applications to ITE programmes (Heinz, 2008; HEA, 2008). The evident lack of governmental concern in relation to teacher retention may also be explained by this continuing over supply of high quality candidates for ITE.

Academic calibre of entrants to teaching

> There are no major concerns in Ireland about attracting competent people to enter the teaching profession (Coolahan, 2003:21).

In 1991, the OECD examiners reported that in contrast to other countries, students of very high academic quality enter teacher education in Ireland, and concluded that entrants to teacher education 'have always been of particularly outstanding academic quality year after year' (OECD, 1991:77). The report stated that the students selected for undergraduate teacher education programmes had received very good grades in their final school examinations and would definitely have been guaranteed a place at university (OECD, 1991:77).

This trend has continued, with more recent studies also highlighting the high academic calibre of students entering teacher education programmes in Ireland (Drudy, 2001; Coolahan, 2003). Applicants for entry to primary teaching are recognised as generally coming from the top quartile of leaving certificate students. Similarly over 90% of applicants to the Higher Diploma in Education (HDip) have honours level primary degrees and high performance on the leaving certificate has been a perquisite for entry to concurrent second-level teacher education programmes, as entrants have tended to come from the upper quartile of achieving students (Coolahan, 2003:19-23).

> The high level in academic achievement of entrants to teacher education has remained intact. Indeed it could be argued that it has increased, at least at post-primary level over the last ten year (Coolahan, 2003:24).

An investigation of entrants to the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) between 1999 and 2005 found that 71% of aspiring teachers had been awarded their primary degree at honours level. In 1999, 61% of those accepted onto the course had honours degrees, a figure which rose to 82% in 2005 (Heinz, 2008:230-231). The author surmises, that the comparatively high academic ability of entrants traditional in Ireland, is atypical in the international context and has lead to a reduction in the share of applicants with lower academic attainment. Based on available data it is reasonable to conclude that in spite of claims to the contrary, teaching at all levels in Ireland continues to attract entrants of high academic calibre (Drudy, 2001; Heinz, 2008).

Recruitment trends and enrolment composition

Despite a good deal of public awareness of the dissatisfaction of teacher unions with teachers' working conditions and the lack of permanent teaching posts available, the number of applicants for primary and second-level teacher education have been increasing. The number entering primary teacher education rose from 695 in 1995 to 1,659 in 2001 and second-level teacher education from 1,019 to 1,279 in the same period (Coolahan, 2003:30&31). In relation to second-level ITE, a 22% increase in entrants was observed in 2002/2003, with a further increase of 30% in 2003/2004. The result of which has been that 'to date the government has not had to engage in any special measures to stimulate recruitment for the teaching career' (2003:21). From 1981 to 2003, a 123% increase in applications for the HDip was observed and demand for places exceeds supply by 61% (Drudy, 2006: 263&267).

> In a country with 743 schools employing 24,811 teachers, an average of 2544 aspiring new teachers per year demonstrates that second-level teaching remains attractive as a career choice in Ireland" (Heinz, 2008:224).

Job prospects for beginning teachers

The HEA's most recent report on the first destinations of graduates in Ireland (2008) found that 90% of HDip and PGDE graduates had successfully gained employment on completion of their programme. Encouragingly, 83.3% were involved in teaching but only 4.9% were in permanent teaching posts in Ireland. 72.2% were in temporary whole-time, part-time or substitute positions and a further 6.2% were teaching oversees (2008:62). This situation had changed very little from the 2000 analysis of such graduates. The situation for post-primary teachers educated on concurrent programmes shows some variation, with 9.5% taking up permanent teaching positions in Ireland, 56.3% involved in various forms of part-time teaching and 3.2% teaching abroad (Coolahan, 2003:44). By comparison, 34.7% of primary teacher education graduates had secured permanent teaching positions in Ireland (HEA, 2008:64).

The higher proportion of permanent teaching posts for primary teachers is a result of factors such as; the declining post-primary population and the number of posts being held by individuals on expanded career breaks and secondments. The possible effect of this on newly qualified teachers (NQTs) has been considered earlier in this chapter.

Feminisation of teaching

> In Ireland and in most other developed countries there are significantly more female than male teachers working in both first and second level schools (Ireland, 2005c:5).

It is widely cited that women have continually outnumbered men among primary teachers over the last seventy years, with the number of women increasing progressively from 58% in 1930 to 83% in 2005 (O'Connor, 2007:138). At second-level, although the gender imbalance is less striking, progressive feminisation of the teaching force is evident. In 1985 the gender ratio at second-level was almost 50:50, but a 60:40 female to male ratio was noted in 2003. While the number of female teachers had risen by 3,500 in that period, the number of male teachers had declined by 500 (2007:142).

A number of studies by Drudy over the last decade have highlighted that female predominance in school teaching is being experienced in most countries throughout the world (2008:309). Internationally the percentage of female teachers is lower at second-level than at primary level, but Ireland is recognised as one of the countries with the highest female to male teacher ratio, as 59% of lower and upper secondary teachers are female (Drudy, 2006:261; 2008:310).

The current stock of intending teachers shows similar gender imbalance. The OECD in 2005 placed the percentage of female applicants for primary teaching at 90%. While the preponderance of females has been less pronounced at second-level the ratio is acknowledged to be moving towards 80:20 (Coolahan, 2003:21-23). In the period 1996-1998, 89% of primary teacher entrants were women as were 74% of HDip candidates (Drudy, 2001:370).

This trend has continued into the 2000s, as three quarters of the student body on the PGDE between 1999 and 2005 were female. While 'the increasing feminisation of applicant cohorts is a European wide trend', PGDE data does show a slight increase in number of male applicants from 25% in 1999 to 29% in 2005 (Heinz, 2008:223). The percentage of male entrants however, has not changed. At present, the proportion of men entering the profession at second-level is about two and a half times that of primary (Heinz, 2008:227; Drudy, 2006:267&268).

Recent developments that recognise the needs of beginning teachers

The induction pilot project and the three Is

Despite the fact that it is thirty years since the Teachers' Study Group (1978) published a discussion paper on *Induction into Teaching*, until recently there has been disappointingly little progress in this area. Accordingly, the continuum of teacher education from initial through induction and in-career has remained under-developed in Irish education (Cremin, 2004:1).

The first significant call for an effective induction system in Ireland came in 1984 when the *Report of the Committee on In-service Education* was published. This stated that there was a need for a more structured system of induction at each level and the provision of some opportunities for 'bridging studies' during the probationary period of newly qualified teachers (Ireland, 1984:13). The OECD's *Review of National Policies for Education - Ireland* (1991) stated that the challenge facing the Irish educational system was how to:

> Address in a comprehensive way the needs and aspirations of talented and well-educated young teachers as they make their first full-time professional encounters with the school (induction) and as they progress through their careers (continuing in-service education and training) (1991:98).

The examiners concluded that induction in Ireland had been delivered through '*ad hoc* and incomplete arrangements' and argued strongly that induction should be 'regarded as an essential component of a policy for maintaining the quality of schooling and of teachers' (OECD, 1991:101).

The Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (1992), called for 'high quality initial training' which it stated should be supported by 'properly structured induction' (1992:165). The importance of induction was subsequently stressed in policy documents from the three main teachers unions (INTO, 1993&1994; TUI, 1994; ASTI, 1995). The *Report on the National Education Convention* (1994) also gave 'a general welcome to the … proposal for a structured induction year into teaching following initial training' (1994:86). It commented that the introduction of a carefully managed induction programme was 'of great importance in the formation of a professional and competent teacher (1994:87). The 1995 White Paper echoed this view and called for a 'well-developed and carefully managed induction programme' (Ireland, 1995:125). The paper

envisaged a model whereby NQTs would be supported jointly by teacher education institutions and schools, with the teacher education institutions maintaining links with the beginning teachers by providing 'additional opportunities for learning to supplement those already provided in initial training courses' (1995:125).

The Standing Committee of Teacher Unions and University Departments of Education also endorsed this concept of teacher education as a continuum based on progression from ITE to induction into teaching, leading to continuous professional development at their seminar in Dublin in 1996 (Swan & Leydon, 1997). The *Report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education* (2002) subsequently underlined the importance of an induction year for second-level teachers and reiterated that induction should form a linking bridge between pre-service and in-service education.

The Advisory Group commented specifically on the futility of overloading ITE programmes and advocated establishing and prioritising elements for inclusion at the initial stage of teacher education and then focusing on specialisation through an ongoing process of induction and continuing professional development (CPD) (Byrne, 2002:50). Their report provided ten specific recommendations on Induction for second-level teachers (see Appendix A page 355) and emphasised the importance of partnership between schools and teacher education departments to facilitate the induction of beginning teachers (2002:15). Coupled with this, it recommended that teacher education should be seen as part of an interlinked framework encompassing the "3Is": 'research should be carried out to determine the efficacy of initial teacher education programmes and to assist in the design of induction and continuous professional development programmes' (Byrne, 2002:14).

In spite of a clear pattern of endorsement of a "3Is" concept of teacher education, the policy and provision of induction in Ireland has remained inconsistent and in many instances deficient (NDP, 2004; Sugrue et al., 2001). A number of significant developments however have brought the issue of teacher professional development as well as teacher accountability and quality to the forefront of the political agenda. In 1998 a consortium of teacher unions and teacher education interests approached the Department of Education and Science 'seeking support for a pilot project to develop and evaluate models of induction and identify best practice as a basis for future policy in the area' (Galvin, 2003:6). As a consequence, the Department's Secretary General

expressed approval in principle for a national induction project in January 1998, with full approval subsequently granted in the summer of 2002 (NDP, 2004; Coolahan, 2003).

The National Induction Pilot Project that thus ensued involved the three Teacher Unions, the DES, the Education Department at the University College Dublin (UCD) (post-primary pillar), St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (primary pillar), and a number of schools which were considered representative of the range of provision and geographical type across the primary and second-level sectors (NDP, 2004; Galvin, 2003). The Induction Pilot Project (IPP) set out to identify and assess the needs of NQTs in schools, with the ambition of making available continuing support to assist beginning teachers in their initial teaching experience. Of the project's many aims, three of most interest are: to explore the role of pre-service teacher education institutions in the induction of beginning teachers, to make recommendations on the development of a national induction policy for second-level teachers and to put forth suggestions on models of induction considering the role of different agencies in any comprehensive programme (NDP, 2004:14).

The strongest finding from The *Interim Report on the Induction Pilot Project: Second-Level* (2004) was the extent to which beginning teachers were unanimous in their view as to the need for an induction programme with mentoring support. Although most considered that they had managed well, three quarters of the group indicated that they were left to their own devices and given no professional support. Interestingly it was those teachers who had been left to their own devices, who at the end of their first year of full-time teaching expressed uncertainty as to whether they had made the right career choice and would remain in the profession. Beginning teachers were found to be concerned about their level of preparedness to teach and highlighted three areas of most serious concern to them; classroom management and discipline, motivating and keeping pupils interested and teaching students with special needs. Staff relationships were also reported to be particularly problematic, although NQTs generally found staff friendly and helpful, they were de-moralised and de-motivated by expressions of cynical views on education by more experienced teaching staff. They highlighted that they found it difficult to accommodate the views of senior staff, which were at variance or opposed to the views proposed in their professional education (NDP, 2004:17-21). It was these findings that were considered when additional support in the form of mentoring,

seminars and planned observation were being organised for the NQTs, as it was felt that these would be the most helpful for participants in the IPP. These findings indicate that at induction level, there is a clear need for a smoother transition for teaching graduates making the adjustment to full-time teaching.

The Teaching Council

Over the last thirty years, endorsement for a teaching council in Ireland has strengthened in parallel with the significant advances in the development of the teaching profession (World Education Forum, 2000). We have witnessed considerable developments in our knowledge, understanding and awareness of teaching and learning. In response to this, we have strived to improve teacher education and pre-service preparation by establishing an all-graduate profession and involving teachers in policy development. This has enhanced the standing of teachers as professionals who possess strong knowledge and expertise to shape both the future of their profession and to contribute to the future direction of Irish educational policy (Coolahan, 2003).

In Ireland, public endorsement of the teaching profession and of the establishment of a teaching council has been reflected in a variety of official reports. In 1991, the OECD commented on how the establishment of a national council to address teacher selection, initial training, induction and in-service had been debated at length and that 'the majority view in Ireland supports the idea' (OECD, 1991:107). They recommended that a statutory national council, reporting to the Minister for Education and representative of a wide range of issues would be a valuable agency (1991:108).

The Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (1992) also recognised that 'a council or governing body for teaching has been long sought by the profession and has been proposed, in one form or another, in a number of reports and other documents on education in Ireland' (Ireland, 1992:170). It also expressed a hope that the legal issues preventing the council's establishment could be resolved. Following the Green Paper the National Education Convention was held in October 1993. The idea of a teaching council was also discussed at this forum and *The Report on the National Education Convention* (1994) stated that, 'the general view was that such a council was timely in Irish circumstances' and 'could do much to promote a distinguished future for the teaching profession in Ireland into the new century' (Coolahan, 1994:90).

The 1995 White Paper on education contained a strong endorsement for the establishment of a teaching council, which 'would emphasis and enhance teaching as a profession' (Ireland, 1995:135). The Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education (2002) also remarked that the establishment of a teaching council would represent considerable progress in maintaining quality standards of teaching. They advised that the council should have a partnership role in the establishment of induction provisions for post-primary teachers and called for its immediate establishment (2002:43&84).

> The Advisory Group recognises that the Teaching Council with its progressive provisions will have strong and important implications for many of the recommendations and ambitions of this Report. Therefore it is recommended that the Council be made operative without delay (Byrne, 2002:110).

On November 4th 1997, the then Minister for Education Micheál Martin launched the Steering Committee on the Establishment of a Teaching Council and the *Report of the Steering Committee on the Establishment of a Teaching Council* was subsequently published in 1998 (Martin, 1997:1; Ireland, 1998:vi). This first comprehensive document in the Irish context, provided an overview of the roles and functions of the teaching council and put forth arguments as to its necessity. The Report describes a teaching council as an:

> Independent, statutory agency which exercises the powers and performs the functions through which teachers can achieve a large degree of professional autonomy and self-regulation and thereby enhance the status and morale of the teaching profession and the quality of education being provided (1998:3).

The steering committee envisaged the teaching council as an autonomous, self-regulatory, statutory body with the primary aim of setting and promoting the highest professional standards for teachers. They conceived that the teaching council would have a significant role to play in any policy decisions affecting professional aspects of the teaching career, would have a specific function in promoting high quality performance by its members and observed the establishment of such a statutory body as an essential developmental step in the maturation of the profession (Ireland, 1998:3-5). The report further outlined sixteen individual functions of the council ranging from the introduction of a register of all teachers, to the establishment of procedures and criteria

for the probation of new entrants, to making recommendations on induction for NQTs (Ireland, 1998:13).

With respect to teacher education, the report specified three functions of the council: to 'determine the qualifications, including standards of education, training and fitness to teach, which satisfy the conditions for registration', to 'advise the Minister for Education and Science on the minimum standards of educational attainment required for entry into initial teacher education programmes' and most specifically, to 'accredit and keep under review, for satisfying the requirement for registration, all programmes of teacher education, including primary degrees' in consultation with each institutional provider (Ireland, 1998:13&14).

The *Teaching Council Act* was subsequently ratified on April 17th 2001. The functions and objects of the Council cited in the Act are closely linked to those suggested by the Steering Committee (Ireland, 2001:5). The education and training of teachers is dealt with specifically in part four of the Act, where it highlights that the Council will have responsibility for accrediting and reviewing all teacher education programmes provided in the State. Coupled with this, the Council will be required to review the standards of education and training appropriate to a person entering teacher education and will also regularly review the standards of skill, knowledge and competence required for the practice of teaching (Ireland, 2001:26).

On February 28th 2005, the then Minister for Education and Science Mary Hanafin launched the first Irish Teaching Council. The Minister spoke of the Council as having 'the very real potential to secure and enhance the status of this most vital profession in the eyes of people throughout the country' (Hanafin, 2005:1). The Minister also made reference to how long it had taken for the Council to be a reality, 'today's launch is the conclusion of a long journey and at the same time the start of another. For many years the concept of a Teaching Council was no more than an ambition '.

> We in Ireland have been well served by teachers throughout the generations. It is right that we entrust them now with a much greater say in the regulation of their own profession (Hanafin, 2005:1&2).

Although the launch took place on February 28th 2005, the *Teaching Council Act 2001* required the Council to be in a position to perform certain functions before it could be

formally established (www.education.ie/home 23/09/05:1). Accordingly, the Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 under the *Teaching Council Ammendment Act, 2006* to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession (http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/ 12/07/09).

The growth of concurrent programmes nationally and internationally

The international context

Due to the different ways in which ITE programmes in Europe and the wider international context have developed, an overview of programmes is rather complex. Nonetheless it has been acknowledged that 'recent comparisons of developments in teacher training in the various European countries show that in spite of all existing cultural differences the systems are developing more or less along the same lines' (Vonk, 1991:69; Buchberger et al., 2000). Although teacher education internationally is by no means in a static condition, two predominant models of second-level teacher education, namely concurrent and consecutive, have evolved (Coolahan, 2001:337).

A 1991 comparative study of trends in the preparation of teachers in Europe differentiated between three different categories of teacher education for secondary teachers: lower, vocational and upper secondary[2]. The findings revealed that the major trend for lower secondary teacher education has been to develop concurrent and integrated programmes (Vonk, 1991:79). In many countries lower secondary education consisted of several different types of schools and because of this, there has been a huge range in the routes of entry, conditions of access and qualifications of teachers. While consecutive teacher education programmes were the dominant form of teacher education available to second-level teachers, in a number of these countries a shift away from consecutive to concurrent models for lower secondary teachers has been witnessed. 'In an increasing number of countries the concurrent model of training is being adopted as the main model' (Vonk, 1991:92). As a consequence of this, in some countries where the consecutive model was strongly established as the main method of

[2] As the terms used to describe each phase of education vary from country to country and therefore varying levels of teacher education exist in each country, it is necessary to distinguish between certain levels of education. The first phase of compulsory education, referred to as 'primary', generally starts between the ages of five and seven and ends between 10 and 14. 'Lower secondary' is defined as the phase that immediately follows primary level education, in those countries where the two levels are distinct from each other. The most common age of transfer from lower secondary to the next stage of secondary education (referred to here as 'upper secondary') is between 14 and16. Upper secondary education generally caters for students up to the ages of 18 or 19.

teacher education for lower secondary education, a dual system encompassing both programme types has developed. With respect to higher secondary education, the analysis concluded that in general models of education for upper secondary teachers are mostly consecutive, but that a closing of the gap between the education for teachers at both levels of secondary education is evident (Vonk, 1991:91-97).

In 2000 the Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe (TNTEE) published their *Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe*. Although the paper makes reference to diversity as a salient feature in discussions on teacher education in Europe, it highlights that recent trends across Europe have shown that teacher education systems are developing along the same lines. 'For several years, policies of the European Commission and OECD have stimulated a detectable trend towards convergence' (Buchberger et al., 2000:11). The TNTEE also point out that differences in structures of education, types of schools and sometimes very particular types of teacher education for different categories of teachers are some of the issues that make comparisons of teacher education across Europe difficult. Using the categories primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level they distinguish between three main systems of ITE identified in Europe (Buchberger et al., 2000).

The analysis concluded that generally teacher education for primary and lower secondary school teachers has been strongly influenced by a "normal school tradition" which is closely identified with the concurrent model, whereas, secondary school teacher education which has had a very strong "academic tradition" has been strongly associated with the consecutive model. The paper noted that somewhat different traditions of teacher education have developed for other categories of secondary school teachers such as teachers described as "practical subject" whose programmes have been seen to be predominantly concurrent in nature throughout Europe (2000:14-16).

Coolahan's (2001) analysis of ITE in Ireland and Western Europe also highlighted that the predominant model of second-level teacher education has been the consecutive model with concurrent programmes being favoured for primary teachers and for secondary teachers of special subjects such as home economics and physical education. Coolahan also acknowledged the trend in an increasing number of European countries to combine teacher education for the primary and junior cycle of secondary education in a concurrent process with training for senior cycle teachers remaining predominantly

consecutive. The development of this trend highlighted a decade earlier by Vonk (1991), clearly indicates a further closing of the gap between the education for teachers at both levels of secondary education (Coolahan, 2001; Vonk, 1991).

The OECD (2003) Report *Education at a Glance* substantiates the data already cited with respect to lower secondary teacher education, with 2001 figures showing that lower secondary teacher education is equally organised between concurrent and consecutive models. According to the report, in twelve OECD countries programmes for lower secondary teacher education are concurrent in their structure and in a further twelve countries, a mixed structure with both concurrent and consecutive teacher education programmes is evident. Only three countries provide pre-service teacher education at this level by the consecutive model exclusively (OECD, 2003:350&351). As can be seen from Table II overleaf, in twenty-five of the countries included within the report's parameters a large number of teacher education programmes at the lower secondary level are concurrent in nature.

With respect to upper secondary teacher education, the OECD remark that models of teacher education vary much more widely among the different countries. While the consecutive model is the only model of upper secondary teacher education in eight of the participating countries, in ten countries the concurrent model is the typical model at this level and in the remaining twelve countries; both models of pre-service teacher education are in use (OCED, 2003:353). Therefore, at the upper secondary level in approximately three quarters of the OECD countries included in the report, a large number of their pre-service programmes are following a concurrent model as is evident in Table III on page 28.

It is noteworthy that Ireland is categorised as typically utilising the concurrent model for upper secondary level teachers. The OECD (2003) however, makes no distinction between the types of teacher education being provided for different types of teachers. Perhaps this is because as the numbers of concurrent programmes for second-level teachers increase, the previous distinction made by other authors who identified concurrent programmes for second-level teacher education as being predominantly for teachers of "practical" subjects becomes less pertinent.

Table II: Pre-service teacher education requirements - lower secondary education

	Cumulative years of education required for entry into the training programme	Duration of training programme in years	**Consecutive (—) or concurrent (‖)**	Mandatory work experience as licensing requirement in years	Competitive examination to enter the public education system	Year of introduction	Percentage of current teacher stock with this type of qualification
OECD countries							
Australia	12-13	4	‖	a	No	1994-1998	65%
Austria	8	5	‖	a	No	a	80%
	12	3	‖	a	No	1999	73%
Belgium (Fl.)	12	3	‖	a	No	1997-1998	98%
Belgium (Fr.)	12	3	‖	a	No	a	A
Czech Republic	9	4	‖	a	No	m	M
	13	3	‖	a	No	1998	M
	13	5	‖	a	No	m	M
	13	3	‖	a	No	1995	M
Denmark	12	3.5	‖	a	No	a	A
England	13	3-4	‖	1	No	1969	M
	13	4	—	1	No	1973	M
Finland	12	3	‖	a	No	2000	A
	12	5	‖	a	No	1998	A
France	12	5	—	a	Yes	1992	A
Germany	10	2-3	‖	a	Yes	m	M
Greece	12	4	‖	a	Yes	2000	M
Hungary	12	3	‖	a	No	a	80%
Iceland	14	3	‖	m	No	a	M
Ireland	12	3	‖	1	No	1975	M
	12	4	—	a	No	m	M
Italy	13	4	‖	1	Yes	1996	A
Japan	12	2	‖	a	Yes	1949	75%
	12	4	‖	a	Yes	1949	19%
	12	6	‖	a	Yes	1988	N
Korea	12	2	‖	a	Yes	a	M
	12	4	‖	a	Yes	a	M
Mexico	12	4	‖	a	Yes/No	1999	M
Netherlands	11	4	‖	a	No	1986	A
New Zealand	12	3	‖	2	No	1988	M
	13	4	‖	2	No	1996	M
Norway	m	m	m	m	m	m	M
Portugal	12	3	‖	a	No	1997	M
Scotland	12	3.75-4.75	—	≥ 1	No	m	M
	12	4	‖	≥ 1	No	m	m
Slovakia	8-9	4	‖	a	No	m	98%
	12	5	‖	a	No	1996	1%
	12	4	‖	a	No	1996	1%
Spain	12	3	‖	1	Yes	1991	95%
Sweden	12	3.5	‖	a	No	2001	a
Switzerland	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Turkey	11-13	4	‖	1	No	1992	a
United States	12	4	‖	≤ 3	No	a	90%

Source: OECD (2003)

Key Data on Education in Europe (2005) offers the most recent analysis of the types of second-level teacher education available internationally. This report supports the OECD's finding on the prevalence of concurrent programmes for the lower secondary level and states that 'for general lower secondary education, the concurrent model is still

the most widespread and exists either as the only possible option or alongside the consecutive model' (European Commission, 2005:201).

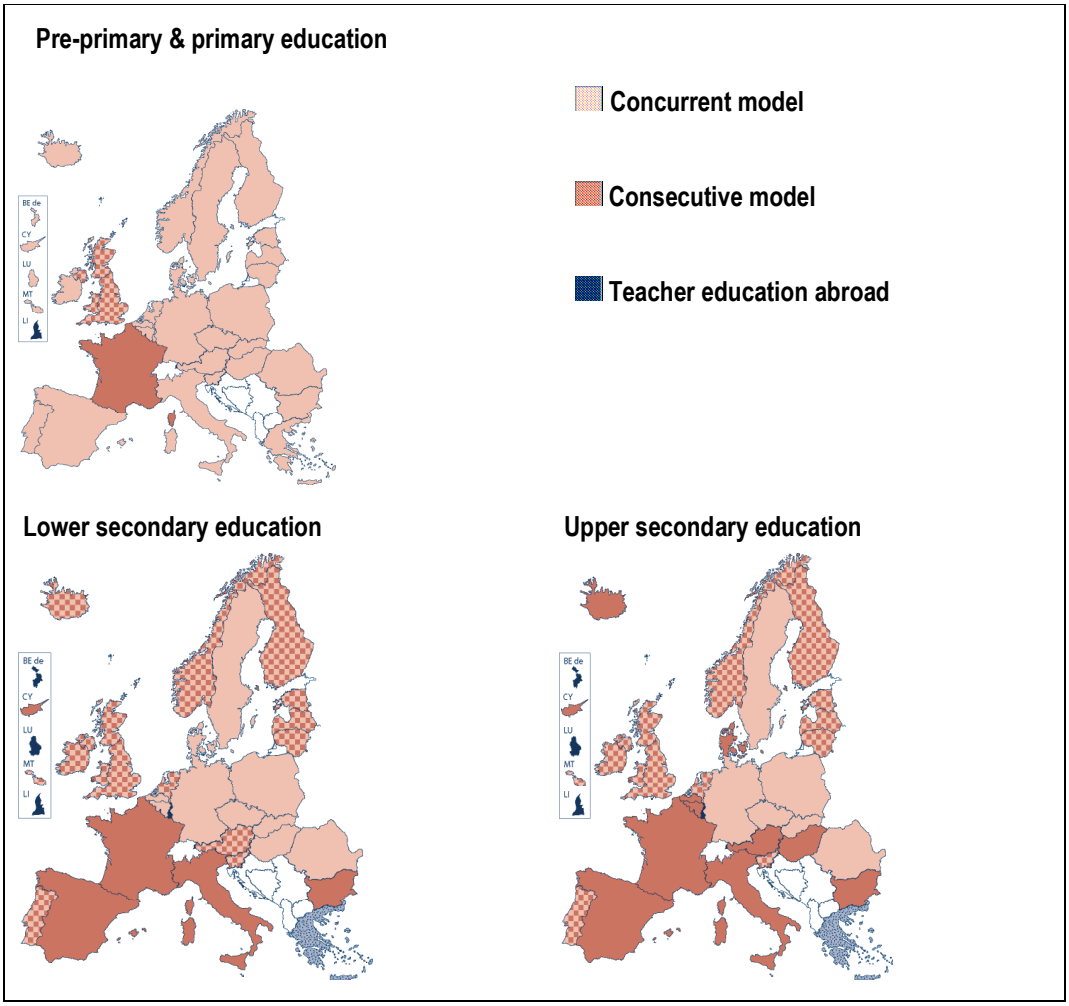
Table III: Pre-service teacher education requirements - upper secondary education

	Cumulative years of education required for entry into the training programme	Duration of training programme in years	Consecutive (—) or concurrent (‖)	Mandatory work experience as licensing requirement in years	Competitive examination to enter the public education system	Year of introduction	Percentage of current teacher stock with this type of qualification
OECD countries							
Australia	12-13	4	‖	a	No	1994-1998	53%
	13	4	—	a	No	1994-1995	8%
Austria	12	3	‖	a	No	1999	73%; 91%
Belgium (Fl.)	12	3	‖	a	No	1997-1998	86%
Belgium (Fr.)	12	3	‖	a	No	a	a
Czech Republic	13	4	‖	a	No	m	m
Denmark	12	4	‖	a	No	a	a
England	13	3-4	‖	1	No	1969	m
	13	4	—	1	No	1973	m
Finland	12	5	‖	a	No	1995	a
France	12	5	—	a	Yes	1992	a
Germany	12-13	5.5	—	a	Yes	m	m
	12-13	5.5-6.5	—	a	Yes	m	m
Greece	12	4	‖	a	Yes	2000	m
Hungary	12	4	‖	a	No	a	80%
Iceland	14	3	‖	m	No	a	m
	14	4	—	m	No	a	m
Ireland	12	3	‖	1	No	1975	m
	12	4.5	—	a	No	m	m
Italy	13	4	‖	1	Yes	1996	a
Japan	12	2	‖	a	Yes	1949	18%
	12	4	‖	a	Yes	1949	78%
	12	6	‖	a	Yes	1988	1%
Korea	12	4	‖	a	Yes	a	m
	12	4	‖	a	Yes	a	m
Mexico	12	4	‖	a	Yes/No	1997	m
Netherlands	11	4	‖	a	No	1986	a
New Zealand	13	3	‖	2	No	1997	m
	13	4	—	2	No	1996	m
Norway	13	4	‖	a	No	1998	79%
Portugal	12	3	‖	a	No	1997	m
	12	4	‖	1	No	1997	m
	12	6	—	1	No	1988	m
Scotland	12	3.75-4.75	—	≥ 1	No	m	m
	12	4	‖	≥ 1	No	m	m
Slovakia	12-13	4	‖	a	No	m	93%
	12-13	7	—	a	No	m	7%
Spain	12	3	‖	1	Yes	1991	90%
Sweden	12	3.5	‖	a	No	2001	a
Switzerland	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Turkey	11-13	4	‖	1	No	1992	m
	11-13	4	‖	1	No	1982	m
United States	12	4	‖	≤ 3	No	a	90%

Source: OECD (2003)

While the report acknowledges the consecutive model as being the traditional model at upper secondary level, it affirms that concurrent programmes have become increasingly more common for the education of upper secondary level teachers across Europe (European Commission, 2005).

Figure I: Structure of initial teacher education programmes across Europe



Source: European Commission (2005)

The Irish context

At present in Ireland, second-level teacher education is provided in the form of both concurrent and consecutive programmes. The traditional method of teacher education, the Higher Diploma in Education (HDip) now generally referred to as the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) was established in 1911[3]. This consecutive model whereby students first establish a mastery of their subject area in an undergraduate

[3] The Post Graduate Diploma in Education is also titled the Graduate Diploma in Education or Higher Diploma in Education. This title is institution specific.

degree followed by a one-year teacher education diploma was the established pattern of second-level teacher education for many decades. This has been seen as the predominant mode of entry into second-level teaching in the Irish context (Coolahan, 1991; Heinz, 2008). In the 1970s however, a number of concurrent degree courses for second-level teachers were established and although the PGDE is still the way by which approximately seventy percent of Irish students enter second-level teaching, the number of concurrent courses on offer is increasing annually (Heinz, 2008:224; Gleeson, 2004; http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10815 10/03/09; Coolahan, 2001).

Table IV: Consecutive second-level teacher education programmes – Ireland

Institution	Number of courses offered	Programme	
		Type	Length
National College of Art & Design	1	Post Graduate Diploma in Art & Design Education	One year Full-time
Cork Institute of Technology **(Crawford College of Art & Design)**	1	Higher Diploma in Arts for Art & Design Teachers	One year Full-time
Limerick Institute of Technology **(Limerick School of Art & Design)**	1	Higher Diploma in Arts for Art & Design Teachers	One year Full-time
University of Dublin **(Trinity College)**	1	Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Secondary Teaching)	One year Full-time
Dublin City University	1	Graduate Diploma in Education	Two years Part-time
University of Limerick	6	Graduate Diploma in Education Business/Music/Languages/ Construction Technology/ Engineering Technology/ Physical Education	One year Full-time
University College Cork	1	Post Graduate Diploma in Education	One year Full-time
University College Dublin	1	Post Graduate Diploma in Education	One year Full-time
NUI Galway	2	Post Graduate Diploma in Education Post Graduate Diploma in Education (through Irish)	One year Full-time
NUI Maynooth	1	Post Graduate Diploma in Education	One year Full-time

With respect to consecutive teacher education programmes, there are currently sixteen programmes offered in ten higher education institutions, all of which are considered post-graduate and recognised by the Teaching Council. Table IV above presents brief details of all consecutive second-level ITE programmes including provider, programme

type and length[4] (http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/ection1/ 12/07/09).

Table V: Concurrent second-level teacher education programmes – Ireland

Institution	Number of courses offered	Programme	
		Type	Length
National College of Art & Design	1	BA (Hons) Degree in Art & Design Education	Four years Full-time
St. Angela's College	5	Bachelor of Education -Home Economics & Religion -Home Economics & Biology -Home Economics & Economics -Home Economics & Irish -Home Economics & Irish (through Irish)	Four years Full-time
University of Dublin **(Trinity College)**	1	Degree of Bachelor In Music Education (B.Mus.Ed.)	Four years Full-time
Dublin City University **(DCU)**	4	B.Sc. in Science Education -Chemistry/Physics -Maths/Physics -Chemistry/Maths B.Sc. in Physical Education with Biology	Four years Full-time
University of Limerick	6	B.Sc. (Ed) -Physical Education -Materials & Construction -Materials & Engineering -Science Education Biology / Physics or Chemistry Physics & Chemistry BA (Ed) -Modern Languages/ELT	Four years Full-time
Mater Dei Institute of Education **(DCU)**	3	B.Ed. Religion & English B.Ed. Religion & History B.Ed. Religion & Music	Four years Full-time
University College Cork	1	Bachelor of Education Sports Studies & Physical Education	Four years Full-time
St. Patrick's College (Thurles)	2	Bachelor of Arts in Education, Irish & Religious Studies Bachelor of Arts in Education, Business & Religious Studies	Four years Full-time
Letterfrack College **(GMIT)**	1	Bachelor of Science (Honors) in Design and Technology Education	Four years Full-time
NUI Galway	1	Bachelor of Arts (Mathematics and Education)	Four years Full-time
NUI Maynooth	1	BSc (Hons) Science Education	Four years Full-time

[4] Reference details for programmes listed in the table are as follows:
(http://www.ncad.ie/faculties/education/postgraduate.shtml 12/07/09)
(http://www.cit.ie/courses/courselisting/higherdiploma 12/07/09)
(http://www.tcd.ie/Education/courses/pgedpp.php 12/07/09)
(http://www2.ul.ie/web/WWW/Faculties/Education_&_Health_Sciences 12/07/09)
(http://www.lit.ie/DEPARTMENTS/ArtDesign/GradDipArt.html 05/05/09)
(http://www.dcu.ie/prospective/degrees.php?school=70&prog_type=post 17/06/09)
(http://www.nuigalway.ie/education/courses_pgde.html 12/07/09)
(http://www.ucc.ie/en/CK900/ 12/07/9)
(http://www.ucd.ie/education/graduateprogrammes/ 12/07/09)
(http://qpo.nuim.ie/teaching/pgdhe.shtml 12/07/09)

In contrast to the sixteen consecutive programmes available there are currently twenty-six concurrent undergraduate teacher education programmes offered by eleven universities and colleges throughout the country, preparing prospective second-level teachers (Gleeson, 2004; http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10815 10/03/09). Table V on the previous page presents brief details of all concurrent pre-service programmes including provider, programme type and length[5].

In Ireland, concurrent teacher education for second-level teachers has traditionally been equated with practical and vocational subjects such as home economics, physical education and craft subjects and the PGDE has been the predominant model for second-level teachers of traditional academic subjects (Coolahan, 1991). This trend is still evident today as the main teaching subjects in most of the programmes are laboratory / workshop / practical subjects, with the exception of the Religious Education programmes offered at Mater Dei Institute, St. Patrick's College and St. Angela's College. These programmes concentrate on religious formation, which cannot be developed as effectively in consecutive programmes due to their relative brevity (Coolahan, 2003). This trend is seen to reflect the academic / vocational divide which has been so event in Irish education since the foundation of the state.

> It is significant that the post-primary concurrent teacher education programmes are mainly in the vocational areas – materials technology (wood), engineering, science, home economics, art, and in the (as yet) non-examination areas of religious education and physical education (Gleeson, 2004:48).

It is evident that the number of concurrent programmes both nationally and internationally has continued to multiply over the last two decades and that teacher educators are embracing this approach in preference to the consecutive model. The consecutive model is shorter, less expensive and less of a drain on faculty resources and

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[5] Reference details for programmes listed in the table are as follows:
(http://www.dcu.ie/prospective/deginfo.php?classname=SE&mode=full 24/02/09)
(http://www2.ul.ie/web/WWW/Faculties/Education_%26_Health_Sciences/Departments/Education_and_Professional_Studies/Programmes 01/04/09)
(http://www.materdei.ie/prospective-students/undergraduate/ 19/06/09)
(http://www.ncad.ie/faculties/education/arted.shtml 5/11/08)
(http://www.tcd.ie/Education/courses/bmused.php 12/07/09)
(http://www.stangelas.com/Prospective%20Students/Programmes/courses.php?qual=Undergraduate 15/01/09)
(http://www.ucc.ie/en/education/SportsStudiesandPE/ 13/07/09)
(http://www.stpats.ie/courses_default.asp 13/07/09)
(http://www.letterfrack.net/D&TE.htm 13/07/09)
(http://www.nuigalway.ie/courses/undergraduate/courses_a2z.php?letter=M 13/07/09)
(http://admissions.nuim.ie/subjects/science_science-education.shtml 13/07/09)

would seem the most obvious choice of programme for the rational-minded teacher educator. However, despite the economies both financial and human this offers, the continuing introduction of new concurrent programmes signifies that teacher educators are electing to establish a wider variety of concurrent programmes.

The traditional approach and the status quo in Ireland

Teacher education has had a long history and its evolution in the worldwide context can be charted back for at least three hundred years (Moon, 1996:219). Since its early foundations, teacher education has taken many different forms, varying in length, context and level of education given to intending teachers (Johnson, 1968; Durcan, 1972; Hyland and Milne, 1987&1992). There are many descriptions of teacher education available and in its most simplistic form can be described as the 'first formal encounter with the ways of thinking and acting involved in the teaching process' (Penso & Shoham, 2003:314).

Despite the obvious diversity of ITE programmes currently available, it is possible to identify a number of common components that are collectively addressed in all programmes namely; 1. Education Studies 2. Academic Subject Studies 3. Subject Methodologies and 4. Teaching Practice. It is important to note however, that, 'there are, of course, enormous variations in the way these elements interrelate' (Moon, 1996:221; Buchberger, 1994). Over the last century, a large amount of psychological and educational research has made available a body of knowledge that potentially has a multitude of uses for the teaching practitioner and it would seem reasonable for teacher educators to wish to try to disseminate this. After all, in many professions a major aspect of the process of legitimisation has been the introduction of an extensive theoretical basis for the practitioners' work (McCullough, 1987; Hoyle and John, 1995). Teacher education too has been no exception and:

> The desire to use as much of the available knowledge as possible has lead to a concept of teacher education as a system in which experts, preferably working within universities, teach this knowledge to prospective teachers (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 4).

It is within this framework that we have arrived at what is widely known as the traditional approach to teacher education. The 1900s saw the rise of this as the prevalent model of pre-service teacher education, when 'the structure of the disciplines in

universities and their translation into school subjects 'triumphed' in the 1960s' (MacDonald et al., 2002:261; Pinar et al., 1995). This approach has epitomised the type of programmes that have subsequently developed in Ireland and indeed many other countries and examples of how this approach is expressed as content in ITE programmes are widespread in educational literature (Wideen et al., 1998).

> There is a familiar discourse in education that is based on its underlying disciplines. These include psychology and its various sub disciplines…Many Teacher Education programmes have been based to a greater or lesser extent on these disciplines or a subset of them (Hegarty, 2000:452&453).

This approach places the educational disciplines as the corner stones from which all else radiates, as 'disciplinary knowledge comprises a key part of the tertiary experience and lays the 'foundation' for what constitutes the focus of a specialist teacher' (McDonald et al., 2002:262; Kirk et al., 1997). Teacher education has wrestled for many decades with the problem of defining its theoretical dimensions and what has emerged are programmes that see the role of the teacher educator as a disseminator of educational theory and school experience as the forum to put this theoretical knowledge into practice. 'At its crudest this meant that students spend much of their time learning 'the disciplines' in highly academic courses' (Drever and Cope, 1999:97).

The traditional approach is viewed by some as being of little difference to any other undergraduate programme, with student teachers studying 'foundations' going through much the same academic hoops as their colleagues reading arts or social sciences. The main difference is the focus of their courses on education, though little attempt has been made to connect their studies to practical teaching, with courses assessed by traditional three-hour examination papers (Stones, 1989:5).

In the Irish context specifically, the traditional approach saw the foundation disciplines forming the backbone of teacher education programmes in most colleges, but the integration of the traditional approach into primary and post-primary teacher education programmes did not occur congruently (Coolahan, 1991; Burke, 1992&2000). According to Gleeson (2004), it was the *Regulations of the Teacher Registration Council*, drawn up in 1926, which provided the framework for the traditional approach in post-primary teacher education. These guidelines, originally drawn up to serve the HDip programmes, identified studies in the foundations of education such as

Philosophy, History of Education, Psychology and Sociology as integral components of ITE and subsequent concurrent programmes that were introduced also adhered to these recommendations. 'Not surprisingly in view of the recommendations of the Teacher Registration Council, the Foundation Disciplines form the 'spine' of the programmes in most colleges' (Gleeson, 2004:47-50). Though the regulations were revised in the 1980s, the position of the traditional approach remained and 'the relative weightings of the foundation disciplines …did not change at all from the 1928 position' (2004:50).

Teacher education at the University of Limerick

Teacher education in Ireland particularly for second-level teachers has traditionally orientated itself towards the traditional approach and this has primarily been seen as an effect of the *Regulations of the Registration Council for Secondary Teachers* (Coolahan, 2004&1991). Leonard and Gleeson (1999) make the point that the original Regulations did not include curriculum studies as a necessary part of ITE and even when these were revised during the 1980s, neither the status of the foundation disciplines or curriculum studies were changed. They feel policy makers' lack of interest in the need for change in teacher education 'suggests a serious lack of attention to both theoretical and practical aspects of the curriculum' (1999:51).

The post-primary teacher education programmes available at the University of Limerick had evolved from their origins in the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE), which was established in 1970, and which, within a decade (1979) developed into Thomond College of Education. Thomond College 'was designed on different lines from the traditional colleges of education and from the university sector' as it was concerned with the education of specialist second-level teachers in the areas of physical education; metalwork and engineering; materials technology and construction studies; general and rural science (Coolahan, 2004:8). The programme structure and content however, showed unity with all other second-level teacher education programmes of the time and was concentrated primarily around the foundation disciplines.

> The Thomond programme, centred around the Foundation Disciplines, in the conventional pattern of initial teacher education widely current at that time, and was constructed around a view of the professionally-educated teacher as a rational, informed decision maker, capable, in the light of this discipline-based knowledge, of understanding and resolving problems of practice' (Leonard and Gleeson, 1999:53).

This programme structure followed the ideals of the teacher-thinking movement of the 1970s in which a view had been created of teachers as conscious decision-makers. Basing teacher education programmes upon the foundation disciplines, reinforced this supposition that teaching is essentially a rational activity guided by a cache of theoretical knowledge. It assumed that teachers possessed theoretical structures, which they can apply to teaching situations. In other words, the relationship between teacher cognition and teacher behaviour was seen to fit into a process-product approach following the idea that; once inside schools, teachers, when making practical decisions would simply use the theoretical knowledge offered to them. Reflection was not seen as an important feature of the programmes of this time (Clarke, 1986).

> The model of teacher as rational decision maker assumed that knowledge from the Foundation Disciplines was central to becoming a teacher: good practice was assumed to consist in applying theory (1999:54).

The prevailing questioning attitude of the late 1980s and 1990s, as seen in the OEDC Report (1991), The Green Paper on Education (1992), The White Paper on Education (1995) and the Report on the National Education Convention (1994) provided a backdrop for change. Faculty at Thomond College saw this as an opportunity to move away from what they perceived were the inadequacies of the prevailing rationalist traditional approach. Coupled with this drive for redirection of teacher education was the real change happening on the ground in Thomond College as it became integrated into the University of Limerick in 1991 (Leonard and Gleeson 1999).

In 1993, the University of Limerick changed from a trimester to a semester system and faculty who had first-hand experience of the potential of reflective practice and teacher inquiry for teacher development saw this as a perfect opportunity to make changes. A review of current structures and practices was thus undertaken and was seen as ‘an opportunity to consider new possibilities’ (Leonard and Gleeson, 1999:54). It was decided that for true professional formation, reflective practice now had to become an essential component of the programmes. Personal reflective enquiry into one’s own teaching was seen by the faculty as a very good way of encouraging student teachers to become more inventive and adaptable in the face of the many changes taking place in schools. The new programme structure that was thus introduced was evocative of what Elliott (1993) has called the hermeneutic view of teacher education (Leonard and Gleeson, 1999:55).

The revised programme framework[6]

Elliot (1993) described how teacher educators have increasingly adopted the hermeneutic perspective as an alternative to the platonic view of teacher education. This perspective has manifested itself in the adoption of classroom-focused action-research and most specifically, in the inclusion of Schon's (1983 & 1987) concept of reflective practice which is seen as a more individualised, personal form of action research. Elliot describes the basic principle underlying this perspective as that of situational understanding, which implies that practice is grounded in interpretations of particular individualised situations and cannot be improved without improving those interpretations.

> From the hermeneutic perspective one does not derive practice from theory as rationalism suggests. Nor does one reduce theory to practice as behaviourism suggests…Good practice is not a matter of reproducing pre-programmed responses but responding intelligently and wisely to a situation as it unfolds on the basis of discernment, discrimination and insight (Elliot, 1993:18).

The revised programme that ensued followed a hermeneutic model and it was intended that the new structure would aid in student teachers' development of skills to critically reflect on their own personal practice as teachers. The new programme was based around a spiral structure whereby the student teachers would focus on a specific theme in each of their four years of ITE. In the first year the focus would be on the self as a teacher, in the second year on the classroom, the third year on the school and then finally, in the fourth year, the focus would return to the self but this time in the context of professionalism. A knowledge base in educational theory was also retained and certain features of the new programme were included to encourage student teachers to develop their skills of reflective practice and personal inquiry.

> The revised programme retained a knowledge base in educational theory, but a unifying concern in the programme would be the development of students' capacity to inquire critically and reflectively into personal practice (Leonard and Gleeson, 1999:55).

[6] The revised structure detailed refers specifically to the concurrent programmes on offer at the University of Limerick. Although the University also offers consecutive programmes, these are outside the scope of this current study and are not considered in this analysis.

Programme structure and content

The manifestation of the hermeneutic model that was adopted can be seen in the outline of the new programme structure (See Appendix B pg. 356). Each of the programmes comprises four central aspects; subject studies, educational studies, teaching practice and specialist options. Due to the undergraduate and concurrent nature of the programmes, student teachers receive tuition in their subject area in the relevant college department while simultaneously coming together in large group lectures for their studies of education. Students take one module of education studies per semester, as detailed in the table below. These modules range in content from curriculum studies, to looking at classroom practice[7].

Table VI: Education studies & teaching practice content of UL programmes

	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
Autumn Semester	Introduction to Teaching	Planning & Management of Classroom Learning ***Language Pedagogics 1***[8]	Education & Society in Ireland	Studying School Organisation
Spring Semester	Introduction to the Principles & Practice of Primary Education	Introduction to reflective practice ***Subject Pedagogics 1*** ***Language Pedagogics 2***	Curriculum Studies ***Subject Pedagogics 2***	Teacher as Professional
	Teaching Experience **One Week** **Autumn Semester**	***Teaching Practice*** **Six Weeks** **Spring Semester**		***Teaching Practice*** **Ten Weeks** **Autumn Semester**

With respect to teaching practice (TP) placements, intending teachers have their first TP in year two, when they complete a six-week placement in a second-level school teaching twelve to sixteen hours per week. In year four they spend ten weeks on TP, teaching approximately nineteen hours per week. Students on all the under-graduate ITE programmes are also obliged to spend at least two weeks observation and teaching in a

[7] The only deviation from this structure is in the The BA in Modern Languages, the newest of the programmes offered. Beginning teachers on this programme spend their third year abroad in work/academic placements in countries where the languages studied are spoken and the education studies usually undertaken in year three are taken by these students in years two and four.

[8] Language Pedagogics is taken by BA (Ed) in Modern Languages (English Language Teaching) students only.

primary school in the inter-semester break of year one. Students are expected to arrange these placement themselves and the amount of teaching time received is dependant on the particular school, but a minimum of one hour per day is expected. Over the course of their four-year programme, intending teachers spend four-hundred and forty hours on the educational component of their studies and approximately two-hundred and sixteen hours in the classroom gaining practical teaching experience.

Table VII: Programme hours allocated to education studies & TP

	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR	TOTAL
Hours spent on education studies	130	77	143	90	440
Hours spent on teaching practice		76		140	216

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The structure of established teacher education programmes

Introduction

It is clear from chapter two of this thesis that teacher education following the traditional approach has encompassed a very rigid and "front-loaded" structure for some time and that this approach has been widely recognised and accepted as the status quo.

> The teacher education curriculum that most readers know consists of courses in a variety of subject matters – the content to be taught – and in foundation disciplines that presumably contain information about basic processes involved in teaching and schooling (Doyle and Carter, 2003:133).

Although many authors have commented on the merits of the foundation disciplines (in some form) being incorporated in teacher education programmes, critics question how adequately the traditional approach integrates these various elements to best meets the needs of student teachers. It would seem this question is not stand alone, but rather has become a strong focus of the evolving commentary on teacher education.

Criticisms of the traditional approach

Programmes following the traditional approach are considered by many to be flawed. These challengers have difficulty with the notion that theory can just be presented to student teachers and that they will subsequently use this theory when needed to inform their practice. 'Many teacher education programmes consist of a collection of separate courses in which theory is presented without much connection to practice' (Barone et al. 1996:112). Indeed Doyle and Carter (2003) highlighted that the assumptions underlying this approach are highly transparent in that, a student teacher, if first shown the theory will then interpret this as necessary in their practice. Following this thinking, knowing precedes doing and action is a consequence of knowing.

> The broad structure and substance of the teacher education curriculum was invented long before the modern narrative perspective was articulated, and this invention reflects often unexamined assumptions about how teachers are made (2003:131).

This approach conceives that the marrying of educational theories to practice will be easily accomplished once the pre-service teacher has finished their ITE and is established in the practice of everyday teaching. 'Then the light would then dawn and

their teaching would be illuminated by the newly revealed truths' (Stones, 1989:5). The dangers inherent to this type of format however, have not gone unnoticed.

> The hidden curriculum of Teacher Education tends to communicate a fragmented view of knowledge, both in course-work and in field experiences. Moreover, knowledge is "given" and unproblematic. These views of knowledge are likely to become quite problematic as teachers gain experience (Ben-Peretz, 1995:546).

In the Irish context the negotiated teacher education programmes that developed based on the traditional approach have become known as the *Devil's Bargain* (Burke, 1992&2000). This is because many believe they have led to a gradual discrediting of the theoretical basis of teacher education due to the way the foundation disciplines have been presented (Goodson, 1995; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996).

Recognised inadequacies of traditional programmes

As the prevalence of programmes following the traditional approach began to increase, so too did the chorus of objectionaires to this type of teacher education (Lortie, 1975; Kagan, 1992; Liston and Zeichner, 1990; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999; Jedge, 2000). Many reasons have been cited for the dismissal of traditional programmes, all of which identify their apparent inability to "adequately" educate teachers.

> It has been customary to think that, after a little judicious theoretical 'foundation', such learning takes place 'on the job' or 'through experience' – and of course, some of it does, just as an apprentice learns from an experienced practitioner or expert in the field. This has been recognised, however, as a restricted conceptualisation of teaching as a simple craft apprenticeship model (Daly et al., 2004:102).

Zeichner and Gore (1990) reviewed studies undertaken on the professional growth of student teachers and they concluded that traditional programmes, 'are not very powerful interventions' and show little ability to aptly prepare student teachers for the realities of classroom life (1990:338; Nettle, 1998). One of the most widely cited reviews of teacher education (Kagan, 1992) also refuted the value of programmes based on the traditional approach and concluded that, 'university courses fail to provide novices with adequate procedural knowledge, or a realistic view of teaching in its full classroom / school context' (1992:162). Writing in the same vein, Lawlor (1990) argued that teachers were failing in their national duty by being fed a diet of irrelevant theory and having a lack of contact with the 'real world' of education. Zeichner and Liston's (1990) work also challenged the ability of teacher education programmes to prepare

teachers to meet the challenges presented in contemporary society. They made the point that in traditional programmes, students are exposed to weak courses focusing on pedagogy and discipline or courses that focus holistically on a liberal arts curriculum, providing little or no practical preparation for teaching (Hargreaves, 1990; Hallinan and Khmelkov, 2001). Possibly the most widely accepted critic of the traditional approach is Goodlad (1990) who held strong opposition to the continuation of programmes advocating this type of structure. His conclusion on this topic, that traditional teacher education programmes are said to fail in preparing prospective teachers for the realities of the classroom (Goodlad, 1990; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999; Korthagen, 2002).

Gargiulo and Pigge's (1982) review of ten years of research across various teacher education programmes noted that the literature is 'replete with criticisms of the apparent lack of effectiveness of teacher education' (1982:8). Their own study found that teacher education programmes were most effective at transmitting knowledge in purely theoretical areas. This finding was reiterated by Newton and Brathwaite (1987) who documented that the effectiveness of university-based programmes has been a concern of much of the literature on teacher education. Kennedy (1987) in analysing the various different rationales that have been adopted in professional education questioned the adequacy of this type of approach, where theory is presented as a kind of pseudo-scientific justification for practitioner action. The implication being that, by using it to generate hypothetical solutions to problems, it could be applied to practice (1987:140-145). The opposition to this type of teacher preparation has been evident within educational circles for several decades, with many critics citing this approach as a major factor in student teachers' inability to connect formal and practical knowledge. 'We think it more important, in training teachers, to produce well educated people than to produce technically competent practitioners' (Jeffrey's 1961:2). Lortie (1975) addressed the notion that teacher education following the traditional approach had failed student teachers and was resolute that established teacher education programmes do not equip teachers for the reality of the classroom. 'Their professional training, in short, has not linked recurrent dilemmas to available knowledge' (Lortie, 1975:70; Davies and Ferguson, 1997).

The washing – out syndrome

It has been argued that how student teachers learn and how knowledge is presented to them affects their perceptions of theoretical knowledge (Korthagen et al., 2001). While there is general agreement that the foundation disciplines should be included in teacher education, research indicates that if these are presented as individualised, neatly packaged modules of short duration, much of what the student learns will be lost very early on in their teaching career (Veenam, 1984; Zeichner and Tabachnick 1981).

Burke (1992) considered this ideology and articulated, that while the foundation disciplines are of critical importance in the understanding of teaching, we must be wary of the effect that presenting these in the form of short concise lectures has on students' ability to retain this information and to connect it to their practice.

> While these topics would seem to be appropriate on any teacher education programme and may be dealt with quite thoroughly in lectures, research findings indicate that the long term effects of foundation courses dealing with them, are to a good extent "washed out" in the early years of teaching (Burke, 1992: 117).

With regards to research on student teachers' inability to connect formal and practical knowledge, it was Veenam (1984) and Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) who originally recognised and analysed the 'washing-out' syndrome (Burke, 1992:123). Washing-out is caused when the impact of teacher education appears to be neutralised by the everyday influence or "reality-shock" of the teaching situation. While many factors are believed to influence the occurrence of "reality shock", the key feature is the way by which theory is presented to student teachers in traditional programmes by means of short lecture type sessions with no apparent link to classroom practice (Veenam, 1984). The work of Benner (1984) substantiated this analysis that student teachers receive insufficient preparation and experience a shock when faced with the full reality of the workplace (Benner, 1984; Stokking et al., 2003). Correy (1980) also found that the format of traditional programmes allowed no correlation between educational theory and actual classroom practices.

> In many cases the training of teachers with an academic degree is inadequate, since no meaningful relationship is established between their content knowledge and the practical dimension of the subject taught (Penso and Shoham, 2003:323).

Research by Assuncao Flores (2001) showed a clear correlation with reference to the concept of practice shock. New teachers in this study referred to their first teaching experience as being tiring, sudden and stressful and terms such as "shock", "jump" and "unprepared" indicate the gap that became evident to them between their expectations and the reality of the classroom. This was found to be the primary factor in their dismissal of their ITE programme (2001:139). The findings from other studies on teacher induction and transition shock (Muller-fohrbrodt et al., 1978; Dann et al., 1978; Hinsch, 1979) also substantiated claims that new teachers, having completed teacher education, experience a "reality shock" when faced with the demands of teaching and with the gap between their ideals and the reality of classroom life. Due to this, 'teacher education was accused of failing to prepare student teachers for the reality of the teaching profession' (Koetsier and Wubbles, 1995:333).

The theory / practice gap

Long and Stuart's (2004) censure of the 'teacher as decision-maker' model was very straightforward. If teacher candidates learn theory in the college setting and adopt practices in the field that are supposedly congruent with the theory, inevitably a theory-practice divide is created. 'A major problem for teacher educators who adopt the 'teacher as decision-maker' model is the necessity of 'bridging the gap' between theory and practice' (Long and Stuart, 2004:288). A decade earlier, Leinhardt et al. (1995) also expressed concerns as to how student teachers would integrate their theoretical knowledge with their practice, when it seemed that knowledge acquired as theoretical disciplines was so separate and inert from practical experiences in the school. 'Integrating knowledge learned in the academy with knowledge learned in practice is neither trivial nor is it obvious how this integration should be accomplished' (1995:402). Barrow claimed that 'much educational theory has had little to say of importance for practice' and that this has lead to the inexcusable state of affairs of teacher education (1990:313). The way theory has been transmitted in traditional programmes, he believes denigrated it to a "poor theory" as it is seen to be concerned with matters of little significance to teachers. According to Corrigan et al. (1986) in traditional programmes no balance is struck between theory and practice, which leaves student teachers baffled by theoretical knowledge, that is seemingly irrelevant to them. They questioned how sufficient this basis is for the sustained lifelong professional development of most teachers (1986:135-142).

Denunciation of established teacher education programmes was evident during the 1980s and calls to replace the 'spurious and questionable studies' of educational theory with 'a solid grounding in the real world' were ubiquitous (O'Hara, 1988:6). This continued into the 1990s, with a score of avid educationalists dismissing the adequacy of traditional teacher education (Zeichner and Liston, 1990; Hargreaves, 1990; Goodlad, 1990; Coffey and Atkinson, 1994; Clifton et al., 1994; Humes, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Barone et al., 1996; Ashton, 1996; Thies-Sprinthall, 1996; Northfield and Gunstone, 1997; Wideen et al., 1998; McPhee and Humes, 1998; Young, 1998; Drever and Cope, 1999; Day, 1999).

Rob Norris in his 1994 paper, 'Theory and Practice in the Teacher Education Curriculum of the 90s', provided a frank and insightful view of how theory has been presented in teacher education. Norris was critical of how traditional programmes had conducted the education of student teachers and judged that they had provided no opportunity for student teachers to learn for themselves or given student teachers any clarity on how to apply theory in their classrooms.

> If we think of educational theory merely as a set or series of generalisations about instructional phenomena i.e. if we do x then y will happen, we do little justice to theory, practice or the provision of opportunities for our students to learn for themselves (Norris, 1994:9).

Young (1990 & 1998) articulated that the problems ascribed to traditional programmes in the main stem from the fact that the disciplines did not provide an adequate basis for student teachers to understand the problems they faced in classrooms. This was further exacerbated by the fact that the foundation disciplines were highly abstracted from real life situations and insulated from each other. 'Students were somehow expected to bring the various disciplinary knowledges together and make them relevant to improving their practice' (Young, 1998:56 & 1990). Clifton et al. (1994) cited similar problems with ITE and reported that teaching practice was the only useful component. In fact they concluded, that students' experiences in the faculty of education were perceived as so irrelevant and negative that they led to feelings of alienation from the programme as a whole and outright dismissal of the theoretical component as useless. Ball (1995) although strongly advocating the role of educational disciplines as part of any "sound" programme, also made reference to how teacher educators have been failing to prepare students for real classroom experiences as, 'too often in educational studies theory

becomes no more than a mantric reaffirmation of belief rather than a tool for exploration and for thinking otherwise' (Ball, 1995:268). Similarly Humes (1995), questioned the devotion to abstract theoretical studies often based upon dubious sociological or philosophical premises, when the practicalities of the primary task of helping children to learn has been given insufficient time and attention (1995: 40-44; Lieberman, 1995).

A clear justification for reconsidering the structure and content of established programmes was presented by Fullan (1995). This echoed the sentiments expressed by others that, 'radical changes are required in how teachers learn and in the opportunities to learn' (1995:266) and that, 'the conventional view of staff developments as a transferable package of knowledge to be distributed to teachers in bite-sized pieces needs radical rethinking' (Lieberman, 1995:592). This plea is based on the view that traditional programmes do not fully create or sustain an environment that genuinely equates or even mimics the reality of full-time teaching which inevitably makes this preparation inadequate (Northfield and Gunstone, 1997; Loughran et al., 2001:7).

In Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon's (1998) review of ninety-three empirical studies on learning to teach, many references are made to the inadequacy of traditional teacher education programmes. The investigation cited six studies (Birrell, 1995; Bullough et al., 1989; Hargreaves and Jacka, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1992; Hollingsworth et al., 1993; Rust, 1994) not previously cited in this thesis, as well as a plethora of others which substantiate claims that, 'pre-service teachers university experiences and their student teaching did not prepare them for classroom realities' (1998:157). This notion is reiterated by student teachers themselves who in the studies reviewed, categorically stated that they were poorly prepared by their ITE programme for the school setting and it this was due to the inadequate preparation in their university coursework (1998:152, 153&156). This research supports the view that in traditional programmes the transfer of theory to practice is meagre or even non-existent.

> The notion that coursework should provide teaching skills and information about teaching – and that beginning teachers can integrate and effectively implement that information – receives very little support from this research (Wideen et al., 1998:151).

McPhee and Humes (1998) dismissed established programmes for being 'increasingly over theoretical' and cited a multitude of authors that are mournful of what the

traditional approach has brought to teacher education (1998:166). The way by which theory is disseminated to student teachers in these programmes by specific modular structure has become known as "front-loading". In this manner, student teachers are given as much theory as possible prior to gaining teaching experience, as if all the learning must be squeezed in prior to beginning teaching, because the teacher will never have a chance to get smart later. This approach is synonymous with traditional programmes and according to Doyle and Carter (2003) has brought very little to teacher education, as in most cases, teachers forget knowledge given out by this means very early on in their career. 'A curriculum based on front-loading, however replete with research based knowledge or practical wisdom is doomed to fail and much of what is heaped on will inevitably fall off' (2003:135). This has not proven to be either a suitable or beneficial way of educating teachers because,

> For the vast majority of students there is simply no real and rich experience of performance as a teacher that can be brought to bear on their teacher education content (Doyle and Carter, 2003:134; Hegarty, 2000).

An earlier (2001) study in Portugal also cited findings on the low impact that initial teacher education has on the teacher development. Here participants referred to a gap between theory and practice and to their inadequate preparation for coping with daily classroom problems, in particular as regards interaction with students.

> What I was taught at the university was a utopia…At the time we weren't aware of what a real school was like at all. We didn't know exactly what the reality was like, we thought that it was like we were told, but then, we get there [schools] and we realise that those theories just cannot be put into practice (Student Teachers cited in Assuncao Flores, 2001:138).

Criticisms of the traditional approach and evaluations highlighting that existing pre-service programmes based on the transfer of educational disciplines are inadequately preparing contemporary teachers are evident in the literature as far back as the 1970s (Hobson, 2003; Korthagen, 2002; Hallinan & Khmelkov, 2001; Hagger & McIntyre, 2000; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Martin, 1998; White Paper, 1995; OFSTED, 1992; OECD, 1991). While some commentators advocate the total abolition of the foundation disciplines, the majority see their innate value, but also see a need for change in how pre-service programmes are structured and educational theory disseminated.

Educational studies is in a sorry state and in danger of becoming sorrier…the invisible light that shines wanly within the knowledge structure of educational studies is in danger of being snuffed out entirely (Ball, 1995:256).

Changes that have since occurred in teacher education programmes although at different times in different countries, heralded a new epoch where 'an alternative discourse, focusing on the attainment of specified competencies and skills began to emerge' (McPhee & Humes, 1998:166).

Policy solutions

The obvious pressures noted in the previous section towards more practical programmes with less (if any) emphasis on educational theory, were a sign of the level of dissatisfaction with established programmes (Barone et al., 1996:1108-1109). This lead to an emerging situation in some countries where a major part of pre-service teacher education became the responsibility of schools rather than the universities, creating a situation in which, to a large extent, teacher education took the form of "training on the job". The development of "teacher-training" has happened in two ways. Firstly there has been a change in the curricula of teacher education programmes from discipline-based to problem-based and secondly, in some cases, there has been a move from university-based to school-based teacher education (Young, 1998). As awareness of the inadequacy of the foundation disciplines (as presented in traditional programmes) in helping student teachers understand the problems that they faced in classrooms grew, calls for their total abolition increased. In response to the recognised inadequacy of the foundation disciplines framework, the curriculum of many teacher education programmes was reconstructed in the 1980s 'on the basis of typical classroom-based problems faced by student teachers' and in many cases completely neglected to include any connection with the foundation disciplines (Young, 1998:56).

> The new problem-based curricula denied students access to concepts which, by linking their practical experience to the wider context which shaped it, might have helped them improve their practice (Young, 1998:56).

In some countries attempts were also made to weaken the link between teacher education and universities. This manifested in some cases with the total removal of teacher education from the universities and in others with the development of partnership programmes between universities and schools. Policies, which reduced the role of the universities in teacher education 'aimed to give a greater role to practicing teachers and force universities to concentrate more on specialist pedagogic advice and less on "theory"' (Young, 1998:57). According to Cochran-Smith (2004) these developments removed the "education" from ITE and made pre-service programmes more narrow and technical in nature. Teaching became seen as something you could train for by learning particular skills and once you had acquired these skills or "competencies", you were amply equipped to teach. The result of this was 'a technical

view of teaching, a training model of teacher education, the isomorphic equating of learning with testing' (2004:3).

The British situation

During the 1980s and 1990s each successive British government assumed greater control over initial teacher training as it became known, and placed a greater emphasis on school-orientated and practical-training (Furlong, 1995; Hobson, 2003). Documentation disseminated by the Department for Education (DfE) in the United Kingdom during that period began to address specific skills teachers need to attain - most notably Circular 9/92 (DfE, 1992) which outlined various competencies of teaching (relating to subject knowledge and application, class management, assessment etc.) on which initial teacher training courses should focus. The DfE also announced that student teachers were to spend a minimum of two-thirds of their training in schools (Hobson, 2003). Consecutive British governments advocated these changes and the competency-based approach was maintained (DfEE, 1997; Young, 1998). The justification for this shift towards competency and school-based training was that intending teachers were now getting what they always wanted, less time in the university and less theory. 'There is no doubt that that the restructured courses now allocate little or no time to the formal study of the 'foundation disciplines' (Hobson, 2003:246).

The competency movement, in which competencies were superseded by standards after the formation of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), involved the identification of various skills deemed necessary for teaching. This has been seen as a somewhat instrumentalist if not reductivist approach to teacher education, where at its most extreme, 'teachers are viewed as technicians who will simply apply what educational research has discovered' (Fish, 1989:157). The activity of teaching was seen purely as a collection of skills, which could be analysed, described and mastered. With such strong involvement of government in teacher education and with the movement towards increasing control, the apparent precision of competency descriptors was an attractive feature. It is widely considered that competency-based models were introduced not only as a solution to the inadequacies of the traditional approach, but partly to monitor more closely the outcomes of training (Drever and Cope, 1999).

Whatever the reasoning behind the move, the outcome has been a political definition of teacher training (significantly not teacher education) closely linked to a prescriptive view of the school curriculum. Thus standards have to be assured in the public domain by a system of inspection, which has caused the evolution of an apprenticeship model, with student teachers spending increasingly more time in schools and correspondingly less theoretical input from universities (McPhee and Humes, 1998). The Teacher Training Agency in Britain has taken responsibility for specifying long lists of competencies or standards, which purport to illustrate in an authoritative way what qualified teachers should be able to do. These lists have not been accompanied by any rationale for the items listed or by any explanation of the conception of teaching expertise that underlies the lists (Hagger and McIntyre, 2000:484-486; Young, 1998). As a result of the implementation of such systems of initial teacher training, student teachers were increasingly seen as being trained to meet certain standards of competence (Lunn and Bishop, 2003).

> A new language (for I.T.T.) has emerged. Teacher Education is now teacher training; students are trainees; the curriculum is expressed as a set of standards for qualified teacher status (Burgers, 2000:410).

The Irish situation

Although in Ireland such an obviously technicised, competency-based system has not been adopted, a pervasive technical interest has been evident at the heart of official thinking as expressed in policy documents since the 1990s (Ireland, 1995; Carr and Kemmis, 1996). Like the British system, control of the learning environment became the dominant concern, with emphasis on 'outcomes' or 'product', with knowledge viewed as aloof and abstract and consisting merely of a set of rules, procedures and unquestionable say-so's. When one looks closely at the main thrust of teacher education policy in the 1995 Education White Paper, it is apparent that underlying the rhetoric, the primary concern was with restrictive rather than developmental reform (Ireland, 1995; Leonard and Gleeson, 1999). In the section 'Teacher Education and Training', favour is shown to an approach whereby the pre-service development of teachers both personal and professional should be, 'decentralised, school-focused and conducive to high levels of teacher participation in all aspects of the process' (Ireland, 1995:128). The focus is technical and rationalist, with emphasis on a product-orientated approach to planning for teaching, the development of classroom management and pedagogical skills. Most

notably the terms “teacher education” and “teacher training” are used inter-changeably (Ireland, 1995).

The dominance of technical concerns in national policy has also been reflected in governmental announcements. In 1998 when establishing an advisory group on post-primary teacher training, the Minister for Education’s identified concerns included the length of training and training methodologies, numbers of programme places and candidate selection (Martin, 1998:9). One could hardly ask for a better more obvious example of technical concerns and all set within the discourse of training. According to Leonard and Gleeson (1999) this technicised view so apparent in governmental documentation has remained and is evident in how the changes needed in teacher education have been perceived and integrated by officials. ‘Our policy makers, spurred on by the achievements of the Celtic Tiger, continue to be driven by technical interests’ (1999:59).

Micheál Martin called for a review of post-primary teacher training in 1998 and on the very same day, also announced that a review of primary teacher training was to be undertaken (Martin, 1998). In a speech four months later, at the Annual Conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE), he spoke in some detail about both of these impending reviews. Martin reiterated his commitment to looking at the challenges that will face teacher education in the next century, although all the time using the pervasive terminology of “training”. Interestingly although no major reviews of this nature had previously been undertaken, this was not seen by educationalists as a response to calls for reform. Rather it was considered to be a pre-emptive measure on the part of the government in the face of rapid change in Irish society, that would inevitably have implications for the way that teachers at all levels were prepared (Kelleghan, 2004:19).

In 2003 just after the two reviews were published, Noel Dempsey, the then Minister for Education, announced that he was granting recognition to a ‘new primary teacher training course’ (Dempsey, 2003:1). This new course was to be delivered by Hibernia College, an on-line third-level educational company using e-learning technology and would be accredited by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and lead to a Graduate Diploma in Primary Education. Objectionaires have questioned not only the content, methods of delivery employed and length of this programme, but

also the ease by which the Minister granted it recognition. The Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education (CHoICE) subsequently made a presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on Education expressing serious concerns about this development in teacher education (CHoICE, 2004). The view held by the Conference was that this programme 'poses a significant threat to the quality of teacher education and to the professional status of teaching'. They questioned the appropriateness of an on-line programme as a means of educating teachers and expressed deep reservations about the justifications for its accreditation (2004:2). They also made reference to the position of Hibernia College in the private sector and its lack of any previous experience of educating teachers.

> For a private sector company with no prior experience in the delivery of any teacher education programme to be given the freedom to take in unrestricted numbers in its initial years borders on the reckless (CHoICE, 2004:5).

The Council of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) also released a statement expressing their opposition to the Hibernia programme. Their objection was on professional grounds, as they argued that internet-based learning was an inappropriate way to provide ITE (IFUT, 2004:1). They also made reference to this as a move towards a more technically orientated approach to teacher education and were critically of how readily the Minister granted the new programme accreditation.

> The Minister has effectively granted Hibernia College a lucrative franchise to 'train' primary teachers, while at the same time significantly reducing the number of graduate entrants to the state-funded Colleges of Education (IFUT, 2004:2).

The Alliance for Professionalism in Teaching (APT), a newly formed group consisting of representatives of student teachers from each of the Colleges of Teacher Education nationwide, also launched a protest against the Minister's endorsement of the new Hibernia programme (APT, 2004). This group accused the Minister of being out to purposefully de-professionalise teachers, and of being complicit in lowering the quality of primary education in Ireland. They too highlighted the orientation of official language around "training" as opposed to "educating" Ireland's future teachers.

> This part-time internet course is a threat to the professionalism of teachers. It represents a worrying move away from teacher education as the education of valued, competent professionals, to teacher education as simply the training of technicians (APT, 2004:2).

Many of those opposed to the Hibernia programme questioned the Minister's justifications for such a programme and highlighted how this decision essentially ignored the recommendations of the review on primary teacher education (the Kelleghan Report). CHoICE wrote of the report as 'making wide-ranging recommendations' none of which supported 'the introduction of a part-time or an on-line programme of teacher education' (CHoICE, 2004:4). Similarly APT wrote of how the government had 'ignored the findings' of the Kelleghan Report by 'endorsing a controversial internet-based teacher training course' (APT, 2003:2). Sugrue and Dupont categorised the introduction of the Hibernia programme as a significant benchmark in the Irish context, with 'many of the hallmarks of a privatisation agenda, though it is frequently presented by the DES as a necessity due to the inability of existing providers to meet demands'. They were clear that, 'in the context of various EU initiatives, this is a significant development, and a general indication of the impact of market forces and deregulation of the sector' (2005:82). Harford referred to the decision of the DES to give recognition to a distance teacher education agency as 'one of the most troubling developments to emerge in recent years' and acknowledged that the move has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction in the educational community (2008:89).

While addressing the area of teacher development at the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) Congress in 2005, the then Minister for Education and Science Mary Hanafin spoke of improving the probationary period for new teachers and as part of this, developing guidelines and practical advice on planning and lesson preparation. Her only reference to teacher education was that 'the quality of teacher training has a major impact on the quality of teaching' and therefore that every child should be taught by a trained teacher (Hanafin, 2005:1). Her subsequent comments focused solely on the provisions for extra 'training places' and highlighted a continuing pervasive technical interest on the part of government (Hanafin, 2005:2).

Re-thinking teacher education

> 'The status of teaching is tied up with the status of its training' (Poppleton, 1999:234).

The teacher training movement, which led in some cases to school-based teacher education, competences and the removal of educational theory and in others, policies laden with technical rhetoric brought teacher education to a critical period; 'both in terms of the way it is delivered and in terms of the way the profession is conceived and regarded' (McPhee and Humes 1998:170; Adams and Tulasiewicz, 1995).

Reproach for the teacher training movement

Much literature however has emerged regarding why the technical-rationality structure has not proven to be the panacea for the ills inherent in teacher education and as to why teacher training has had a regressive and negative impact on teacher education (Broudy, 1984; Bayer, 1987; McClelland, 1989; Barone et al., 1994; Koetsier and Wubbles, 1995; Davies and Ferguson, 1997; Whitty et al., 1998; Young, 1998; Poppleton, 1999; Dowrick, 1998; Turner – Bissett, 1999; Leonard and Gleeson, 1999; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999; Hegarty, 2000; Humphreys and Hyland, 2002; Williams and Soars, 2002; Korthagen, 2002 & 2004; Edwards et al., 2002; Deng and Gopinathan, 2003; Lunn and Bishop, 2003; Becker et al., 2003; Edwards and Portheroe, 2003).

Michael Young (1998) put forth a clear line of argument as to why the displacement of the role of theory by focusing on making teachers into technically competent practitioners creates its own inherent problems. This policy follows the assumption that the core of any teacher education programme should be the experience of teaching in a school under the guidance and control of experienced teachers. Here learning to teach is seen as a purely practical and experiential process in which the only theory needed would result from student teachers own reflection on their practice. Young questions how experience in a single, individual school could be seen as an adequate model for a future teacher and how a student teacher could be believed to gain all the necessary knowledge to become a competent and capable teacher from the experience of trying to teach and watching others teach (1998:57). This concept of teacher education according to Young, has limited the opportunities for teachers to develop, after all, how is a student teacher expected to reflect on their work, if they have no grounding in how to reflect or encouragement to do so? His argument concluded that teacher education

curricula cannot afford to exclude the educational disciplines, because it is only with this knowledge that teachers can develop their skills sufficiently (1998:60).

Stones (1989) pointed out the irony of a prescription of relevant experience in schools, staffed by allegedly inefficient teachers, as a way of improving teacher competence. If existing teachers are dismissing their own teacher preparation as irrelevant, how can a system based on learning wholly with and from these teachers be seen as a step forward? (1989:4). In his earlier work (Stones and Morris, 1972) Stones applied the term 'sitting with Nellie' to this apprenticeship system of teacher training, as an argument to attempt to expose the obvious inadequacies of what he characterised the profoundly conservative and inefficient nature of the system.

> Rules of thumb related to specific teaching situations…and an a-theoretical school experience cannot provide the experience to bring about learning appropriate to the development of an inquiry-orientated, self-correcting pedagogy in student teaching (1989:9).

Stones advocated a movement away from competency-based prescriptors and highly practice orientated teacher education. 'We must go beyond the craft knowledge of teachers in our aim to construct a pedagogy that will unify theory and practice' (1989:7). Poppleton (1999) also criticised the evolution of teacher preparation to teacher training and was particularly sceptical of how it had led to the demise of the educational disciplines, without which she feels teachers are not adequately equipped. 'I.T.T. may not in itself be an academic discipline but it is informed by a number of disciplines without which the teacher and pupils are placed at risk' (1999:241). She also made reference to the industrial terminology of the 1950s where learning to teach was simply a matter of "sitting by Nellie". "Nellie" according to Poppleton was the prototype female repetitive worker needing only simple skills, which is how teacher training portrays the needs of the teacher. Student teachers are faced with the mastery of complex skills that need time to be indoctrinated so as to encourage a good learning environment and failure to recognise this according to Poppleton, has lead to a situation where teachers are not properly prepared for their job (1999:240-242).

Research by Dowrick (1998) on the impact of school-based programmes correlates with the view that these programmes are de-professionalising teachers. The findings confirmed that student teachers on teacher education programmes that are

predominantly school-based, may develop less in their thinking / reflection about their teaching than students taking traditional higher education programmes (1998:290). The author concludes that there is now a strong recognition in educational literature that 'classrooms are not necessarily the dominant contexts for student teachers learning' (McIntyre, 1994:81). Another affiliated argument was provided by Hegarty (2000) who stated that from a knowledge-based orientation, these programmes have a number of limitations because they tend to focus on and promote teaching as a craft as opposed to teaching as a knowledge-based activity. He agreed that having certain set skills is important, but that an excessive focus on them leads to an impoverished notion of teaching, which reduces the job to an unreflective application of rules devoid of any insight or creativity (2000:456). Turner – Bissett (1999) also surmised that although some standards can be useful for judging the abilities and attainment levels of student teachers, the model of teaching that competency lists present is impoverished. She held two concerns, the actual content of the lists of criteria and the nature of these types of lists. In Turner-Bissett's view the criteria are far too general, as it is assumed that the new teacher can either do a particular thing or not, but there are no graduations of ability or performance in these competencies. Concomitantly these lists provide only a partial representation of what it means to teach and in describing certain 'standards', have ignored the substantial knowledge base that teachers require in order to do the job well. She argued that 'merely skilled performance might just as well be craft… more is needed to lift the business of teaching into the professions, where it belongs' (1999:41).

Lunn and Bishop (2003) undertook research with 75 trainee teachers and reported that the trainees themselves expressed dissatisfaction with the training they were receiving. They were most critical of the structures of the technicist model as presented by their course design and objected to its prescriptive nature. They were not convinced of the validity of a model that stated that only in meeting each and every one of the outlined criteria would they become an effective teacher. Indeed the research showed that the message coming across to the student teachers was that they were being trained rather than educated and this resulted in the trainee teachers' perception that their training course was coercive and destructive of their own knowledge (2003:205). The authors highlighted that even the term 'trainee' had negative perceptions, as it indicates a technicist viewpoint of the art of teaching that encourages no more than a transmission approach to learning with a lack of desire to promote independent thinking.

> Perhaps one of the biggest questions of the moment is: are we trying to train teachers, like horses to be ridden? Are we aiming for them to know everything and to know how to do everything? Or are we trying to educate them to be intelligent? (Ovens, 2000:196).

Their analysis highlighted a need for teachers who are well educated, not simply well trained and called for a move away from the reductionist discourse associated with competencies (Lunn and Bishop, 2003; l'Anson et al., 2003).

Research of this type, from the student teachers perspective, is sparse, but Davies and Ferguson (1997) also cited similar findings regarding teachers' opinions of their pre-service preparation. Their report looked primarily at the gaps teachers perceived in their ITE, but also provided information on teachers' opinions of school-based teacher education. 85% of the participants did not advocate teachers taking over the responsibility of teacher training. No member of the study group agreed with teacher education being wholly school-based and all participants wanted the role of the teacher education college in teacher preparation to remain. Twenty-three different disadvantages of training student teachers within school were cited. Interestingly the main reason cited for not basing teacher education wholly in schools, was that bad habits could be passed on, as who would decide what makes a "good" or "bad" teacher? Another reason cited was that in schools there is no time for theory, and participants stressed that they needed to learn about educational theory so as to have a rationale behind their work and to be able to know how children learn so they can plan and structure their lesson correctly (1997:46-50). Participants also strongly agreed that moving teacher preparation holistically into the school would de-professionalise teaching (1997:39&51).

This idea that school-based teacher training is affecting the professionalism of teachers was also considered by Leonard and Gleeson (1999). They consider that the new reformed programmes of teacher training that have developed in Britain and are, 'out to de-theorise and deprofessionalise teaching and teacher education in the interests of pursuing technical interests in school education' (1999:60). Ball (1995) conceived this type of training as 'advocating an isolationist, apolitical approach to education in which it is assumed that educational problems can be fixed by technical means' (1995:261). He believed that the removal of theory from teacher education and the reduction of teacher development to a matter of competencies and on the job training had made

teaching reconstituted and depoliticised and had changed it from being an intellectual endeavour to being a purely technical process.

Deng and Gopinathan (2003) challenged three core assumptions of the teacher-training model; concerning what teaching is, the primary purpose of teacher preparation, and the role of practical experience. With respect to the concept of teaching behind this model, they feel that it omits some essential features and functions of transformative teaching and seriously misrepresents what is distinctive of teaching as a human behaviour by emphasising a body of pre-determined classroom procedures and skills. A tendency inherent in this conception that they find particularly worrisome is that it treats these skills as an end in themselves, not as a means to some specified educational goals. This encourages student teachers to develop a very limited conception of what they will be doing in the classroom and an inability to see their work in the context of current reform initiative and its connection with social purpose. This trend of equating improvements in educational quality with technical advances they feel is leaving in its path a danger of 'widespread dehumanisation' (Jackson, 1996:142).

> Pre-service teachers could be afflicted by a conceptual blight if they think of teaching too much in terms of skills and procedures, or pay too much attention to the technical dimension of teaching (Deng and Gopinathan, 2003:59).

The technical orientation of this movement is troublesome for the authors, as it does not take into account teachers' own beliefs and perceptions, which they believe are the guiding force behind the way teachers act and behave. This emphasis they judge will undoubtedly destroy the real essence of initial teacher education (2003:60-62).

> Our primary concern is that the training model of teacher preparation – which is effective in producing classroom technicians who will uncritically continue traditional classroom practices – falls well short of producing teachers needed in the new era of educational initiatives (2003:61).

They are also critical of the role of practical experience in teacher training, as there is an assumption that practical experience provides a sufficiently valid source and means for learning to teach. The practicum experience is primarily skill and procedure orientated, with a strong tendency to concentrate on the mastery of specific skills and the maintenance of discipline, rather than encouraging pre-service teachers to carefully reflect upon and examine issues relating to their teaching. Thus trainees are likely to

develop a narrow view of teaching, which is centred exclusively upon particular procedures and skills. 'Too much emphasis on practical experience tends to reinforce 'reflective conservatism' making it difficult for student teachers to see the range of possible classroom practices available' (2003:61). This produces followers of tradition, which results in a lowering of aspirations and an unquestioning commitment to present pedagogy. 'Helping pre-service teachers to teach in new ways… it requires education, not merely training' (2003:60; Edwards and Portheroe, 2003).

Landon Beyer (1987) accused the teacher training movement of causing a 'crisis of knowledge' and centred his contention on the fact that this system is based on scientific principles, yet the relationship between education and science has proven to be hasty and unproductive (1987:24). He argued that just because teachers appear to develop in a particular way under prescribed circumstances, does not imply that this is the way we ought to help teachers develop (1987: 23-29).

> A reliance on psychometric analysis, isolated technical competence, linear thinking and instrumental reason, we must admit, is not the saviour of educational waywardness we once thought it was (Beyer, 1987:19).

According to McClelland (1989), training programmes have no clearly worked out guiding philosophy of teacher formation and show no concern for matters that cannot be designated as 'the nuts and bolts' of training (1989:21). They assume that the formation of teachers can be viewed as simply a mechanical process, divorced from a real overarching concept of teaching. Treating teacher preparation as little more than the sum of its parts, explains McClelland, 'propagated the dangerous myth that teacher education ought to concern itself primarily if not exclusively, with a training in performance' (1989:31). Broudy's (1984) dismissal of this approach stems from the basis for this movement, its practicality and its effects on the professional education of teachers (1984:2-4). She considers that it runs counter to common sense to believe that life outcomes of schooling can be specified in advance and tested on demand and that if they are not, then they are not worth achieving. This type of teacher preparation has downgraded the scholastic aptitude requirements for entry, because aptitude is just aptitude for theory, and without theory you have no need for it. Due to this programmes can be shorter and therefore more financially cost effective and because of the shorter length and lack of theory, teachers can only been seen as "paraprofessionals" and therefore will not command a professional salary. According to Broudy, this explains

why competency-based teacher training has been so widely supported by policy makers (1984:2-5). Edwards et al. (2002) highlighted that rational models and methods based partially upon medical education and capstone clinical experiences have typified teacher training initiatives. Teaching, they say, is not a profession that can be easily rationalised into clear, defined procedures taught step-by-step in clinical experience and learning is not a process that can be solely left to easily tested routines and procedures. They dismiss this as an appropriate grounding for educating teachers and caution against creating universal teacher criteria.

> There is no simply checklist of teacher knowledge…Instead the practice of teaching reveals interconnected sets of rule-governed behaviour which vary from context to context…It is possible to identify some of these rules, but it would be a basic mistake to attempt to generalise from them so as to produce a definitive list of teacher knowledge (2002:39).

Humphreys and Hyland (2002) also made reference to how performance-based teacher training strategies were de-skilling teachers and equated competency-based teacher training with the widespread erosion of professional autonomy (2002:6; Whitty et al., 1998). They made the point that through the centralised control of all aspects of teachers' work we have seen the transformation of public service values into a 'marketised, consumerist culture', which has left the teaching profession in crisis (2002:7). These types of programmes overlook inherent features of human relationships – the ethical and the emotional, without which we have an overtly rationalist conception of performance. They argue for a reconceptualisation of how teacher education takes place with a newly refined role for educational theory and practice. 'Teachers should seek to maintain control over all aspects of theory and practice, which impinge on their professional lives' (Humphreys and Hyland, 2002:7).

The drastic reduction in the influence of teacher education institutions on teacher preparation (especially their lack of involvement in the practical component) may lead to an overemphasis on conforming to existing school practices, at the cost of introducing new educational developments and theoretical insights according to Koetsier and Wubbles (1995). Therefore, highly regarded new developments and views on how to improve practice could be ignored and prevailing teaching practices (which may not necessarily be the best models) reinforced (1995:336). Their colleagues at the University of Utrecht (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999) have similarly argued that a

professional teacher should acquire more than just practical tools for managing classroom situations simply for survival and that it is the job of the teacher educator to present student teachers with a broad view on education which offers a holistic grounding in sociology, psychology etc. They do not however advocate a return to the traditional based approach, but a more realistic integrated model. Korthagen's (2002) work asserted that the root of the 'how' question of teacher education has been that we did not know (and were perhaps not open to) what other possibilities there were to initiate developments in teacher education. Approaches to teacher education have always been at polar opposites, either starting from theory as in the traditional approach, or from practice as in teacher training. According to Korthagen, if we merely train teachers with practical tools there is little chance of long-term job satisfaction or indeed of the teachers using their knowledge for any length of time. 'There is an admitted problem in trying to train teachers like seals, but there is little chance of their implementing the desired changes if left alone' (Holmes, 1998:254). This is where the problem lies, the dichotomy between "training like seals" and "leaving teachers alone". If we accept this dichotomy then we are trapped in an educational vacuum where only these two ways of educating teachers are possible (Korthagen, 2002&2004).

It is clear that neither the traditional or competency based approach to teacher education are considered to adequately prepare teachers for the realities of the classroom. It is evident however that teacher education without some form of a theoretical background is not education at all, and that there must be a place for theory in teacher education.

> It is not adequate to think that you can learn by sitting with Nellie, no matter how good Nellie is and there is a body of theory that needs to be respected and delivered expertly away from the schools (Williams and Soars, 2002:95).

The place of educational theory in teacher education

> Skills and procedures should be acquired in ways that are guided and informed by educational concepts, principles and theories from foundation studies (Deng and Gopinathan, 2003:63).

According to Norris (1994), if we accept the notion of theory as a systematic attempt to explain practice and as a predictor of its effects, by which one can establish through critical scrutiny a system of explanatory principles or rationales, then and only then can we have a rationally determined basis for action and a means for adequately evaluating

teaching. Put more simply, theory gives us access to a means of determining the markers by which quality is judged. His argument continues that in the era of quality standards, 'it is foolhardy as well as ironic to underestimate the role of theory in informing and evaluating our practice' (Norris, 1994:6-8; Barrow, 1984). What we need to distinguish between however is the over-loading of educational theory with no thought given to its relevance and making sure that the theory put forth is appropriate, tested and dynamic. Accordingly, we need explicit and testable empirical evidence, alongside equally testable and explicit value statements, before we can formulate explanatory and predictive theories as a basis for determining how we should guide our student teachers and how effective their subsequent actions might be. He strongly advocates teacher education based on exposure to theories and their application to and derivation from practice, which provides a much more grounded and worthwhile teacher preparation experience. 'Much more valuable and empowering are patterns of training based on exposure to theories' (1994:9). He explains that if the act of developing theory as a system of explanatory, predictive and testable generalisations is seen as rooted in practice and also as operating inferentially from practice as well as deductively to it, we immediately open up possibilities for highlighting success, inconsistency or paradox in our practice. Once student teachers have experienced this type of structure, his conclusion is that both their thinking and their practice will not only be better informed and more dynamic, but also more challenging.

> Reflecting on our actions and on the theories and philosophies, which underpin our actions, provides an essential and dynamic means of developing our own learning… as well as that of our students (1994:9).

This notion of applying theory in practice according to Drever and Cope (1999) seems to suggest that educational theory has the quality of a science, so that when faced with a problem, the student teacher expects theory to provide a hypothetical solution that can be tested in practice. This they believe is where teacher education has gone wrong. They explain that because educational settings are ambiguous and success is so dependent on context specific factors, the solution may not provide a cure-all, which falsifies the 'science' and leads to the rejection of that theory and in some cases, theory in general. They conceive that theory should not be presented as a solution or magic fix-all for problems, but rather as an aid to explaining a particular problem. On conceptualising theory in this way to their own students, their findings showed that if a particular piece of theory was helpful to explain some classroom experience, the student teacher was

reassured of the value of that theory but did not expect every bit of theory to be useful. Because of this experience, the students began to see theory as providing support for them, and this they assert should be the role of theory, as a support and not a perceived cure-all for every problem student's encounter.

> There are various reasons for teaching theory to student teachers, of which utility is only one…we should be cautious about promising it will help them cope with placement. We recognise too that such theory as we teach to that end will need to be relevant to their actual concerns, quickly consolidated by their experiences, and supportive of the practice they see around them (Drever and Cope, 1999:108).

Stones (1989) attempted to explain the complexities of the relationship between educational theory and the theory of teaching and the relationship of both to practical teaching. Most discourse on theory in teacher education does not clearly distinguish between theory in teaching and theory in education and although it is possible to regard the theory of teaching as a subset of educational theory, which can be studied without being involved in some way with practice, this is where Stones feels teacher preparation has gone wrong (1989:35). Although not in favour of theory as presented in the foundation disciplines, Stones likened the removal of theory from teacher education to 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' (1989:6). He advocates a pedagogical theory grounded in practical teaching, which can easily be achieved by linking educational studies quite explicitly with student teachers' practical experience and uses philosophy of education as an example. The study of philosophy raises questions about the relationship between theory and practice in concrete situations to which students can relate their own practice, therefore this type of theory is crucial to student teachers. This verbal dialectic however is not enough and must be complemented by dialectic interaction between tentative practical activity and tentative theorising.

> It is important to acknowledge that exegesis alone is not sufficient. Socratic seminars, for all their open and self-critical nature, are unavailing when our object is to discover new connections between theory and practice (1989:6).

In Stones view, pedagogy should be the heart of any preparation programme and the foundation disciplines are enriched and not threatened by a focus on pedagogy. Stones believes that there is a body of empirical knowledge that is potentially of great importance in teaching and what is lacking is any systematic attempt to relate practical teaching to this body of knowledge.

> The challenge facing teachers educators is how to structure learners' environments so that they will learn the concepts symbolised by the words, spoken or printed, even if the words are at any one time unsupported by other experience (1989:8).

The absence of theory leaves the student teacher prey to un-examined, un-reflexive preconceptions according to Ball (1995). He conceived theory as a vehicle for 'thinking otherwise', a platform for 'outrageous hypothesis', which offers a language for challenge and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by more dominant others. 'The purpose of such theory is to de-familiarise present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for invention of new forms of experience' (1995:266). In order to go beyond the incidences in our teaching and the contingencies that enfold us, it is necessary to start from another position and begin from a place that is normally excluded. Theory in Ball's assessment provides this - the possibility of dis-identification, the effect of working on and against prevailing practices. The point of theory is to reveal and undermine what is wrong and invisible in prevailing practices (1995:265-268). He cautions on the need to be selective about the theory used, so as to ensure it is a tool for exploration and thinking otherwise.

Writing in the same vein, Young (1998) advocated a model where student teachers reflect on their experiences and feels that for this to occur, they have to have access to systematic bodies of theory and research. According to Young, school experience generates practical knowledge, which can be the basis for student teachers to learn; but they also need theoretical knowledge in order to be able to conceptualise how to change their practice in response to difficulties encounters or new demands. This type of knowledge is unlikely to be produced in schools and this is why the role of the colleges is crucial. Accordingly, the curriculum of teacher education 'cannot exclude the educational disciplines', for it is through them that student teachers can develop the concepts to relate their specialist subjects and the curriculum as a whole and its broader educational purposes (1998:60). An investigation into trainee teachers' perceptions of their current knowledge and what they think they need to know to become expert teachers (Jedge and Taplin, 2000) established that there are several areas in which student teachers desired to know more. The areas they wanted more knowledge about were pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of concepts and knowledge about theories of teaching and their use. Significantly, trainee teachers identified knowledge of theories of teaching and their use as the area in which they had the least current knowledge and felt they needed to know more about (2000:292-294).

The item that was ranked the highest need to know more about overall was 'how to use new ideas/current theories in teaching' (2000:302). According to the authors, these findings indicate that student teachers have high expectations of the range of knowledge they need to have to be an expert teacher (2000:301-303).

In Davies and Ferguson's (1997) work clear parallels are evident, as a large percentage of their study cohort advocated having time in university to learn theoretical knowledge which, they felt would be difficult, if not impossible to learn if placed holistically in a classroom setting. The participants expressed a need to know more about educational theory, so they would be able to justify their methods, understand how children learn and to have a rationale behind what they were doing in the classroom (1997:48-50). Denemark and Nutter (1984) advocated offering prospective teachers the opportunity to develop breath and depth in the study of educational theory, to enable them to internalise and make their own of it instead of presenting them isolated introductory courses. Their argument stems from the concept of teaching as a profession, because if teachers are to be considered professionals, we must help them understand the theoretical basis for professional practice. 'Education like medicine, is a profession, not a discipline…It can only be an effective one if it draws on the disciplines, which lean on its problems' (Peters, 1963:21). According to Winch (2004) professions are unquestioningly characterised by the need for and possession of abstract, theoretical knowledge, which can only be acquired after a lengthy foundational period of study of the theoretical component, in a tertiary institution (2004:181). Teaching, he feels, currently lacks the possession of a body of applied theoretical knowledge. He advocates its reinvention, not only to promote it to the status of a profession, but also because, student teachers need to be able to justify what they are doing both in terms of both normative and empirical theories of teaching. He also believes that, 'schools are not the best place for teachers to acquire theory' and that theory can only be adequately taught by specialised teachers in specialised settings (2004:190).

> Teaching is underpinned by both normative and empirical theory, that theory has to be taught by individuals who are specialists in the theory as well as in the practice of teaching (2004:193).

Making educational theory meaningful

While the previous section of this literature review focused on the place of and need for educational theory within teacher education, the current section considers how educational theory has been incorporated into teacher education and perceived by student teachers.

> Contemporary critiques of educational research in terms of its irrelevance and remoteness from practical concerns have been paralleled by developments in professional studies and the preparation of teachers at all levels of the system (Humphreys and Hyland, 2002:5).

Much literature on teacher socialisation (Hobson, 2003; Assuncao Flores, 2001; Sylva, 2000; Knowles, 1992; Schon, 1987; Isaacson, 1981; Veenam, 1984) has highlighted not only the low impact of the formal context of professional learning on changing student teachers implicit theories about teaching, but also the perceived irrelevance of educational theory to their real-life experiences in the classroom.

The perceived relevance of educational theory to everyday teaching situations

Previous investigations have indicated a certain antipathy on the part of teachers to the theory content of their ITE. Veenam (1984) found that student teachers are primarily concerned with survival and they feel a need to learn the 'tricks of the trade' to provide them with the skills necessary for their role and his work indicated that student teachers do not feel that pre-service education provides these basic skills. He suggested that teachers' resistance to theory is due to their lack of classroom experience prior to beginning teaching, which is 'a definite obstacle in their appreciation of the relevant theory' (Veenam, 1984:148). Sears (1984) also highlighted that student teachers want to know very specific things, how to: motivate, teach and discipline. He found that if teacher education programmes failed to address these areas the students viewed both the course and its content as too theoretical and irrelevant. Schon's (1987) book *Educating the Practitioner* also attributed teachers' antipathy towards theory to the fact that they found it too far removed from the reality of the classroom life and of no use for handling classroom problems.

The research of McNally et al. (1996) highlighted that student teachers' accounts of their initial teaching experiences contained many references to the 'deep end' and the 'law of the jungle' (1996:78). The reality of teaching was often perceived to be in

conflict with the version of teaching promoted in the student's pre-service preparation and because of this 'many teachers come to dismiss their training as idealised. It is unconnected to the reality of survival in sometimes-difficult schools' (McNally et al., 1996: 80). Teachers' education tends to relegate them to a passive role and prospective teachers experience alienation from the subject matter of teaching, because they are not required to internalise the theories and ideas that they learn as part of their education programme according to Lasley and Watras (1991:4). Consequently teachers find that theories are of no use to them in their classroom practice and they subsequently see theory as irrelevant. 'Pedagogical ideas are viewed by pre-service teachers as idiosyncratic to the college classroom, something for here (the campus) not there (the classroom)' (1991:4).

In a paper by Hobson (2003) the findings of a small-scale study of secondary teachers' opinions of their ITE illustrated that the student teachers were less appreciative of and most critical of the so-called 'theoretical' components of their pre-service programme (2003:245). The teachers clearly assessed their preparation in terms of its practical applicability in the classroom context. Whilst a mere 8% of the cohort indicated that reading up on educational theory and research had been valuable, 45% stated that it had little or no value for them in preparing to be a teacher (2003:250).

> Some of the stuff that they were telling us I was thinking 'yeah it's all well you teaching us this theory, yeah Vygotsky fine and Bruner yeah OK, but let's see it in action in classes, you know can I relate that to what I'm doing in classes?'…I found it difficult to relate some of the information into a class environment…I didn't see the relevance of some elements of it (SCITT trainee cited by Hobson, 2003:249).

Hobson's findings in the English context correlate with evidence from a 1999 survey of student teachers' in both England and France by Asher and Malet, who found that students,

> Appreciate most those elements of their course that deal with day to day practicalities of teaching rather than the principles that underpin them [and] … view with greater or less degrees of antipathy those parts of the training process that may be broadly termed 'theory' (Asher and Malet, 1999:80).

Similarly Foster's (1999) study highlighted that student teachers wanted courses that would provide them not with useless theory, but with 'a manual for survival in the classroom' (1999:139). A 1993 research investigation carried out by Munro in New

Zealand examined a number of school-based teacher preparation innovations and identified confusion about the nature of theory and it's connection to practice (1993:96-98). Here student teachers were seen to associate theory with "inputs" and practice with "experience" and approved of their work in the schools as real and worthwhile, while at the same time were able to 'denigrate that in the college as "theoretical" and remote from reality' (1993:97). The fact that theory and practice appear to have been dealt with at a different time, in a different place, by different people, was a key factor for the student teachers' belief that theory was extraneous (1993:98).

All of these very context specific studies suggest that student teachers value more highly the practical elements of their pre-service programme and are less appreciative of the more 'theoretical' components. The author will now consider established reasons regarding why student teachers see theory as so irrelevant.

Tillema (1994) looked at the conditions under which teachers will accept and utilise new information presented to them. According to Tillema, the knowledge which teachers draw insight from, is knowledge that is gradually built up as a result of practical experiences, which they have consistently found to be coherent. This has proven to be valuable in real-life situations and prepares them for action. Any new knowledge presented, will only be utilised and considered relevant if, it fulfils certain conditions: it must be plausible, intelligible and fruitful. Therefore, unless the 'theory' has immediate, recognisable uses in a practical setting, it will be dismissed (1994:601-604). Accordingly, it is the teachers' pre-existing beliefs that serve as a filter and ultimately determine if the knowledge will be accepted. Because of this, new knowledge will only be accepted in so far as it is congruent with the teachers' pre-formed conceptions of teaching. Hegarty (2000) suggested that it is the fractured format of educational theory that affects its perceived relevance. He reasoned that because of the way the disciplines have been so separate from each other, even though they provide valuable insights that inform the practice of teaching, they do so in a very atomistic way with no systematic means of combining different understandings within a common forum. This makes it difficult to see the benefit of theory, and teachers therefore look to other more practical theories, which are immediately coherent (2000:452-454). Michael Young (1998) in his discussion of the future of teacher education provided a two-fold explanation for why theory is seen as irrelevant by many student teachers. Firstly, he ascribed this to the age-old issue of practicality, in that theory simply doesn't provide an

ample basis for students to understand the issues they meet in the classroom. Secondly, because of the way that educational disciplines have been so separate from each other and abstracted from real-life situations, he queries how student teachers are expected to bring them together and make them relevant to enhancing their own practice (1998:56).

Tomlinson (1997) also questioned how we can simply expect student teachers to 'apply' theories unproblematically to individualised everyday educational experiences, however justified or well grounded such theories have proven to be (1997:17). Tomlinson wonders how theoretical insights can be transferred from the original situation in which they were established when it is highly likely that the individualised teaching situation faced by the student involves more and indeed diverse influencing strands than the theory was designed for or is capable of shedding light on. This does not mean however, that each perspective teacher must re-invent the proverbial wheel to fit their own situation, but rather that we must be eclectically open to using not only theory but combining it with other insights and experiences to give students a more valuable source to draw from (1997:18). The great majority of student teachers themselves recognise that the type of learning in which they need to engage, in contrast to their experiences of university, must use the practical activity of teaching as their starting point and not any kind of academic discipline. This is because they believe the nature of arguments, relevant to their practical classroom tasks, are very different to those relevant to academic disciplines (Counsel et al., 2000). Indeed research from eight higher education institutions, found that student teachers rejected educational theory primarily because it was in competition with other knowledge that was seen as more useful.

> The impression gained from the data is not that students universally reject such knowledge, but that such knowledge competes with other priorities…students struggle to find space for knowledge which seems not to provide answers or for a way of learning which appears to be at odds with much of their day to day activity (Husbands and Pendry, 2000:3).

For educational theory to be considered useful it must contribute to student teachers' experiences on the ground and be significant in its contribution to practical everyday experiences. Accordingly knowledge that is perceived to be of no use to student teachers, will be disregarded and becomes 'shelf' knowledge, knowledge which has not

become part of the student teachers personal practical knowledge and is unlikely to ever become so (Counsell et al., 2000:470).

Cochran-Smith in her 2001 paper 'The outcomes question in teacher education' also analysed how we present theory to student teachers and made a similar point about the paradigms presented in the study of teaching. She was clear that bodies of knowledge about teaching cannot just exist and be passed on, but must emerge instead as a function of the problems, issues and questions encountered by individuals in their own context (2001:528; Shulman, 1986). The result of this one size fits all approach to educational theory according to Cochran-Smith is that there is now no consensus about what teachers should learn and what theories of teaching and learning should guide their behaviour (2001:538). Indeed Edwards et al. (2002) highlighted that both educational personnel and political leaders have begun complaining about how teacher education programmes overcrowded with theory are oblivious to the need for plans that work in "the real world" of teaching. The authors acknowledged that without theoretical grounding much of what goes on is guesswork, but that theory without practice is of little use and has little relevance to teaching on the ground. 'Theory without practice has no basis for growth and change' (2002:396).

Student teachers are novices in teaching situations and they lack the strong conceptual ideas that practicing teachers have gained from repeated episodes in the classroom (Doyle and Carter, 2003). As a result, they lack the ability to draw from any experientially grounded categories for comprehending classroom events and yet cannot rely on more abstract disciplinary knowledge to make sense of everyday experiences. Because of this, according to Doyle and Carter, student teachers are likely to fall back on a strategy they already have in existence, their own personal narrative (2003:131). Students "story" what they do in teacher education as they do with all of their experiences but until performance as a teacher, they can only rely on the story they know so well, the narrative of a student. Performance therefore is the key and this is why any theory that is detached from practice is generally seen as extraneous. 'Performance in this light is the bridge into teaching. All that comes before is anticipation with little understanding' (2003:135). The fact that that only one form of professional knowledge has traditionally been recognised is the root of the integration problem as articulated by Leinhardt et al. (1995). According to the authors there is professional knowledge acquired in practice, which tends to be procedural, specific and

pragmatic and professional knowledge learned at the university, which in its nature is conceptual, abstract and declarative (1995:403). The focus in teacher preparation has been on the latter and guided by the assumption that if students are given generative theories, they can later adopt them in specific classroom situations. This however, has not shown to be the case, and when student teachers teach their first class, they cannot make use of this knowledge in abstract form. This harsh realisation shocks intending practitioners and thus leaves them with a negative view of both theory and their pre-service education (1995:402-404).

A research study carried out by Tang (2003) on the experiences of student teachers during their practicum, revealed that supervisors from the teacher education institute made little reference to educational theory, thus impacting the student teachers' new found realisation regarding the relevance of theory in actual teaching situations. It was found that supervisors' conferences with students on placement focused primarily on immediate classroom practice rather than on wider educational issues, as well as practical rather than theoretical issues (2003:492). A similar enquiry carried out by Loughran et al. (2001) found that student teachers spoke of their teacher education as a 'waste of time' and this opinion appeared to become more real with time (2001:11). No clear understanding of the purposes and practices in their preparation was evident, and although enduring memories were clearly etched in students' minds, the underlying theory to particular approaches did not spring to mind so readily (2001:19). It appears from this investigation also, that theory doesn't hold much relevance in real-life situations and the over-riding message is that telling does not lead to learning, but rather that teacher education programmes need to create a way that the theory being espoused is in a realistic and memorable way (2001:20).

Korthagen and Lagerwerf (1996) strongly emphasise this point in their discussion of the gap between theory and practice. They recognise that for student teachers, learning about teaching is not only a cognitive process, but is primarily directed by their personal needs (1996:182). According to the authors, the main concern of student teachers is to survive in the classroom and consequently, they elicit knowledge of previous experiences or memories from their student days to help them overcome the problems they face. Therefore, it is their personal knowledge that forms the basis for their behaviour and it is almost impossible for theories on teaching and learning to have any

real impact on student teachers' behaviours in the classroom during their initial teacher education.

> Any attempt to use exercises and training elements, after the introduction of theory, with the aim of promoting the transfer to practice, is like starting with the walls of a house and then laying the foundations (1996:183).

Hagger and McIntyre (2000) highlighted that there has been an awareness in educational circles for many decades as to the naivety of believing that educational theory has a significant impacts on the beliefs of student teachers (2000:486). Many authors subscribing to this view are supportive of the idea, that in developing their teaching skills, student teachers replace the officially offered framework of concepts and ideas with their own criteria, in terms of what their own perceptive evaluation of their teaching situation has shown them. They also use their own perceptions to formulate strategies, which will guide their teaching on subsequent occasions (2000:488; McIntyre, 1980; Macleod, 1977). The explanation for this stems from the idea that student teachers bring much of their own pre-conceptions, ideals and understandings with them to teacher education, and the power and persistence of these personalised ideals far outweighs any learning, which takes place during pre-service education. Coupled with this, is the observable fact that what student teachers experience in the school setting is so unlike anything they have come across during their teacher education, that it becomes wholly irrelevant.

> Beginning teachers found their needs in the school context…so very different from what they had met in their university studies, that these rarely seemed relevant (Hagger and McIntyre, 2000:489).

Drever and Cope's (199) study, which looked at students' use of theory in an ITE programme, highlighted that asking student teachers to incorporate theoretical considerations into their classroom practice is not straightforward, but rather is dependant on the nature of the theory and the reasoning for its inclusion. Furthermore, a critical consideration for the student teachers was whether the theory helped them to make sense of their teaching experience (1999:97-100). The study also examined if students, in the throes of practice teaching, could and would apply theory to their experiences and whether they found it helpful to do so. Although students were provided with a 'given' theory, they were encouraged to use any theories they felt were appropriate. Even with this free rein, none of the students discussed any theory other

than the one prescribed. Their use of theory was also found to be highly eclectic, with student teachers starting from their own concerns and selecting elements of theory that seemed to match (1999:105). The authors concluded that the notion of applying educational theories to practice suggests that educational theory has the quality of a 'science', so that when faced with a problem, a student teacher can expect a hypothetical solution, which can be tested in practice. They subsequently dismissed this framework because it neglects to consider that each educational setting is individualised and ambiguous, and successful outcomes are dependant on very context specific factors that the theory may not work for. This falsifies the 'science' as it were and conceivably leads student teachers' to reject this theory as irrelevant and indeed leads to the discarding of all theory (1999:106-109).

> This exercise dispelled any lingering notion that our students enter the final placement confident in their mastery of pedagogical theory taught during the course, and keen to apply it in practice (Drever and Cope, 1999:108).

Student teachers uptake of educational theory

Although in the previous section the author has discussed literature regarding how students perceive the relevance of theory, this must be differentiated from the various documented reasons for the uptake of theory by student teachers. Although there are many partisan reasons put forth for student teachers' inability to "down-load" theory, these can all be categorised under two key headings: the transfer problem and the two types of theory (Copa, 1991; Sarason, 1980; Lortie, 1975).

The transfer problem

Many research initiatives have focused on the psychosocial difficulties experienced by student teachers and as part of this the key reasons of the transfer problem have been documented. These can be loosely generalised into three categories which are discussed below.

One reason is related to the learning process within the teacher education programme itself, as even before the implementation stage, research on learning and teaching has shown that prior knowledge exhibits a strong command over learning and comprehension. It has been documented that student teachers in ITE do have their own pre-conceptions about teaching but these personalised ideas are often in conflict with the theories taught in teacher education. These pre-conceptions show a sturdy resistance

to traditional attempts to change them, and this can be partially explained by the fact that they are grounded in the many years of experience student teachers have had as pupils themselves (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999:5; Lortie, 1975). Accordingly, student teachers' ideas on teaching subject matter are strongly affected by the way in which they themselves learned subject content as pupils (Stofflet and Stoddart, 1994).

This conception of student teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning was further emphasised by Huibregtse et al. (1994) who's work showed that even with practising teachers, there is a solid relationship between the way of teaching to which they give preference and the way they themselves were taught. Teachers they found had a restricted view of their pupils' range of learning styles and tended to transfer their own way of learning onto their pupils (1994:55). Corporaal (1988) deduced that this poor transfer of theory to practice is being caused by a lack of integration of the formal theories in teacher education, i.e. that the teacher educators' theories are not being integrated into the student teachers theories.

Another very well documented cause of the transfer problem has become known as the feed forward mechanism, described over 20 years ago by Katz et al. (1981) as 'resistance from the student teacher at the time of exposure to given learnings and, later, protestations that the same learning had not been provided in stronger doses' (1981:21). In order for student teachers to learn anything during teacher education, they must have personalised concerns about teaching or have encountered real problems, otherwise the usefulness of the theory is not apparent to them and they are not motivated to take it on board. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) queried why this reasoning for student teachers lack of uptake of theory had not been more widely accepted as they saw it as simply a derivation of the well-known principle by Skemp (1979) that learning will only take place if the learner has some personal goal that is, in the view of this person, served by learning (1999:6). According to Joyce and Showers (1988), even when there are such personal goals, because the student teacher has developed individualised concerns, generalised theories will only be seen as helpful if there is some element of coaching of the student in connecting the theory to their actions in the real world of practical teaching in which they encounter their problems.

> …a large and dramatic increase in transfer of training occurs when in-class coaching is added to an initial training experience of theory explanation, demonstrations, and practice with feedback (Joyce and Showers, 1988:206).

A third and much talked about cause of the transfer problem has to do with the nature of relevant knowledge. Once inside schools, student teachers are expected to attain many and varied goals, which are often conflicting and according to Clark and Lampert (1986), prior knowledge of educational theories are found to be of minimal value. 'Under these circumstances, a priori knowledge identified by researchers about the relationship among particular decisions or actions and their outcomes is of limited worth' (1986:28). In classrooms, teachers need quick and solid solutions to situations in which they have little time to think. This very immediate situation calls for action-guiding knowledge, which is very different from the more abstract, theorised expert knowledge that teacher educators often present to student teachers. Copa (1991) also recognised this phenomenon and equated the reality of the school experience with a restriction of effective thinking on the part of the student teacher. There is a vast cluster of research studies focused on psychosocial difficulties experienced by student teachers. These have drawn similar conclusions and centre around the notion that problems are not dealt with proficiently, with respect to the use of theory, because a breakdown occurs in student teachers' thinking. Student teachers are not able to identify relevant elements of problematic situations and apply appropriate treatments because the conditions of their school experience prevent them from thinking rationally (1991:106-108).

Lortie (1975) also found that in the school setting, where high stress and anxiety could be assumed likely, 'it is true that too much anxiety retards learning' and subsequently 'some beginning teachers will have difficulty making accurate perceptions and thoughtful decisions as they learn the job' (1975:72). Both Glassberg (1980) and Corcoran (1981) also cited findings on the limited reliance on theoretical knowledge within the constraints of the school setting. Glassberg highlighted that the demands placed on student teachers made it difficult for them to accurately perceive situations, to make decisions and to act in a deliberate and thoughtful way. And Corcoran wrote of student teachers as being "paralysed" in the school setting and incapable of using the resources they were made aware of during pre-service teacher education (Copa, 1991:108). In Sorenson's (1967), paper similar findings were reported and the author recognised that student teachers, 'rarely referred to what they were trying to accomplish

with their pupils but only to how, and not at all to the application of theory except to warn against it' (1967:177).

The two types of theory

Another documented cause of the problems associated with uptake of theory by student teachers, is related to the meaning of theory, as in teacher education there has traditionally been confusion surrounding at least two different meanings of "theory". Kessels and Korthagen (1996) discussed this confusion using Aristotle's concepts of episteme and phronesis. According to the authors, if a teacher educator offers epistemic knowledge, he provides generalised conceptions, applicable to a wide variety of situations. This knowledge is based on research and can be described as "objective" theory, or theory with a big T. This type of knowledge, traditionally provided in teacher preparation, is considered important to enable students to see the bigger picture of educational knowledge. Student teachers need additional knowledge however, that is situation-specific and related to the setting in which they meet a problem or develop a concern. Knowledge that brings their already existing, subjective perception of personally relevant classroom contexts one step further. This type of knowledge is called phronesis or theory with a small t (Korthagen, 2002; Kessels et. al, 2001). This discussion of the two types of theory, was picked up again by the same authors in another paper (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). Here phronesis was characterised as being more perceptual than conceptual, in that it is often unconsciously focusing the attention of the individual on the characteristics succinct to that situation and on features important to the question of how to act in the situation.

> To put it concisely, *episteme* aims at helping us to *know* more about many situations, while the emphasis of *phronesis* is mostly on *perceiving* more in a particular situation and finding a helpful course of action on the basis of strengthened awareness (1999:7).

This 'strengthened awareness' of real features of specific situations is also the essential difference between phronesis and procedural knowledge. Advocates of teacher training would state that this is the type of competency that student teachers should be trained in. Korthagen and Kessels however warned of the dangers of an over-emphasis on procedural knowledge because students will learn a lot of strategies for many types of situations but will not learn how to discover, in context specific situations occurring in everyday teaching, which strategies to use (1999:7-9). This emphasis neglects to

consider the assumption underlying the idea that teachers should be taught to recognise types of situations. The assumption that teachers actually make logical analyses of situations focused by conscious decisions about the course of action to take. Because, as already noted, teachers' decisions on the ground may be neither conscious or logical (Corporaal, 1988; Clarke and Lampert, 1986).

Copa (1991) also acknowledged the existence of more than one type of theory and conceived this as a hierarchy within conceptions of teaching. According to Copa, there is a traditional assumption that 'real' theory can only be created by certain people in special circumstances. This has created a dichotomy between theory found in what was labelled the 'theoretical mode' and that of the 'practical' (1991:112; Gauthier, 1963; Schwab, 1969). The practical, specified an approach for arriving at a decision that could be used to guide possible action in a particular situation, where as real theory was equated with that which was universal, timeless and abstract. Because real theory was recognised as possessing these attributes, 'theory in the theoretical mode – which met these criteria – was considered "better", than that found in practical usage' (Copa, 1991:112). Although not discussed openly, this hierarchy within orientations towards theory is often found in educational literature (Lortie, 1975; Huberman, 1983).

Copa highlighted two qualities of practical theorising that demonstrate how it is different from formal theory in structure and use. Firstly, practical theory is contextual in that it occurs in and considers the continually developing interplay of different factors unique to a situation. Unlike formal theory 'the practical theorist must consider the world as a whole and cannot enjoy the luxury of isolating particular elements for attention' (1991:113). Because of this, issues or problems do not segregate neatly and have to be dealt with in the particular context, along with other competing problems, in which they are found. Secondly, practical theory is an integral component of action (Schon, 1983). Contemplation of alternative actions, consequences and goals must be in the mind, as must the risks and commitment needed when acting in contexts where a variety of different needs and interests are at stake (Copa, 1991:111-114). Copa recognised the importance of practical theory and that knowledge about teachers' implicit theories represents a qualitatively different perspective to what is considered knowing and theorising. Rather than theory being seen as an a contextual, universal entity that is just applied to a particular problem at will, theory making is viewed as

being an ongoing process, a conversation of active, thoughtful individuals with their environment as they explore the concrete, the specific, the immediate.

Student teachers' perceptions of how teaching should take place – their practical theory of teaching

Within the ever mounting body of research on learning to teach, it is now accepted that student teachers enter teacher education with pre-conceptions of how teaching should take place and that these fixed ideas have an effect on their subsequent behaviour in the classroom. These pre-conceptions are presented in the literature under a variety of headings including, "teachers' beliefs", "teaching conceptions", "lay theories" and "teaching values" (Fung and Chow, 2002:313; Nettle, 1998; Maxon and Sindelar, 1998; Anderson, 2001; Solmon and Ashy, 1995).

Sugrue's (1997) discussion of lay theories is embedded in the view suggested by Hargreaves that, 'it is the struggle between and within modernity and post modernity that the challenge of changes for teachers…is to be found' (Hargreaves, 1994:4). According to Sugrue it is these contradictory and competing forces, which operate on the teaching identities constructed by student teachers and have consequences on their attitudes and approach to teaching. Modernist identities of teaching are conventional and humdrum and are based in a predictability that essentially we are all the same. This teaching identity encapsulates characteristics which are universal to all teachers, characteristics which teachers are said to be born with and cannot be learned. Post-modern teaching identities are essentially the exact opposite. They are very ambiguous and are open to constant re-definition rather than conforming to certain essential characteristics (1997:213-215). Lay theories in Sugrue's view are primarily modern in nature and are,

> …beliefs developed naturally without the influence of instruction. Pre-service teachers do not consciously learn them at announced, recognised moments from a formal teaching/learning episode. Rather, lay theories represent tacit knowledge lying dormant and unexamined by the student…lay theories are based on untutored interpretations of personal, lived experiences (Holt-Reynolds, 1992:326).

Accordingly it is the personal experiences of student teachers, their "apprenticeship of observation" in the classroom (Lortie, 1975), as well as cultural archetypes of teaching

that simultaneously create 'both the form (socio-historical situatedness) and the context (beliefs, attitudes, dispositions and behaviours)' of their teaching behaviour (1997:214).

> It is necessary to recognise student teachers' and practitioners' embodied knowledge as an indispensable dimension of how they construct their teaching identities: a prerequisite to continuous reconstruction of professional identities (1997:223).

According to Kettle and Sellars (1996) underpinning all decisions that a teacher makes is that teacher's individual system of knowledge, attitudes and values in relation to teaching or their "practical theory". This is highly individual and susceptible to change and as student teachers pass through teacher education it is anticipated that their personalised practical theories will change and develop (1996:1).

> A person's private, integrated but ever-changing system of knowledge, experience and values, which is relevant to teaching practice at any particular time. This means, first of all, that 'theory' in this sense is a personal construct which is continuously established in the individual through a series of diverse events (such as practical experiences, reading, listening, looking at other people's practices) which are mixed together or integrated with the changing perspectives provided by the individual's values and ideals…it is indeed a practical theory, primarily functioning as a basis or background against which action must be seen, and not as a theoretical and logical 'construct' aimed at scientific purposes of explanation, understanding or prediction (Handal and Lauvas, 1987:9).

Kettle and Sellars also made reference to the various different terms used to describe practical theory, most notably the term 'educational platform' described as, 'something that supports one's actions and by which one justifies or validates one's own actions' (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1979:313). One's 'educational platform' is made up of assumptions, beliefs and theories that they have for prominent aspects of teaching, such as what knowledge is of most worth, their perceptions of teaching and the usefulness of different teaching techniques (1996:3). Another term utilised by Bullough and Knowles (1991) was 'schema', which they described as a rather informal, personal theory about 'the nature of events, objects or situations we face' (1991:123). Goodman (1988) called this 'practical philosophy', Argyris and Schon (1978) 'theory of practice' and Marland and Osborne (1990) 'theory of action'. All of these allude to a 'set of claims a teacher makes about what informs or shapes his or her teaching practice and may include beliefs, principles, tactics, role conceptions and so on' (Kettle and Sellars, 1996:1-3).

In their review of the literature on practical theory, Kettle and Sellars made three assertions about the nature of this type of theory. Firstly they recognised that although external factors can be significant in the development of an individual's practical philosophy, it is predominately the students themselves who are most active in developing this. 'Since interpretations are individualistic, the theories will be also' (1996:2). They acknowledged that many factors, impinge on the development of a student teacher's practical theory and categorised these under the four heading outlined by Martinez (1990); personal biography, classroom situation, institutional organisation and university teacher education. Consequently they questioned the functionalist view of teacher socialisation, which places student teachers into a passive role and works off the assumption that intending teachers can be moulded, as this stance neglects to recognise or take into account any experiences prior to teacher education that may have influenced the student teachers (1996:2). Secondly they perceived practical theory as being dynamic on the basis that it is changing over time as new experiences and knowledge are encountered. Kettle and Sellars wrote of how student teachers experience anticipatory socialisation during their preliminary years of schooling and ever before entering teacher education, they have developed some opinions / ideas about what a teacher is (Merton, 1975). It would seem however, that these 'archetypes of teaching' (Sugrue, 1997) are only partially developed and are 'expanded and refined as student teachers develop', thus the belief in the dynamic nature of practical theory (1996:2, Argyris and Schon, 1978; Bullough and Knowles, 1991). Their third assertion related to the difficulty in assessing teachers' practical philosophies. The main reason cited for this is that many teachers 'have a very limited consciousness of the theory underlying their practice' (1996:3). Of the teachers who do accept that they have a personalised practical theory, many express openly that they have problems trying to formulate it (Handal and Lauvas, 1987).

Although many studies have shown that teachers seen to have limited consciousness of their practical theories, this was not found to be the case by Lunn and Bishop (2003). They also recognised the many stalwart influences on teachers' beliefs or pre-conceptions such as contact with schools, the literature they read, experiences as pupils themselves and interaction with other student teachers (2003:195-197). They found that student teachers were highly critical and disapproving of their ITE because it recognised only formal knowledge as legitimate and completely ignored the role that tacit knowledge had to play. There was a noted tension between the prevalent official view,

which holds that all valuable knowledge is formal, and the lack of consideration of the strong role of tacit knowledge. This resulted in the student teachers perceiving that their preparation programme was coercive and destructive of their own intuitive knowledge and beliefs. The findings suggest that within teacher education, 'there must be a place of implicit, tacit, intuitive knowledge' (2003:205).

> The trainee teachers were critical of a model of teachers' knowledge that only allowed formal knowledge a legitimate status, ignoring teachers' tacit or intuitive knowledge. They argued for the need to make connections between formal and tacit knowledge so constructing a stronger, and ultimately more effective basis for improving classroom practice (Lunn and Bishop, 2003:203).

This need for more awareness of and a place for, intuitive knowledge in teacher education was advocated by Korthagen (2004) who too recognises the strong role of practical theory.

> Researchers studying the behaviour of teachers and how they were trained, stressed that it is important to know what teachers think, what their beliefs are' and indeed what these beliefs are based on (2004:81).

Student teachers have spent many years as pupils in the classroom during which time they have developed well set beliefs about teaching. Korthagen was clear that these beliefs determine their actions and so are a strong factor in their development. In an earlier paper (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999) he highlighted that when we look at the way in which a teacher behaves in an immediate teaching situation, it is virtually impossible to separate out perception, interpretation and reaction, because all take place within a split second. Together these form a unity rooted in the many early experiences in a teacher's life and that many things such as; feelings, former experiences, values, role concept, routines, needs and concerns may play a role in guiding teacher behaviour.

> All of these needs, feelings, values, conceptions and so forth, together – within a split second – create the personal meaning of the situation to the teacher, and – often unconsciously – lead to a behavioural inclination (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999:9).

He referred to this as 'personal practical knowledge' and envisaged this as taking the form of images that have been developed throughout a student teacher's life. For example the image of a teacher as someone standing at the front of the classroom and explaining something is one that many intending teachers retain from their school days.

These images may not only have visual aspects, but also cognitive, emotional and behavioural facets and Korthagen used the term Gestalt to refer to the amalgamation of these images evoked by concrete situations (2004:80-82; 1993).

Gestalts

> Through the various experiences of life, Gestalts are created in people. These Gestalts are closely tied to the concrete situations in which they were formed. In similar situations these Gestalts are re-created and help us to find our place in the here and now (Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996:165).

Gestalts themselves are not a new concept, in fact literature on Gestalt psychology spans well over half a century and central to this, is that the most elementary way by which individuals acquire a grasp of their environment is through the formation of Gestalts, which often unconsciously help them to see objects or situations as an entity and to respond to them as such (Ellis, 1950; Korthagen, 1993, 2001 & 2002). In the case of immediate teaching situations, there are many and varied conditions and events embedded in a given situation which are combined into one holistic perceptual identity. This implies a complex interplay between psychological, physical, cultural and social factors. The knowledge embedded in Gestalts is linked to concrete situations previously encountered by the person and is shaped by the value-laden and subjective experiences of such situations. There is also inter-play between the situation and the individual person experiencing the situation and also the role of context in that experience (Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996).

To consider the internalised process of Gestalt formation, we take the example of a student in primary school that when doing a mathematics problem, writes 12 + 9 = 22. Seeing this, the teacher immediately reacts by saying, “That’s wrong. You know 12 + 8 = 20, so 12 + 9 must equal 21” (Korthagen et al. 2001:177; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996:163). Most teacher educators will agree that the teacher’s reaction in this case was inadequate; because she made no attempt to discover how the pupil got that answer; did not encourage the student to think about the way he had solved the problem and did not help the pupil to overcome his mistake by developing his own strategy for dealing with the problem. It is probable that this will increase the likelihood of that pupil repeating the same mistake again in the future.

What is of importance is why the teacher reacted like this. Under the teachers as thinkers movement, the dominant view would have been that the teacher had a theory about this type of situation, she then interpreted the situation on the basis of this theory and rationally arrived at a decision to react as she did. If the teacher was asked to explain her behaviour subsequent to the event, she would be expected to give an explanation, which shows a chain of perception, interpretation, logical-thinking, decision-making and finally action. It has been proven however that this is not an adequate or realistic depiction of what takes place. According to Korthagen et al., this is because it is impossible to separate out perception, interpretation and reaction from each other as they all take place within a split-second and together form a unity, which is grounded in many earlier experiences in that teacher's life (2001:196). Had that teacher not been asked for an explanation for her reaction, the way she reacted would have remained at a subconscious level and she would not have given it any thought, but would be content in her belief that it was the natural way to react; natural in that it relays back to her own days as a pupil (2001:177&178; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). Korthagen et al. also highlighted that the process-taking place within the teacher is not exclusively cognitive in nature and so cannot be packaged so simply into a process-product style approach, rather it is influenced to an equal degree by many other aspects, which play a role in her behaviour. These other aspects are conglomerates such as; feelings, former experiences, values, role conception, needs/concerns and routines (2001:178).

It is this amalgamation of feelings and conceptions etc., that together create the personal meaning of the situation for the teacher and lead quite unconsciously to her reaction, which is rooted in her own, earlier experiences. This reaction involves the triggering of a certain Gestalt within the teacher, which causes her to behave a certain way. Each time that such a Gestalt is active, it then becomes more likely that same Gestalt will be triggered in another comparable scenario.

This analysis of what guides teacher behaviour is not intended to discredit the classical ideal of teachers as decision makers, but rather to highlight that an alternative explanation may be more appropriate for actions in the immediacy of the classroom press. The classical ideal which describes the process of events in terms of a logical chain consisting of perception – interaction – thought – action, according to Korthagen et al., is more accurate in cases when the teacher is operating on a fairly conscious level,

such as during reflection after a lesson. During most teaching situations however, the immediate split-second way of reacting in which all the aforementioned aspects form one inseparable whole is a more accurate descriptor of general teacher behaviour, which is mainly subconscious in nature (2001:178; Eraut, 1995). 'In most situations during a lesson the "split-second" way of reacting rooted in Gestalts triggered by the characteristics of the situation, is probably more common' (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999:9). This is supported by literature on teacher routines, which emphasises the fact that automatic or mechanical performance of teaching acts is emblematic of a good deal of teacher behaviour. It is also substantiated by research findings, which suggest that teachers' actions are controlled mainly by routines and rules, with decision-making having a very minimal role in their interactive thinking (Carter, 1990; Halkes and Olson, 1984; Clarke and Yinger, 1979).

This process of Gestalt formation starts very early in life and 'through the various experiences of life, Gestalts are elicited in people'. These are closely linked to the specific situations in which they were formed (Korthagen et al., 2001:179). Therefore, in similar situations, these Gestalts are recreated as it were and help each individual to find their place in the present situation (Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996:165).

Examples of familiar Gestalts are the notion of learning and the notion of teaching. The notion of learning is universal to all people. Everyone is familiar with everyday phrases like; "I have learned how to cross-multiply" and "my dog has learned to sit when instructed". Because of the general use of these types of statements by people in their everyday lives, we can see that most people do not feel any great need for a definition of learning and it is satisfactory for them to have an embedded idea of what learning is. The same is found to be true of the notion of teaching. Teaching is something that every person has experience of as a pupil being taught. Even when we do give a specific definition of teaching, most people when they hear the term, will think of a teacher standing at the top of a class explaining something to the pupils. In both examples, Gestalts are triggered, which are connected to the person's own, particularized experience of that situation (Korthagen et al., 2001; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996).

Another very important aspect of Gestalts is that they are formed when the person in question has some sort of concern or need. For instance, a Gestalt of learning and teaching is formed in a school child when they first encounter the classroom and have to

learn how to deal with what is happening in the class. This need not only starts the process of Gestalt formation, but also shapes the person's perception by focusing their attention. Because of this some things will become important and others will be disregarded as peripheral. Those things that are made important and have attention focused on them are simply those that satisfy the need. Accordingly, Gestalts are strongly connected with familiar experiences and in many cases the Gestalt remains linked to the feelings of the person at the time it was created, even when it is triggered in future situations. For example a Gestalt of teaching may be connected to a feeling of anxiety or fear if the person's first encounter of a teacher was a negative one (Korthagen et al., 2001). A final characteristic of Gestalt formation is that concepts or rules underlying the Gestalt are seldom if never made explicit and if they are addressed it is usually in a very vague way with little detail.

> Gestalt formation is the process in which a situation triggers a unity of needs, thoughts, feelings, values, meanings and action tendencies. A gestalt is connected with concrete situation in a multi-faceted way, because it is rooted in those situations. Gestalts are restricted to certain relevant characteristics of the situation, i.e. those characteristics that help to satisfy a need. They constitute the feelings, which belong to the experiences in which they were formed. Language plays a minor role…people use words that seem self-evident to them (Korthagen et al., 2001: 180; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996:166).

The development of teachers' craft knowledge

> There are several credible explanations of the socialization process available and the socialization of teachers is undoubtedly a complex process not readily captured by a simple, one-factors frame of reference' (Lortie, 1973:488).

There is a clear lack of consensus with regard to the potency and influence of various different socialising factors and mechanisms that affect the development of teacher perspectives over a career. According to Zeichner et al., (1987) there are many different factors that must be considered to gain an understanding of the processes involved in teacher socialisation and therefore teacher learning. They specified that the experiences of three key areas must be considered in any analysis; those prior to formal training, during pre-service teacher education and during the early years of a teaching career (1987:24).

> The influences that shape teachers lives and that move teachers actions are…more likely to be found in a complex web of formative memories and experiences…the

> most significant and most deeply embedded influences that operate on us are the images, models, and conceptions of teaching derived from our own experiences as learners (Brookfield, 1995:49).

Applegate (1986) acknowledged that the craft knowledge student teachers develop during their preparation for teaching result from their interactions with people, from courses they take and from the personal experiences they have. These form the basis of their values and attitudes about teaching, underpin teaching perspectives and guide decision-making about classroom practices for many years to come (1986:21). Applegate further outlined three types of perceptions which guide teacher behaviour; internal perceptions, (for example feelings and motives), self-observation and awareness of self in situation and external self-evaluation, or sense of competence. The author also identified that there are many influences that shape this perceptions and separated these into five categories.

Firstly student teachers may be influenced by what they have and are presently learning at the university. Depending on how advanced their teacher preparation is, they will have mastered different levels of the techniques and skills of teaching and of educational knowledge and therefore have different expectations of the job. Another influencing factor is the two cultures experienced by the student teacher. While in the university, students have a special set of characteristics around the activity of teaching defined by the university experience. When they begin practice teaching, they are presented with a new culture, with its own set of behaviours, which may be in contrast with those of the university. The degree to which any or all of these characteristics are taken on board by the student teachers also has a strong influence on their behaviour. A third influence has to do with the teacher's personal histories related to school. Student teachers' perceptions about learning have been evolving since they were very young and their expressed perceptions about school experiences may be reflections of past experiences. Another strong influence is the image the student teacher holds of teachers and teaching, as both consciously and unconsciously people collect and store images of teachers from their early school experiences. When student teachers enter teacher education they already have many images of good and bad teachers and may use these images to model their own teaching persona. A final influence is the personal attributes of the individual. Personal attributes are the sum total of what each student brings to teacher education – their intelligence, age, health, gender, values, personality, motivation, interests and abilities. Many studies have recognised the influence of

personal attributes on teacher behaviour (Applegate, 1986:22-26; Kohlberg, 1969; Perry, 1970; Hunt, 1977; Vance, 1983),

Pre-training influences and the impact of teacher education

Much of the literature on teachers' craft knowledge argues that experiences predating formal teacher education are more influential than either ITE or socialisation factors in the school (Zeichner et al., 1987:24). In fact the apparent persistent of pre-training beliefs have often been blamed for the inherent failure of teacher education programmes to overcome the effects of the student teachers "apprenticeship of observation" prior to entering teacher education (Lortie, 1975).

One recognised view is that individual teacher characteristics, capabilities and dispositions are more influential in determining the course of teacher behaviour/socialisation than are the various institutional factors associated with teacher education. Contrary to this stance others have emphasised the strength of institutional influences and ignored completely the role of biographical and individual factors. An alternative position, considers the interaction or interplay of both individual intent and institutional constraint in teacher behaviour and development (Zeichner 1986:135; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984&1985; Zeichner et al., 1987).

> Teachers teach as they were taught during their many years as students. Their professional preparation comes late in their own schooling and is too little and too thin to separate them from what their experience has taught them that teaching is. Their professional preparation and subsequent practice merely reinforces their own perceptions. Teachers fail to transcend the conventional wisdom of their own profession and continue to teach as they were taught (Goodlad, 1982:19-20).

Zeichner (1986) presented arguments related to the three most prevalent explanations for the influence of pre-training experiences on student teacher behaviour (1986:40). The first argument emphasises the role of "spontaneous pedagogical tendencies". According to this view, each human being has acquired their own specific deeply ingrained habits from their lives both inside and outside the classroom. Because of this, children as they grow, not only learn what they are told by parents and teachers, but they also learn to be teachers. The second argument is focused on the "psychoanalytical" explanation. Studies on this phenomenon suggest that teacher behaviour is affected to a considerable extent by the individual relationships one has had as a child with important adults such as parents and teachers. Becoming a teacher is

in some ways a process of attempting to become like the significant others in one's childhood. The stance suggests that early relationships with significant others are the blueprints for subsequent relationships throughout life, and the kind of teachers that students become are governed quite strongly by the effects of their childhood heritage on their personalities (1986:140; Wright & Tuska, 1967). The third viewpoint emphasises that teacher behaviour is largely influenced by the internalisation of teaching models witnessed during the multitude of hours spent as a pupil in close contact with teachers. The activation of this latent culture during teacher education and in school experience is seen to be a major influence in shaping conceptions of teaching and performance (1986:140-142; Zeichner et al., 1987). Due to the existence of literature verifying these factors as influences on teacher behaviour, Zeichner judged that it is time for educationalists to recognise that 'biography exerts a powerful influence on the development of teacher perspectives' (1986:141).

A study entitled 'Person and Context in Becoming a New Teacher', also looked at the influences of and the interplay between biographical and contextual factors in new teachers professional learning and development. The findings are congruent with those already cited and recognise that, 'the way in which new teachers interpret their own experiences of teaching is influenced by their personal biography, their beliefs and their expectations' (Assuncao Flores, 2001:144). Participants attributed a great deal of importance to their prior school experience and the influence of their previous teachers to the way in which they handle their role as full-time teachers. Their images of being a teacher and of good teaching were also found to be intrinsically related to their own experiences as pupils and to the conceptions, beliefs and perspectives internalised during their long "apprenticeship of observation" (2001:145). The realities of the school and of the classroom are interpreted through the lenses of these 'formative experiences' which are entrenched in their practices and the complexity of teacher behaviour is seen to encompass a wide array of idiosyncratic, contextual and dynamic variables (2001: 135-140; Knowles, 1992).

San (1999) in discussing the developmental stages through which student teachers pass, acknowledged that student teachers learn to teach in different ways and that this is dependant on their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences (1999:18). Turner-Bisset also wrote about what she termed the personal identity and its role in shaping teacher behaviour. She recognised the strong role that each individual teacher's personal history

has to play in the formation of their teaching character and perceived 'the understanding of self' as a crucial element in the way teachers themselves understand the nature of the job. 'Teachers exist as people before they become teachers and their work calls for massive investment of their 'selves' in a historically determined context' (1999:46). Turner-Bisset also referenced much existing research which intimates that knowledge about teaching from their own school experience as pupils shapes intending teachers' perceptions of teaching and their developing practice (1999:45; Leinhardt, 1988).

These recognised biographical and historical factors, which shape and guide student teachers identities and behaviour, were also addressed by Lunn and Bishop (2003). They found that the student teachers' construction of their professional viewpoint was not exclusive to their time in teacher education, rather many other factors such as; the literature they read, interaction with other student teachers, contact in schools during their days as students and during their practice teaching, have an influencing role in shaping teacher behaviour. Accordingly, teachers' values and beliefs are not only personal and highly individual, but they also have a 'socio-historical dimension' (Poulson et al., 2001:273).

It is clear that student teachers enter teacher education with pre-formulated conceptions of teaching and that these pre-conceptions or practical theories are decisive factors in their action. The work of L'Anson et al. (2003) suggests that these pre-conceptions of teaching are very deeply held and remain at the forefront of the student teachers' minds throughout teacher education. Consequently, much of the research in this area has shown that students often tend to leave ITE with little if any change to their pre-conceptions of teaching. The reasoning for this is that student teachers, '…tested their practices against what they brought to the programme rather than ideas developed from it's social deconstructionist ideals' (Gomez et al., 2000:742). The authors surmised that these pre-conceptions about teaching appear to be difficult to change and deeply held, as these formed very early on in student teachers' experiences of school. They recognised that the existence of 'these powerful and tenacious lay theories' (Sugrue, 1997:221) must rule out any approaches to teacher ITE that assume student teachers are a 'clean slate' (L'Anson et al, 2003:191).

Long and Stuart (2004) also referred to the critical influence teacher pre-conceptions and beliefs are on teachers choice of effective teaching practices.

> Prior beliefs can be a major impediment to subsequent learning: beliefs may be objectively wrong, or bigoted, or dysfunctional and block fair and open encounters with the new or different (2004:276).

They wrote of how difficult established beliefs are to change and noted specifically that didactic approaches to teacher education are highly ineffective in challenging and changing beliefs. Their research highlighted that if the knowledge presented in ITE is not compatible with teachers' existing pre-conceptions, student teachers beliefs will remain unchallenged, current teaching practices will prevail and traditional archetypes of teaching which may not necessarily be the best will be maintained (2004: 275-277).

Reviews of approaches to teacher education aimed at the professional development of teachers (Tillema and Veenam, 1987; Cruickshank and Metcalf, 1990; Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, 1990; Tillema, 1994) also support this assumption that whenever teachers' existing cognitions and beliefs are not congruent with the information presented and delivered in teacher education, the acquisition of new knowledge and skills will be hampered. This implies that the way in which ITE programmes are designed and delivered will reflect a particular approach to dealing with student teachers existing pre-conceptions. Somehow teacher education has to find a way to embrace teachers' lay theories so as to regain some influence over student teachers decision-making processes.

> Bridging the gap between the information presented in training and teacher cognitions means that theoretical assumptions about the process of knowledge acquisition and restructuring become manifest, either implicitly or explicitly, in training design (Tillema, 1994: 602).

Chapter Four: Methodology

Approach to the Study

Research principles

Husén asserts that there cannot be any prevailing paradigm or "normal science" in the multifaceted field of educational research (1997:16). The twentieth century witnessed conflict between two main paradigms employed in researching educational problems. One can distinguish between these paradigms on the difference between their epistemological bases. The first, positivism, is conceived as the functional-structural, objective-rational, goal-directed, hierarchical, and technocratic approach and the second phenomenology, is interpretivist, humanistic, consensual and subjective. Positivism is modelled on the natural sciences with a strong emphasis on empirical, quantifiable observations, which lend themselves to analysis by means of mathematical tools.

> Quantitative methods express the assumptions of a positivist paradigm, which hold that behaviour can be explained through objective facts. Design and instrumentation persuade by showing how bias and error are eliminated (Firestone, 1987:16).

The phenomenological paradigm emphasises the importance of taking a widened perspective and of trying to get to the basis of human activity.

> By widening the perspectives and trying to understand human beings as individuals in their entirety and in their proper context it also tries to avoid the fragmentation caused by positivistic and experimental approach that takes out a small slice which is subject to closer scrutiny (Husén, 1997:18).

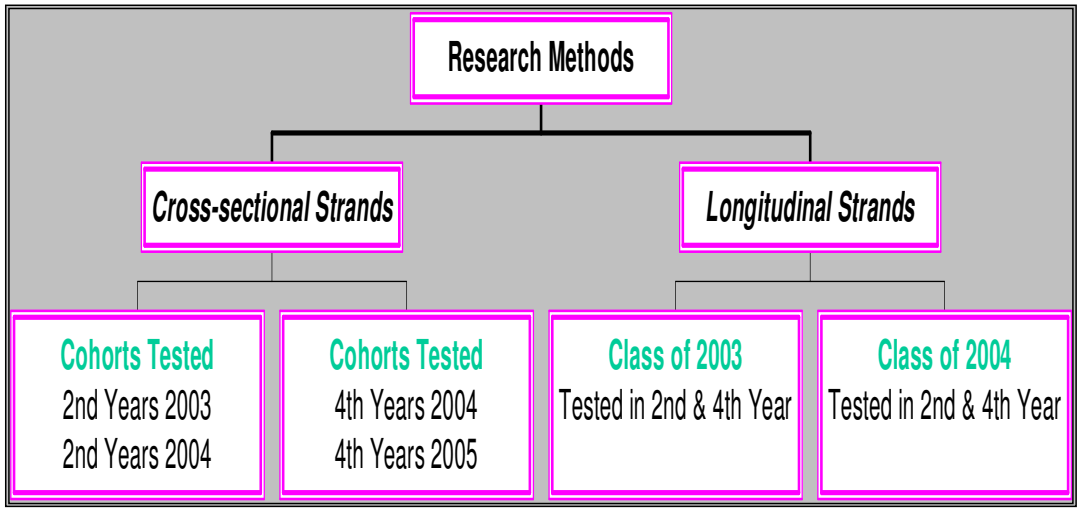
Keeves (1988) has argued however, that in educational research the various paradigms are harmonious to each other and that in the end, there is only one paradigm with many strands or approaches; ' The two main paradigms are not exclusive, but complementary to each other' (Husén, 1997:21).

On consideration it was decided by the researcher to include both positivistic and phenomenological elements in the research so as to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. By utilising a mixed methods approach it was felt that qualitative insights into the generalised data could be obtained. Also, it was felt that this approach would add to the representativeness and validity of the study. The various research methods discussed below were employed to further enhance the validity of the findings.

Research method – cross-sectional and longitudinal

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, although described generally as descriptive research, are collectively termed developmental research because they are concerned both with describing what the present relationships are among variables in a given situation and with accounting for changes occurring in those relationships as a function of time. With descriptive research it is important that the context in which the data is collected is established in order to make sense of the data. When collecting the data therefore, it is necessary to design strategies to ensure that the data needed to provide this context is gathered. Two useful types of information for this purpose are data about different groups and data about the same group over time (De Vaus, 2002:31). The necessity of gathering this data was a primary consideration in the decision to conduct both longitudinal and cross-sectional strands in this research.

Figure II: Research methods employed



The cross-sectional aspect of this study was concerned primarily with providing information on the opinions of student teachers at a particular point in their development. Two cross-sectional strands were conducted as part of this project. For the first cross-sectional strand, two different second year teacher education cohorts, the class of 2003 and the class of 2004, were tested using the research instrument, immediately succeeding their first major teaching practice placement. For the second cross-sectional strand two year four teacher education cohorts, the class of 2004 and the class of 2005 were tested using the research instrument, following their terminal TP placement. This investigation is a simultaneous cross-sectional study where, even though measurements are made at only one point in time, two or more target

populations are investigated so that; 'the samples may be considered both accurate and fully representative of the populations being investigated' (Lietz and Keeves, 1997:122).

The decision to conduct the cross-sectional strands was made on the basis that they:

- are comparatively quick and inexpensive to conduct
- are useful for charting population wide features at one point in time
- limit control effects as respondents only participate once
- provide a stronger likelihood of participation, as continuous participation is not required.

Although these are all valid reasons for conducting the cross-sectional strands, the final decision was primarily based on the fact that the cross-sectional studies although worthwhile in their own right, would act as a triangulator for the data obtained from the longitudinal studies.

The longitudinal aspect of this research differed from the cross-sectional, because testing took place on more than one occasion, with the same study cohorts, over an extended period of time. Two longitudinal strands were conducted as part of this project. The study cohorts for these strands were the second-year teacher education cohorts, of 2003 and 2004. Study cohorts were tested immediately succeeding the first major TP in second year, and were subsequently surveyed again, in the final year of teacher education, after the terminal teaching practicum. This type of study, 'where successive measures are taken at different points in time from the same respondents', is known generally as a 'cohort' or 'panel' study (Cohen et al., 2000:174).

One of the main problems associated with the longitudinal approach of the study, is the difficulty encountered in maintaining contact with the members of the chosen study cohorts. Because of this and also as the research was primarily interested in the opinions and experiences of the overall student teacher cohort, rather than those of specific individuals, the researcher decided that the study would be specifically deemed a cohort study. The significance of this lies in the fact that unlike a panel study, where each individual from the cohort is tracked over time, with a cohort study, the entire population is tracked over a specific period of time but selective testing within the study

cohort occurs. It was hoped that by this using this method, it would be possible to retain a high number of respondents for the second testing.

The benefits of including the longitudinal strand of the study were also noted in that, unlike the cross-sectional studies, the longitudinal strand:

- illustrates change in opinions over a two-year period of time
- separates real change from chance occurrence
- charts student teacher development, to investigate if it is sequential in nature
- gathers data contemporaneously thereby eliminating the problem of false or selective memory
- reduces testing error as the research remains with the same cohort
- affords the opportunity to make recommendations for intervention (Cohen et al., 2000: 178).

It was also decided, that rather than testing the cohorts during each year of their teacher education, they would be surveyed on two occasions thereby preventing control effects. This type of investigation is known as a simultaneous longitudinal study because, added to the fact that successive measures are taken at different points in time from the same respondents, two or more target populations are investigated, so that the study cohorts may be considered both accurate and fully representative of the overall populations being investigated (Lietz and Keeves, 1997).

Research method – triangulation

'Triangular techniques are suitable when a more holistic view of educational outcomes is sought' (Cohen et al., 2000:115). The research study employed two types of triangulation, multi-method and methodological triangulation.

Multi-method triangulation

Triangulation in its purest sense is a multi-method approach to educational research. This involves the use of two or more methods of data collection, which attempt to explain more fully or holistically the complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and in so doing making use of qualitative and quantitative method types. This method of research combines elements of both paradigms, and triangulation of data from both of these methods can overcome the problems associated with each technique without losing validity; 'Triangulation is a

powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity' (Campbell and Fiske, 1959: cited by Cohen et al., 2000:112).

The advantages of the multi-method approach, particularly in social research are manifold. Whereas single observations or primarily quantitative methods can yield results in the area of clinical science by providing unambiguous results, this does not transfer as easily to the social sciences as it provides only a limited view of the complexity of human behaviour and interaction. Likewise traditional ethnographic research can be subject to a lack of objectivity and bias. Similarly it has been observed that as research methods function as filters through which the environment is selectively experienced; they can never be seen as neutral or atheoretical. Absolute reliance on any one method therefore; 'may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating' (Cohen et al., 2000:112). The researcher needs to be confident that the data generated are not simply specific to the type of collection used and this certainty can only be achieved if different methods of data collection are employed which yield the same results. Furthermore, the greater the contrast between the methods used, the more confidence can be ascribed to the results generated. Utilising more than one method to collect data resolves the issue of 'method-boundedness' (Miles and Huberman, 1984:231-43; Parahoo, K., 1997:67).

An important rationale underlying this method of triangulation is the inadequacy of any single method to fully represent the complex human behaviour. Triangulation therefore aims to map out the richness of information regarding the phenomenon under study.

> The social world is socially constructed and its meaning is constantly changing. As a consequence, no single research method will ever capture all of the changing features of the social world under study... For those reasons, the most fruitful search for sound interpretations of the real world must rely upon triangulation strategies (Denzin, 1990:34).

In this study the complexity of human nature necessitates the use of more than one single observation to allow the development of a true understanding of the phenomena being researched. The researcher has made use of three sets of observations of the research phenomena – student teachers' experiences and opinions of their initial teacher education and the teaching practicum. By triangulating quantitative data from the questionnaire, student personal responses written on the questionnaire and qualitative

data from the guided discussion groups, the researcher has endeavoured to put forth a more elaborate and inclusive image of the research phenomena. Student teachers on a concurrent second-level teacher education programme are the population of choice in both phases of the research, and their experiences, perceptions and opinions are the main focus of this research project.

Methodological triangulation

Three types of 'methodological triangulation' are utilised within this research, the first being *time triangulation*. Many research initiatives are conducted at one point in time only, therefore ignoring the effects of social change. Time triangulation attempts to rectify this omission by making use of either cross-sectional or longitudinal approaches. As outlined above, both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches were used to further triangulate results.

The cross-sectional studies collected data concerned with time-related processes from different groups at one point in time. In this research, the cross-sectional aspects consisted of testing both two second-year teacher education cohorts and two fourth year teacher education cohorts from different academic years. The longitudinal studies collected data from the two cohorts in second year and then again in fourth year, therefore collecting data from the same groups at different points in the time sequence. The cross-sectional studies examined selected processes continually and the longitudinal studies compared the same measurements for the same individuals in the study cohorts at two points in time. Although neither method on its own is deemed to be completely effective as a means of data triangulation; 'the weakness of each of these methods can be strengthened by using a combined approach' encompassing both aspects to strengthen validity (Cohen et al., 2000:113).

The second type of methodological triangulation employed in this research *within methods triangulation*, has arisen due to the fact that this research project contains two cross-sectional and two longitudinal studies. This type of triangulation concerns the replication of a study as a check on reliability and theory confirmation.

The final type of methodological triangulation is *between methods triangulation*. This involves the use of more than one method on the same object of study; 'as a check on validity, the between methods approach embraces the notion of convergence between

independent measures of the same objective' (Cohen et al., 2000:114). In this research project, this is achieved by triangulating quantitative data from the questionnaire, with student personal opinions written on the questionnaire and qualitative data from the guided discussion groups.

By the use of these varying methods of methodological triangulation, coupled with the traditional multi-method triangulation approach, the researcher has attempted to develop a more robust and comprehensive illustration of the research phenomena.

Research design

The research design is a 'broad term involving all the strategies, including method or methods of data collection, adopted by the researcher to answer the research questions or test the hypotheses' (Parahoo, 1997:143). Research design can be categorised into three levels: descriptive, correlational or causal and for the purposes of this research project, the study is best categorised as descriptive research.

Descriptive research

At the descriptive level, research is primarily aimed at describing phenomena and from the data obtained; 'possible links between variables can be observed, but the emphasis is on the description of phenomena' (Parahoo, 1997:143). Parahoo's explanation of descriptive research is important in this context as it acknowledges that relationships may be observed in descriptive studies, but distinguishes this from a correlational design, which seeks deliberately to examine links between chosen variables. Therefore, although this is classed as a descriptive research project, it does have a correlational aspect due to the fact that independent variables were included and it was intended that statistical tests would be undertaken to investigate any noteworthy associations.

The survey

Once it had been established that the main aim of the research was to examine the experiences and perceptions of student teachers, consideration had to be given as to what method(s) of data collection would best suit this purpose. The research design most suited to this research was that of a survey, which 'can comprise of one or more method of data collection' (Parahoo, 1997:248). The survey was chosen as it is 'designed to obtain information from populations regarding the prevalence, distribution

and interrelationship of variables within those populations…and as such the survey is appropriate for descriptive studies' (Parahoo, 1997:148).

As part of the survey design, two methods of data collection were chosen, a questionnaire and guided discussion groups. Both methods were chosen because of their suitability for both a descriptive and survey-based research design. A questionnaire was chosen as the primary method of data collection as it would provide data that facilitate understanding of the phenomena being examined, and also had the potential to generate data from which concepts could be formulated. Guided discussion groups were chosen because they afforded the researcher the opportunity to get different perspectives on the phenomena being investigated, which it was felt would provide alternative but complementary data to that generated from the questionnaire (Parahoo, 1997:148, 298).

Specifics of the research design

The research design, although original to this research project, was in part influenced by two other studies, which looked at various aspects of the experiences of student and beginning teachers in the Irish context, Killeavy (2001) and Leonard and O'Doherty (1998). These studies illustrated for the researcher the lack of solid research findings on the experiences of student teachers of their ITE. The research adopted a two-phased approach, and within the first phase there were two strands.

Phase One

Strand One: This comprised the first cross-sectional study when two separate cohorts of Year Two student teachers were surveyed using the research instrument, the questionnaire, immediately succeeding their first TP. The questionnaire was designed with the objective of getting both qualitative and quantitative information on the experiences and opinions of student teachers at a specific point in their development. It was hoped that the results obtained would provide a basis for triangulation as well as for comparison against results from the second strand of the project.

Strand Two: Consisted of the final part of the longitudinal studies whereby the two separate study cohorts were re-tested with a similar instrument after their final TP in their fourth year of teacher education. The data from this re-testing also made up the second cross-sectional study as it provided information on student teachers' opinions and experiences immediately preceding their final TP placement.

Phase Two

This phase of the research study involved conducting guided discussion groups with a number of the student teachers from the class of 2004 (the second research cohort) who had completed the questionnaire and had expressed an interest in further expressing their own opinions and experiences of teaching practice and ITE.

Phase One: quantitative & qualitative research

For the quantitative research the student teachers completed a self-administered questionnaire. The research instrument was devised solely by the researcher and based on extensive reading of current literature in the areas of teacher socialisation and development and on previous research studies on student teachers' opinions of their ITE.

> The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:246)

A questionnaire was chosen as an appropriate primary research tool for surveying the student teachers' opinions, as it is typically used to scan a wide range of issues, in order to measure or describe any generalised features. It was chosen for a number of reasons:

- it gathers data on a one-shot basis and so is efficient which adds to ease of administration
- it represents a wide target population and gathers standardised information
- it provides descriptive and explanatory information
- it has the ability to elicit both opinions and facts from the respondents
- it is suitable for longitudinal studies, which require more than one testing over an extended period of time (Cohen et al., 2000:249).

It was noted that 'questionnaires are a valuable source for getting information, especially preliminary and background information in the research process' which prompted an awareness that the information gathered may be very generalised (Davies and Preston, 2002:238). Consequently at the end of each section a space was provided where student teachers were invited to add their own opinions. It was hoped that by including these additional answer spaces, the respondents who felt confined to a pre-

determined set of answers would be able to express their opinions more comprehensively and more in-depth personalised information would be made available to the researcher. In general this option solicits subjective data, which it was hoped would contribute to the depth and honesty of the responses and also provide the opportunity to gather qualitative data on the student teachers' opinions and experiences, which would be used to aid in the formulation of the discussion group questions.

These types of responses require time and thought on the part of respondents and thus it was anticipated that not all participants would be eager to add additional comments. The spacing left for these types of responses although ample, was restricted so as to retain the respondents' interest and motivation to complete the questionnaire. However, as the written opinions given were inevitably influenced by the quantitative questions immediately preceding their placement and indeed their overall placement within a structured questionnaire, the data generated from these sections must be considered and evaluated within the context of which they were collected.

An additional sheet was also appended at the end of the questionnaire where respondents were encouraged to write about any aspects of their teacher education programme or their experiences they wished. The appended sheet, because of its placement and the openness afforded to the respondents in expressing their own views and opinions, was seen as a good way of gaining subjective data. As with the additional answer spaces this data too must be analysed and interpreted within the framework in which it was presented. It was felt that this qualitative aspect, together with the student personal opinions expressed in the additional answer spaces, would provide more depth for the generalised results generated from the structured aspects of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire design

The original questionnaire (Appendix C) comprised eighty-eight questions and was divided into eighteen sections. It was considered that the length might impact negatively on the response rate and to combat this, the questionnaire was designed to be non-invasive and user-friendly. This was achieved by the use of an uncluttered layout; the questions were clear, response options were well drawn and exhaustive, and there was a natural ordering or flow that kept the respondent moving towards completion of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire format

The questionnaire began with straightforward, closed-ended biographical questions and the subsequent sections contained a mix of closed-ended questions of varying type following a logical and easy to follow format. Closed questions were used throughout the questionnaire and a variety in the types of closed questions was used to prevent boredom on the part of the respondent and also to keep answers as honest as possible.

Dichotomous questions which require a 'yes' / 'no' response, were used periodically throughout the questionnaire when the researcher required a very specific answer and wished to compel the respondent to answer the question in a truthful manner (Parahoo, 1997:252). Dichotomous questions were also used as a funnelling or sorting device to lead into subsequent less generalised questions on the same area.

Multiple choice questions were included to gain insight on complexity, and the researcher included multiple choice questions where the range of choices was designed to capture the likely range of responses to given statements. The researcher was cautious to include categories that were discrete and mutually exclusive, having no overlap so as to exhaust the possible range of responses to any given question. Clear instructions on how to accurately complete multiple-choice questions were provided to prevent confusion.

Rank-order questions were also included thereby providing the opportunity for the respondent to identify personal priorities, which enabled the researcher to assume a degree of preference or priority otherwise not available. Although this type of question format gives scope to include many ranking options, too many options may weary respondents who may not be able to differentiate their responses. Wilson and McLean (1994) suggest that it is unrealistic to expect respondents to arrange priorities where there are more than five ranks provided. Consequently the researcher kept all rank ordering questions to a maximum of four responses.

Rating Scale questions employing both Likert and semantic differential scales were also used frequently throughout the questionnaire. Emphasis was placed on the inclusion of this type of question to move away from purely dichotomous questions and to build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response while still obtaining solid, generalised statistical information. The categories given for the Likert scale questions

were discrete and covered all possible responses that the respondents were likely to give. Although issues may arise around each respondent's interpretation of the given scale, the researcher endeavoured to include scales, which were well known and so less open to individual interpretation on the part of the respondents. The response options included were based on the original scale developed by Likert (1932) to measure attitudes. The volunteers were asked to respond to a series of statements using a five point scale ranging from 'strongly-agree' to 'strongly-disagree' (Parahoo, 1997:258). The researcher was also careful to ensure that; 'the scale should only be measuring one thing at a time' to prevent any added confusion (Oppenheim, 1992:187-188).

Semantic differential questions are particularly useful as a measure of attitude or feeling towards a concept or phenomenon and in evaluative contexts (Osgood et al., 1957). They also combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine quantitative analysis. Rating scales 'afford the research the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality' (Cohen et al., 2000:253).

Questionnaire sections

The original questionnaire comprised eighteen distinct sections, with each section contributing to give an overall picture of the student teachers experiences of their ITE and teaching practicum.

Sections One and Two respectively sought biographical information from student teachers regarding their gender and the particular teacher education programme in which they were enrolled. This data formed an integral part of the questionnaire as these independent variables were needed by the researcher to build up a profile of the student teachers and for the purpose of cross-tabulation with other findings.

Section Three concentrated upon the respondents' experiences of teacher education prior to commencing TP and in particular their feelings of preparedness for teaching practice. A Likert Scale ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' was employed for these questions to combat against the problems associated with leading or presuming questions, an issue about which the researcher was very concerned due to the nature of the questions posed in this section (Bell, 1999).

Section Four focused on the student teachers' experiences of their campus-based teacher education. This section was included to gain some insight into the student teachers' views on the lectures and tutorials they received prior to TP to set the foundations for a profile of their opinions of the content of their programme.

Section Five sought to establish the extent to which student teachers employed strategies for teaching and personal reflection as promoted by their teacher education programme. This section also asked students how personally useful they found these approaches in their everyday teaching.

Sections Six, Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten respectively concentrated upon the participants' experiences during TP. These sections were included to gain insight into how the student teachers felt during their time in the school and into how accommodating both the school structures and personnel were of the preparatory and reflective work that is required of student teachers.

Section Eleven focused on the teaching approaches employed by the student teachers and most specifically what most influenced those approaches. These questions were included as a means of cross-referencing answers to previous questions on teaching approaches for inconsistencies in answering and, to act as a precursor for subsequent questions on student teacher concerns and what guides these concerns.

Section Twelve dealt with questions on student teachers' concerns. These questions were included to examine student teachers' concerns in relation to their practice and performance and to investigate if these concerns changed over time. The concern classifications were based on established categories of concern from research in this area (Guillaume and Rudney, 1993; Kagan, 1992).

Section Thirteen sought to establish some generalised information on the role of the co-operating teacher and how influential co-operating teachers were on the practices and performance of student teachers. The research also wished to establish the importance student teacher's placed on the relationship they had with co-operating teachers.

Section Fourteen and Sixteen concentrated on the role of educational theory in informing the practices of the student teachers. In these sections specifically the

researcher was very aware of leading questions and so two different methods were utilised to insure honest answers. Section Fourteen involved questions using a Likert Scale ranking, where students were asked to rank the relevance / usefulness of elements of educational theory for various different aspects of their teaching. Reverse order value statements were also presented. Section Sixteen involved the respondents again ranking their responses according to a Likert scale, but this time the student teachers were given short statements, ranging from positive to negative, to which they were asked to respond. It was hoped that the dual method of questioning would afford the researcher an opportunity to check consistency of responses.

Section Fifteen sought to look at the student teachers' views on the length of their TP. This was also included to compare with Section Seventeen. Section Seventeen solely investigated the student teachers' opinions on the areas of their teacher education programme that they found most worthwhile / relevant to them during their TP. Here twenty elements of their teacher education programme such as Learning styles, Theory of Motivation, Discipline etc. were included. These elements were selected from module descriptors and presented in random order. As this section differed from those previous, clear instructions were provided to prevent any misunderstandings.

Section Eighteen focused on various aspects of their overall teaching experience. These questions were purposefully inserted at this point as it was felt that earlier questions might have provoked ideas, opinions and thoughts about aspects of their pre-service teaching experience not already addressed. Although these questions were more generalised it was anticipated these would also act as an identifier of areas where student teachers felt that they needed more guidance or instruction.

Changes to the research instrument(s)

After initial testing of the first Year Two cohort in May 2003, it was found that some areas of the questionnaire, which did not come to light during the piloting, would need to be amended for the second testing in December 2004.

Fourth year questionnaire

Three amendments were made to the questionnaire for use with the Year Four study cohorts. The first of these was in Section Ten. Student teachers were initially given three response categories to the question 'At the beginning of TP with whom did you

identify more?' these response categories were; The Pupils, The Teachers, Neither. It was felt that this multiple-choice question should be amended to include another response choice 'Both' to provide a more conclusive range of answer choices. The next amendment was to the additional comment spacing provided on the questionnaire. In Section Fifteen specifically, the respondents showed a keen interest in expressing their own views on the length of TP as a lot of personal opinions were received. To further encourage extended responses it was decided to lengthen the additional comment space provided at this point in the questionnaire. The final amendment was to Section Seventeen where two additional elements of the teacher education programme were added to the initial list of twenty. It was decided to include this at the second time of testing as student teachers had now studied areas that they had not been exposed in the first two years of the programme (see revised questionnaire Appendix D).

Second year questionnaire

As stated, three amendments were made to the questionnaire prior to its use with the study cohorts at the second time of testing. The first two amendments described above were also included when the second study cohort was first tested in Year Two.

Further amendments

Further amendments to the research design were recommended as part of the transfer process from Masters to PhD. In addition to those previously recorded, the committee also recommended that additional information on tutoring during TP would be extremely beneficial to the research. Following the recommendation of the Transfer Committee it was decided to include a further question specifically concerned with the frequency with which tutors referred to college-based aspects of the teacher education programme during TP visits. It was decided that this question would be placed in Section Fourteen, which concentrated on the role of educational theory in informing the practices of the student teachers. Careful consideration was given to the wording of this question to avoid leading the respondents and the final version of the question stated 'How often did your tutor/s refer to campus based aspects of your programme during teaching practice visits?' (see amended questionnaire Appendix E).

Independent variables

Section One and Two of the original questionnaire sought biographical / contextual information from student teachers regarding their gender and the particular teacher

education programme in which they were enrolled. This data formed an integral part of the questionnaire as these independent variables were needed to build up a profile of the student teachers and for the purpose of cross-tabulation in the analysis of the data. The Transfer Committee recommended that to further increase the depth and breadth of the study, additional independent variables should to be included and recommended obtaining additional information from the respondents. On consideration of the Committee's directions, it was decided to include five more independent variables:

- School Type attended on TP
- School classification (designated disadvantaged / not designated disadvantaged)
- Overall level of academic attainment (QCA)
- Academic achievement in modules taken in education
- Teaching practice grade received

After consideration it was decided that the information needed for two of the independent variables on the classification and type of the school attended on TP would be retrieved by including two additional questions on the questionnaire. The first asked respondents 'What type of school did you attend on Teaching Practice?' The four response categories provided for this question were; 'Secondary', 'Vocational School & Community College', 'Comprehensive School' and 'Community School' and were based on the classification of post-primary school types in Ireland as provided by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2003:iii). The second question asked respondents 'Was your Teaching Practice school designated disadvantaged?' This was classified as a dichotomous questions as only two response categories 'yes' and 'no' were made available to the respondents (see amended questionnaire Appendix E).

To obtain the information needed from the respondents for the three remaining independent variables: overall level of academic attainment, academic achievement in education modules and TP grade, it was decided not to ask the respondents to provide this information as part of the questionnaire. This decision was based on the belief that if participants were asked to give information on the questionnaire itself, this would affect their perceived anonymity and respondents may feel that the level of importance of their response may be linked in someway to their level of educational attainment. Both of these factors it was felt may discourage a volunteer from participating or from being as honest and forthright in their answering as they may have been had they not

been asked about these areas. Therefore, it was decided to ask respondents for their permission to retrieve this data from the Student Academic Administration Office. The specifics of how this permission was obtained are discussed as part of the ethical considerations of this project (see page 114).

Validity and reliability of questionnaires

For questionnaires to be viable they must produce results which are both valid and reliable. The validity of a questionnaire is 'the extent to which it addresses the research question, objective or hypothesis set by the researcher' (Parahoo, 1997:264). Two questions can be asked when assessing the validity of a questionnaire; 1. Does the questionnaire answer the research question? 2. Do the chosen questions adequately reflect the varying aspects of the concepts or issues being studied?

The reliability of a questionnaire however refers to the consistency with which the respondents understand and respond to all the questions posed and again, two questions that can be asked when assessing reliability are; 1. Does each respondent interpret the instructions given by the researcher in the same way? 2. Are the questions unambiguous and clear enough for each individual to respond to them in the same way each time they are presented to him/her and for each individual to understand them in the same way that others do? It is important to note that a questionnaire can be reliable without being valid, but it cannot be valid without being reliable (De Vaus, 2002:52).

In any research project there can be many threats to validity and reliability and many sources of unreliability. For example:

- respondents can be economical with the truth or colour their responses to make them more socially desirable
- answers given can be exaggerated to support or protest specific causes
- the context in which administration of the questionnaire takes place can also affect reliability and validity of the data obtained
- issues such as selective memory, memory gaps or even memory distortion can lead to inaccuracies in self-reporting
- wording and structure of questionnaires plays a huge part in their reliability
- questions that are leading, ambiguous, double negative, hypothetical etc. also threaten reliability

- question order and length can also affect responses given (De Vaus, 2002; Cohen et al., 2000; Parahoo, 1997; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Although in any research project there may be variation in how some respondents interpret questions, it is important to include a number of strategies to reduce bias and ambiguities as much as possible to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. 'The reliability and validity of questionnaires can be greatly enhanced by careful preparation and skilful construction, paying particular attention to the needs and circumstances of potential respondents' (Parahoo, 1997:269).

Reliability

'Reliability is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents' (Cohen et al., 2000:117). In order to ensure that the data generated from the questionnaire was as reliable as possible, the researcher carried out certain checks and included a variety of strategies to examine the consistency with which the questionnaire collected data.

The wording, structure and order of questions along with questionnaire length can have a huge impact on its reliability. Consequently certain measures were taken at the design stage to make certain that the questionnaire would be non-invasive and user-friendly. Much consideration was given to ensure that the layout was well organised with clear unambiguous questions and response options that were well drawn. As it was anticipated that the questionnaire would be demanding of respondents' time, every effort was made to insure that the layout had a natural flow to it that kept the respondent moving towards completion.

As part of this process, the researcher deliberated over the format of each question and avoided questions that were hypothetical, double-barrelled, double negative or leading. It was also decided to exclude open-ended questions and extreme statements. It was felt that these question types in particular might bias the types of answers given and perhaps lead participants who hadn't yet formed their own opinion. It was extremely important to the researcher that the student teachers answered in an honest and forthright manner. With the closed-questions, predetermined answer sets were considered carefully to avoid ambiguous or poorly defined terms and although some sections appeared long, the researcher deemed their inclusion necessary to avoid bias or risk leading the

respondents. Some answer sets were also cross-referenced with those from Killeavy (2001), Leonard and O'Doherty (1998) and Guillaume and Rudney (1993) to ensure that they were balanced and thereby reduce the likelihood of the researcher imposing her own views and opinions upon the respondents.

According to Wolf (1997) more often than not with the use of questionnaires, once the format, structure and question types have been decided, the researcher makes no attempt to measure the reliability of the responses obtained. Two general approaches were employed to determine the reliability and, hence, measurement error presented in the questionnaire.

Alternative-form test

The best method of measuring reliability is to include a number of questions to measure each concept rather than just including single itemed indicators. This is known as the Alternative-form Test (De Vaus, 2002:52). In order to perform alternative-form reliability tests, specific questions were repeated in a slightly altered form, to provided consistency checks. In Sections Eleven, Twelve, Fourteen, Sixteen and Seventeen respectively, alternative forms of the same questions were included as a means of cross-referencing answers. Three different question types namely; dichotomous, rank ordering and semantic differential, coupled with changes to the wording of questions were employed specifically to determine if responses were reliable. It was intended that by crosschecking the answers given to each of the questions, prevalence and consistency of occurrence could be identified and thereby the equivalence reliability of the questionnaire established (Cohen et al., 2000:118).

To further establish the equivalence reliability of the research an additional method of data collection - guided discussion groups were included. It was anticipated that this would make data available, which could be cross-referenced with findings from the questionnaire and act as a moderate consistency check. 'If an equivalent form of the test or instrument is devised and yields similar results, the instrument can be said to demonstrate this form of reliability' (Cohen et al., 2000:118).

Test-retest

As only some aspects of the research were checked using the Alternative-form Test, another method was employed to test the reliability where only a single question was

used to measure a particular concept. The only way to check reliability of single questions is the Test-retest Method, which 'involves administering the questionnaire on two occasions and comparing the response' (Parahoo, 1997:273; Cohen et al., 2000). The questionnaire was re-administered in both strands of Phase One of the research project to a second cohort of student teachers at the same point in their teacher education, which took the form of the cross-sectional studies.

Validity

Validity is in essence 'a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure' (Cohen et al., 2000:105). With questionnaires, there is general agreement that three specific types of validity measurements should be employed; content, construct and criterion-related (De Vaus, 2002; Parahoo, 1997). In an attempt to validate both the questionnaire and the data generated the researcher carried out particular checks and included a variety of strategies to examine the three aforementioned types of validity.

Content validity

This approach to validity 'refers to the degree to which the questions or items in the questionnaire adequately represent the phenomena being studied' (Parahoo, 1997: 270). As there is no statistical test for content validity it is generally assessed by submitting the questionnaire to a panel with experience and knowledge of the topic in question who are equipped to make suggestions on the adequacy and relevance of the questions. For this study, the questionnaire was submitted to all academic staff in advance of a meeting of the Department of Education and Professional Studies on April 2nd 2003 to obtain their opinions and suggestions on the adequacy of the questions. The questionnaire was discussed and agreed by the Department prior to use with any of the study cohorts. The questionnaire was subsequently presented to another panel as part of the transfer process from Masters to PhD who too affirmed the adequacy of the questions.

Construct validity

This is the most difficult type of validity for a questionnaire to achieve as it refers to how well a questionnaire measures the overall construct being examined. The main method employed in this research was the multitrait-multimethod approach as described by Campbell and Fiske (1959). This involved using different methods to measure the construct, which in this study comprised of a questionnaire and guided group

discussions. If there is a relatively high inter-correlation between the different methods that measure the construct, then convergent validity is assumed (Campbell & Fiske, 1959 cited by Cohen et al., 2000:110).

'Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity' (Campbell and Fiske, 1959: cited by Cohen et al., 2000:112) and the methods of triangulation employed in this research, enabled the researcher to examine the construct validity using a multitrait-multimethod approach. A secondary method of assuring the construct validity was achieved by comparing the researcher's own construction of the particular issue with other constructions of the same issue. This was achieved by rooting the researcher's own construction in a wider literature search which teased out the implied meaning through comparisons with other measures of the issue being examined. This was specifically concentrated in sections Four, Five, Seven, Twelve, Fourteen and Eighteen of the questionnaire as the questions and answer sets were developed on the basis of previous research initiatives where the construct had already been tested.

Criterion-related validity

Using this approach the researcher endeavoured to compare 'people answering our new measure of the concept, with existing, well-accepted measures of the concept' (De Vaus, 2002:53). This was achieved by comparing data generated in this study with findings from Killeavy (2001), Leonard and O'Doherty (1998) and Guillaume and Rudney (1993). This type of validity is known as concurrent validity. A noted problem of this approach however, is that it assumes the validity of the established research criterion and a low correlation between the two measures is interpreted as meaning that new measure is invalid whereas, it may be the case that the old measure was in fact invalid (De Vaus, 2002).

Piloting

'The questionnaire was piloted with student teachers not included in any of the research cohorts but involved in the same teacher education programmes and at the same stage of development as the study cohorts would be at the time of testing, as it was recognised that piloting 'should be conducted with people who resemble those to whom the questionnaire will finally be given' (De Vaus, 2002:117). The purpose of the pilot in this research initiative was to:

- evaluate the clarity of the questionnaire with regards to layout, instructions and question content
- eliminate ambiguities or difficulties with the wording of the questions or instructions and identify redundant questions (e.g. those that showed inconsistency of understanding, or were not answered by the respondents)
- gain feedback on appropriateness of answer sets for closed questions
- ascertain the length of time it would take to complete the questionnaire
- identify if participants became bored or lost interest in the questionnaire therefore leading to a revision of the position and types of questions included in the final draft of the questionnaire (De Vaus, 2002; Parahoo, 1997).

The information gathered from the pilot allowed the researcher to make more informed decisions about the length, structure and content of the questionnaire. Length was found to be a concern along with the layout, which made the questionnaire too time consuming. Some of the response categories were also found to be too long with too many response options. Issues were also noted with the open-ended questions included in the original draft. Feedback from participants who engaged in the pilot study highlighted that there was variation in the interpretation of these questions leading to problems around validity. It was also noted that there was a lack of provision of optional comment spaces, which was hindering the quality of response obtained.

As a result of the issues noted, the questionnaire was shortened, some of the response categories were refined and the layout of the questionnaire adjusted. The decision was taken to remove all open-ended questions as the researcher found it extremely difficult to remove personal bias and leading aspects from these questions. In addition it was decided to include additional comment spaces throughout the questionnaire in the hope that this would provide an opportunity for unprompted responses from the participants, which would add to the depth to the data gathered.

Ethical considerations

As a questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent and in this case into the lives of teaching staff in terms of time and possible invasion of privacy, the researcher endeavoured to set down guidelines to insure that the testing would be as ethical as possible. The guidelines the researcher generated were to:

- emphasise the voluntary nature of the research
- obtain informed consent from all participants
- inform participants of their right to withdraw at any point in the research study or not to complete particular items in the questionnaire
- guarantee complete confidentially and anonymity to participants
- limit the intrusion into the life of department staff
- limit the sensitivity of questions (De Vaus, 2002; Parahoo, 1997).

The questionnaire and associated documentation were presented to the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee (ULREC) prior to use for data collection. The Committee subsequently granted full approval for the questionnaire and accompanying documents on April 9th 2003 (see Appendix F). Following the revision of the questionnaire on the basis of the recommendations given by the Transfer Committee it was again brought to ULREC and on September 7th 2005 the Committee granted full approval for all the intended amendments (see Appendix G).

Voluntary participation and informed consent

Informed consent has been defined as 'the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions' (Diener and Crandall, 1978 cited by Cohen et al., 2000:51). The respondents were informed about the nature of the study and what involvement would entail. Further to this, the researcher provided each likely participant with a Volunteer Information Sheet (see Appendix H) and personally explained the details of the project and the voluntary nature of participation to each study cohort during the introductory sessions given prior to each phase of the research. It was felt by doing this the researcher could be reassured that all likely respondents were in full knowledge of what participation in the study would entail.

To solidify this groundwork, each respondent who decided to take part in the study was given a Volunteer Consent Form (see Appendix I), which they were asked to complete prior to filling out the questionnaire. As the questionnaire focused on the work of the faculty permission was also sought from faculty members to engage in the research as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Access to student teachers

Initial contact was made with the first cohort of student teachers on their return from TP in May 2003. The researcher negotiated with faculty members who were teaching the entire cohort for general modules and it was agreed that the researcher could contact the student teachers at a lecture where all students from each core group would be present.

The researcher met with potential participants in accordance with guidelines laid down by the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee. The Committee advised that, to avoid creating a 'captive audience' where students might feel compelled to participate, the researcher should meet the intended population to inform them of the research and to invite them to participate at a subsequent time if they so wished. At this initial meeting the researcher spent ten minutes introducing both herself and the research study and explaining what involvement in the study would entail. Each student teacher was given a Volunteer Information Sheet as already discussed, to highlight 'the aim of the research, to convey to respondents its importance, to assure them of confidentiality, and to encourage their replies' (Cohen, et al., 2000:259). The one page volunteer information sheet was clear, concise and easily comprehensible - to avoid boredom or confusion, and to assure confidentiality of respondents' answers at all times (Verma and Mallick, 1999).

Student teachers were afforded the opportunity to ask questions about the research and were assured that all aspects of the research would be carried out by the researcher and would have no bearing on their academic studies. At the conclusion of this initial meeting, the student teachers were informed of when and where the research would take place and were invited to come after scheduled lecture time to participate. Again the voluntary nature of participation in the research was stressed. For consistency, the same format was followed prior to each subsequent testing.

Questionnaire administration and anonymity

In light of issues around anonymity and to reassure respondents that participation would not affect their academic progress, it was decided that the student researcher would exclusively carry out the administration of the questionnaire. This decision was made to make the questionnaire more personalised and meaningful to participants and therefore generate a greater response and to establish the independence of the student researcher from the Department of Education and Professional Studies.

'The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity' and the researcher took certain measures to ensure this (Cohen et al., 2000:61). The principal means of ensuring respondents' anonymity was by not using names or any other form of personal identification. Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher assured the participants that she had absolutely no interest in linking the person as a unique named individual to actual behaviour, but rather was interested in gaining insight into the opinions of the overall group. To demonstrate this, the researcher devised a system for return of questionnaires and consent forms, which guaranteed total anonymity. On completion of the questionnaire and consent form the participants were asked to detach the consent form from the questionnaire themselves and deposit each one into separately labelled boxes. Respondents could see that their questionnaire, which contained no personal identifiers at all, would be stored separately to their consent form. Although the questionnaires and consent forms were coded, this was done initially only to enable the researcher to track prospective focus group members so a profile of the volunteers could be developed prior to each group, enabling the researcher to ensure that different subgroups of the population were included.

Prior to commencing testing with each cohort, the researcher gave clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they wished during the course of the session. The researcher also introduced and finished each session by reiterating to the respondents how important their opinions were and how grateful she was for them taking the time to participate in the study.

Accessing additional student teacher information

As previously highlighted in this chapter, as part of the transfer process from Masters to PhD, the Transfer Committee recommended that additional independent variables should to be included to further increase the depth and breadth of the research study.

For the second study cohort the research instrument was adapted to ascertain information on the type and classification of school attended on TP. To obtain the information needed from the remaining independent variables: overall level of academic attainment, academic achievement in education modules and teaching practice grade, it was decided not to ask the respondents to provide this information as part of the questionnaire as previously discussed (see page 108) but rather to ask the respondents for permission to retrieve this data from the Student Academic Administration Office.

To do this, the researcher amended the consent form to enable participants to give their permission to access this data and clearly explained to participants what information would be retrieved and the purpose of including this information. Students were again assured the all information would be held in the strictest of confidence and their anonymity would be preserved (please see Appendix J for the amended consent form).

As the first study cohort had already completed their participation in the project, another method of obtaining this additional information had to be employed. It was decided that all participants from the first study group would be sent a letter outlining that additional information was needed, detailing the specifics of this information and asking them for their permission to retrieve this information from the Student Academic Administration Office. This process was made possible due to the fact that the original questionnaires and consent forms had been coded to enable the researcher to track prospective focus group members. The researcher was able to make contact with participants based on the contact information they had provided on their original consent form. The letter and accompanying consent form sent to participants can be found in Appendix K.

The study cohorts

The intended representation of this research was student teachers at the University of Limerick only. To ensure that the study groups were as illustrative of the overall student teacher cohort at the University of Limerick as possible, students from all undergraduate teacher education programmes, of both genders and all ages were included. It must be noted that the researcher did not pick particular groups as the study cohorts but rather that each cohort was self-selecting and as such volunteer sampling took place (Cohen et al., 2000:99; Parahoo, 1997:233). All student teachers from the 2003 second-year cohort and from the subsequent cohorts were invited to take part in the study and after the initial invitation it was each individual's decision to participate or not.

As there were cross-sectional and longitudinal aspects to the research, more than one study cohort was involved. Because it was hoped to follow student teachers' development through their ITE, the first study cohort was targeted in their second year of teacher education, just after their first major TP placement (May 2003). This group was tested again after their second major practicum in their fourth year of study (December 2004). The second study cohort was made up of volunteers from the second

year teacher education students of the following academic year, tested in May 2004 and retested in their fourth year of teacher education (December 2005).

Response rate

The response rate at each time of testing was very high and student teachers showed a genuine interest in being involved in the research. This was amplified by the fact that respondents personally decided to make themselves available for the testing sessions outside of their scheduled lectures.

TableVIII: Response rate

	POPULATION SIZE	STUDY COHORT SIZE	STUDY AS PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL POPULATION
Cohort 2A	**n = 127**	**n = 103**	**81.1%**
Cohort 2B	**n = 198**	**n = 151**	**76.2%**
Cohort 4A	**n = 130**	**n = 106**	**81.5%**
Cohort 4B	**n = 193**	**n = 151**	**78.2%**

Table IX: Guidelines for determining size of study cohorts[9]

Population size	Sample size
120	**92**
130	**97**
170	**118**
180	**123**
190	**127**
200	**132**

The researcher decided to use Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines for determining the adequacy of the size of the study cohorts. Although the study cohorts were not considered random and non-probability sampling was used in this research, these guidelines still provided an adequate way of assessing the sufficiency of the size of the study cohorts in relation to the overall population. From these guidelines the researcher was able to determine the minimum number needed in each study cohort for it to be

[9] Source: Dunham and Smith, 1979:68.

representational of the overall population of student teachers at the University of Limerick. As can be seen from the table above, the response rates complied with Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines for sample sizes.

Research analysis – quantitative data

The quantitative data generated by the questionnaire from each of the study cohorts was sorted and coded, first by study cohort; each study cohort was then given an identification letter and then each student teacher's questionnaire was also coded with a number, before the data was inputted into the statistical analysis package. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed by the researcher. In the first stage of analysis, descriptive tests were used to analyse all variables so frequency distributions could be established. Frequencies of complementary questions were compared to measure the reliability of the instrument and consistency of response.

At the next level of analysis measures of association were analysed. The measurement scale of the data was typically nominal or ordinal (categorical) and normal distribution of data could not be assumed. Consequently non-parametric tests were used in the further analysis of all variables except QCA. QCA however is a continuous scale variable and it was possible to test the distribution of the data received prior to performing any further analysis. Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test the probability of the data set being normally distributed was calculated; this test was chosen as it is the most appropriate for larger cohorts with greater than fifty-one respondents. The higher the probability ($P>0.05$) the closer the data are to normal distribution. P was found to be 0.2 for both cohorts at each time of testing; therefore the data sets were normally distributed. An ANOVA or f-test was used when looking at the relationship between QCA and other variables.

As normal distribution could not be assumed, non-parametric versions of the traditional parametric tests were employed to aid in the interrogation of the other nominal and ordinal variables in the data sets. The strength of relationships between the independent variables and these variables was measured and non-parametric versions of the Pearsonian correlation, Spearman's rho and Cramer's V were used as these are the most appropriate measures of association for the special characteristics of the nominal and ordinal variables. Inferential results are reported in this study to highlight the strength of the relationships between variables but not to draw any statistical inferences from the

data. Similarly, because the present study does not use randomly sampled data, significance tests are not appropriate for inferential analysis. However, significance is reported here as an arbitrary criterion in deference to its widespread use in social science for exploratory analysis of non-random data (Henkel and Uslaner, 1976).

Research analysis – qualitative data

The qualitative responses from each questionnaire were hand analysed by the researcher and entered into a specifically pre-formulated document, which provided the opportunity to begin identifying emerging themes. When the responses had been entered a printout was obtained and each questionnaire was read again to afford the researcher the opportunity to make specific notes about individual comments. Notes included comments on recurring themes and the researcher's own individual thoughts and feeling about the nature and significance of the data.

The comments were subsequently re-read by the researcher and codes assigned to recurring themes. This process is known as open coding whereby the data are examined word-by-word and line by line (Parahoo, 1997). The codes were freely generated and it was intended that they be reflective of the words of the respondents themselves. Subsequently a 'data reduction' process was initiated where data were condensed, focused and simplified' (Parahoo, 1997:356). As part of this process the codes were re-examined to look for congruency between comments, which would allow the global codes to be collapsed into more substantive codes and subsequently grouped together into categories. Finally each questionnaire was colour coded according to the categories identified so that all comments relating to a particular category could be seen not as fractured comments but as a coherent whole. It was hoped that by working with the data and revisiting each questionnaire in this way, the meaning and accuracy of each category would become clearer.

Initially the researcher carried out this process individually, but in an attempt to make the analysis more objective and to ensure rigour another researcher also analysed the data obtained from the questionnaires. It was felt that by doing this a more subjective view of the emerging themes would be obtained and any bias on the part of the primary researcher would be reduced. The themes and categories identified by the researcher were subsequently cross-referenced with the themes etc. that had been identified by the second researcher to validate the qualitative findings. The process then began of

combing through each respondent's comments for the most appropriate evidence of themes and categories emerging in the qualitative data. It is important to note that although qualitative data are sometimes reported in quantitative forms, it was decided with this research project that the qualitative findings would be reported textually and supported by relevant comments from respondents. This decision was based on the belief that with any data that is considered qualitative, importance must be placed on describing the experience and opinions of respondents from their own point of view.

Phase Two: qualitative research

A multi-method approach was chosen to enhance the validity of the data as it was felt that having a complementary qualitative aspect to the study would bring out insights and understanding in ways which the questionnaire items might not. After consideration of the possible qualitative methods, guided discussion groups were employed for Phase Two of the research. This decision was based on the fact that the researcher was primarily interested in gaining insight into the opinions and experiences of the overall groups of student teachers rather than those of specific individuals. It was therefore felt that guided discussion groups would be more suitable than other forms of interviews as 'focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views' and 'the main purpose of focus groups is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way which would not be feasible using other methods' (Gibbs, 1997:1).

The group element of the qualitative research was therefore an important factor leading to this decision, but this method was also chosen specifically and in contrast to group interviewing because of its particular format, as there is no standard instrument but rather a topic guide to be explored through discussion. Therefore the reliance is on the 'interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher' rather than on a question answer session between the interviewer and group (Morgan, 1997:12). Hence the key characteristics, which distinguish focus groups, are the data produced by the interaction between participants. This format was seen as very important in this particular study, as it would best allow for the participants' views to emerge (Cohen et al., 2000). Coupled with this was the fact that focus groups can be used either as a stand alone method or as a complement to other methods especially for triangulation and validity checking (Morgan, 1997; Cohen et al., 2000).

Focus / guided discussion groups

Gibbs describes the focus group as 'organised discussions with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic' (1997:1). What is most useful about focus groups is that they provide another avenue to explore issues more deeply and they can also provide alternative interpretations of findings that may not otherwise have been possible using more quantitative methods (Vaughn et al., 1996). Focus groups are beneficial for a number of reasons as:

- they provide the opportunity to gain several perspectives on a particular topic and to explore people's experiences of a particular phenomena and also their understanding of it
- the researcher can gain deeper insights into expressed opinions by probing responses more deeply
- the researcher is able to direct conversations towards particular topics they wish to investigate and also to follow new ideas as they arise
- they offer a more comfortable arena for people to express their views as they have the support of a group rather than being one-on-one with an interviewer
- they provide the opportunity for participants to reflect on and react to the opinions of others (Cohen et al., 2000; Parahoo, 1997; Gibbs, 1997).

Although the terms focus group and guided discussion group are used interchangeably in this research, the difference between this two methods is noted. With focus groups in their truest sense, the role of the researcher is to provide the topic for discussion and then allow the participants to interact with each other and the reliance in this case is on the group themselves discussing the topic (Cohen et al., 2000). As this format has certain noted drawbacks (Chillberg, 1991) it was decided that the group sessions would be specifically deemed guided discussion groups, as this format provides a more flexible structure and the researcher can better managed any procedural difficulties and ensure that key issues from the topic guide are addressed. This flexible structure also enables the researcher to ensure that every participant gets the opportunity to speak and to draw out participant's responses further in the hope of gaining greater insights (Gibbs, 1997).

> The strengths of focus groups for research in education and psychology is that individuals are invited to participate in a forum where their diverse opinions and perspectives are desired' (Brotherson cited by Vaughn et al., 1996:15).

Format of guided discussion groups

Planning is essential to ensure that the guided discussion group experience is optimal and the desired results can be achieved. While the participants' experience is that of an informal conversation around a particular theme, careful planning is necessary to ensure the relevance of data gathered to the research questions. Organising research of this nature usually requires more planning than other types of interviewing as getting people to group gatherings can be difficult and setting up appropriate venues with adequate recording facilities requires a lot of time (Gibbs, 1997).

Four guided discussion groups were conducted as part of this research. The recommended number of participants per group varies from six to ten and four to twelve with some researchers suggesting the necessity to have up to fifteen participants (Morgan, 1997; Gibbs, 1997). There is also a need to over recruit by twenty percent to allow for participants who don't show up. With these issues in mind it was decided to invite nine people to each guided discussion group in the hope of having six to eight participants. It was anticipated that each guided discussion group would be a maximum of one hour in length and a topic guide was compiled to aid the structure of the discussion (see Appendix L). Once this guide had been established along with the aims and objectives of the groups the researcher designed the structure of the discussion groups (see Appendix M).

It was decided that at the end of each session the researcher would conduct an independent analysis. As part of this analysis group dynamics, discussion themes, tonality of discussion, questions or special concerns, and suggestions or recommendations made by participants were noted. These issues were deemed important to be able to consider the context of the responses when analysing the data obtained (Cohen et al., 2000). The sessions were conducted in a neutral venue as it is acknowledged that such groups should be conducted in a non-threatening environment, which allows free-flow of thoughts, feelings and candidate feedback (Powell & Single, 1996). The guided discussion groups were recorded using an audio recorder and were transcribed by the researcher to guarantee optimum confidentiality.

Access to and selection of participants

When all student teachers in the study cohorts were invited to complete the questionnaire, they were asked to indicate if they would be interested in participating in a focus group by filling in a Guided Discussion Group Expression of Interest Sheet (see Appendix N). Participants were selected from those who indicated that they would be interested in taking part and in the first instance were self-selecting. However, as such a large number of student teachers expressed an interest in being involved, the researcher was able to perform quota sampling. This method 'involves elements of purposive and stratified sampling without random selection' which enabled the researcher to ensure that certain sub-groups of the population were adequately represented and that the participants chosen were the best available to provide data on the issues being researched (Parahoo, 1997:235).

Using the contact details contained in the Expression of Interest Sheet each individual was contacted and asked if they were still interested in participating and to establish the time and date that would be most suitable for them. Based on this, a schedule for the guided discussion groups that best accommodated each participant was devised.

Confidentiality

Focus groups by their nature involve the sharing of information, thus privacy is a central concern (Morgan, 1998:87). In a face-to-face group discussion it is confidentiality rather than anonymity that can be guaranteed as a way of protecting a participant's privacy (Cohen et al., 2000). Because of the lack of anonymity of the discussion groups the researcher assured all participants that their involvement would be treated with complete confidentiality at all times. Although the researcher knew the identity of each participant it was agreed that this information would not be made public.

To uphold confidentiality the information recorded was transcribed solely by the researcher, excluding any identifying features and any possible further identifiers were withheld from data used in the findings of this research. The issue of confidentiality was included in the overview to each session and the participants' and researcher's understanding of confidentiality was clarified. To solidify this each participant was invited to fill out a consent form (see Appendix O) which outlined that they understood that all information received would be treated with the strictest of confidence and that their identity would not be revealed at any stage in the reporting of the research. This

was also addressed in the ground rules (see Appendix P) where it was made clear that although participants could discuss with others their own involvement in the guided discussion groups but they could not discuss anyone else's involvement. As part of the confidentiality agreement it was made clear that no group member could:

- divulge comments made by others in the group
- divulge the identity of other participants in the discussion group
- identify any tutor, teacher or university staff member by name during the discussion.

Research analysis

After each guided discussion group, the transcript was manually transcribed by the researcher into a specifically pre-formulated document, which provided the opportunity to begin identifying emerging themes[10]. Once the transcription was completed the researcher listened to the tape repeatedly to annotate the transcript. Notes included comments on recurrent themes, tone of voice and the researcher's own individual thoughts and feeling about the nature and significance of the data.

The transcripts were subsequently re-read by the researcher and codes assigned to recurring themes. The codes were freely assigned so they would be reflective of the words of the participants themselves. These initial codes were subjected to a data reduction process, whereby they were collapsed into more substantive codes and subsequently grouped together into categories. Finally each participant's pathway through the transcript was traced by colour coding the categories within the transcript. This process relates to the 'fit' of categories whereby according to Parahoo 'all instances of the phenomena under question relate to the developing category and the fractured data come together as coherent whole' (1997:357). It was hoped that by working with the data and revisiting the original transcripts the meaning and accuracy of the categories would become clearer.

Initially the researcher carried out this process independently, but again a second researcher also analysed the data. The themes and categories identified by the second researcher were subsequently cross-referenced with the themes etc. that had been

[10] See Appendices Q for complete transcripts of focus groups.

identified by the main researcher on the project, to validate the qualitative findings. Transcripts were then examined for the most appropriate evidence of themes and categories emerging in the qualitative data.

Limitations of the research

This research was not designed to be an evaluation of the teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick. Nonetheless when participants were asked about individual components to the programme, their responses illustrate that they did not differentiate between the programme in general and the education components thereof. Their perception is that the whole programme is one of teacher education and that the distillation of the elements as presented by the researcher in the questionnaire, did not necessarily reflect their understandings of teacher education. While such a distillation was essential to attain permission for a postgraduate student to undertake this research, students' responses fused the specific elements with the global degree programme. Consequently the participants provided additional data, which although interesting, lie outside the scope and remit of the research. In addition it became evident in the analysis of the data that there was a level of repetition within the responses. This may be ascribed as a limitation of the questionnaire.

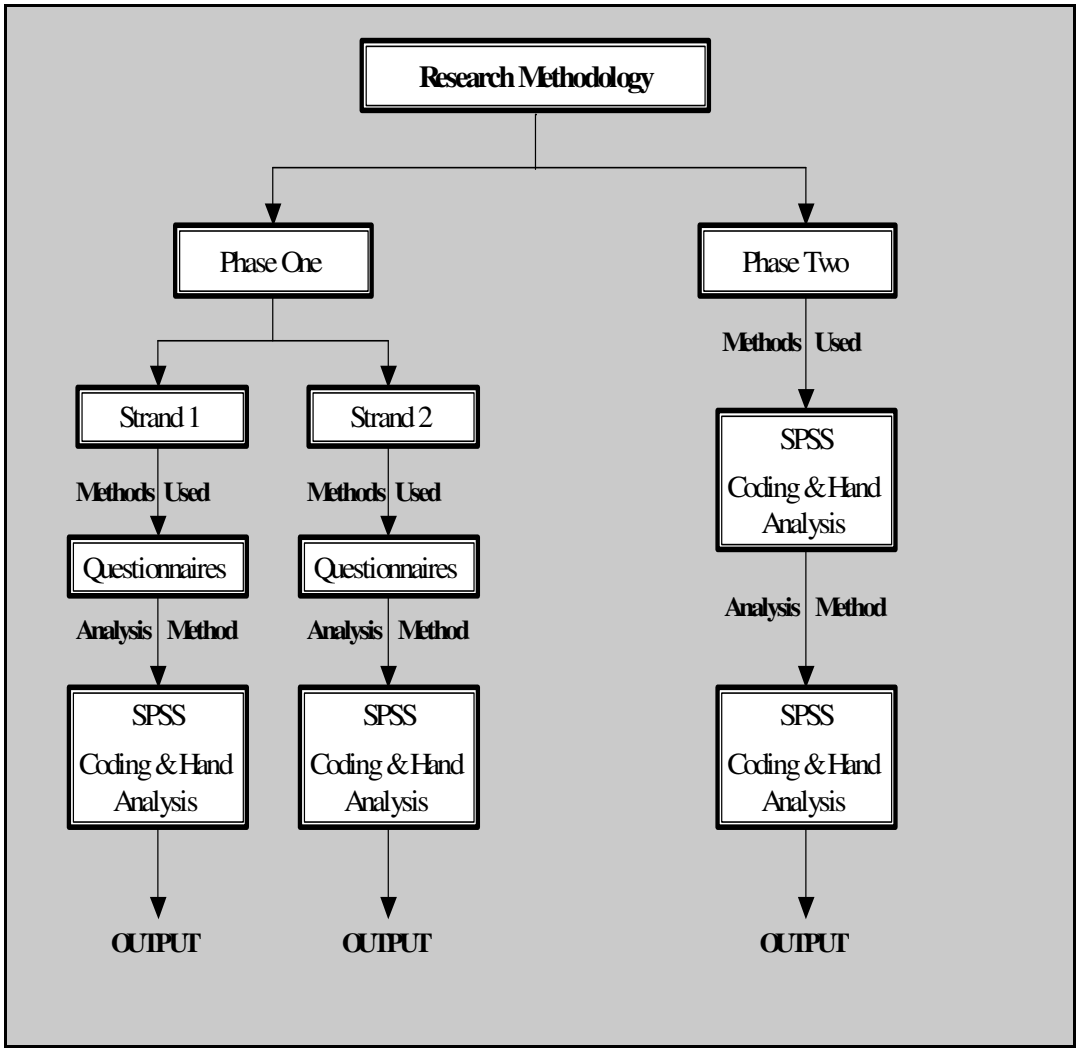
While the researcher was at all times conscious of the ethical dimension of the research, this project was carried out with the academic support of the lecturers within the Department of Education and Professional Studies, and was part funded by a research scholarship from the Faculty of Education. Permission to undertake this research was given but parameters were established by the faculty. This meant that specific lines of inquiry raised in the discussion groups, while acknowledged by the researcher during the data collection period, have not been included in the findings of the research.

Conclusion

The research process consisted of a multi-method approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative aspects and had two consecutive but connected phases. Phase One had two separate strands, both of which consisted of a quantitative questionnaire comprising of eighty-eight questions and divided into eighteen sections. The questionnaire also contained additional answer spaces for volunteers to make personalised comments and give their own opinions, as well as an appended additional

sheet where respondents were invited to write about any aspects of their ITE that they wished. The quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed using the statistical analysis package SPSS and the additional comments were hand-analysed. The procedure employed for administration of the questionnaire was non-probability volunteer sampling and as such the participants were self-selecting. The findings from Phase One shaped the structure of the next phase of the research.

Figure III: Research Methodology



Phase Two consisted of four guided discussion groups with questionnaire respondents who indicated a willingness to participate further in the study. Although the participants were self-selecting quota sampling was employed to ensure that certain sub-groups of the population were adequately represented and that the participants chosen were the best available to provide data on the issues being researched. The qualitative data from the guided discussion groups was hand-analysed and coded for emerging themes. The

focus groups were designed to be interactive in nature and their experiential aspect yielded rich data.

Overall the two-phase approach allowed the researcher to gain a broader perspective on the student teachers' perceptions and opinions of their ITE experience. Rather than a single method providing insight into the phenomena, the combined multi-method approach served to illuminate the perceptions, experiences and opinions of student teachers immediately following their two major Teaching Practice placements and gave the researcher the opportunity to probe more deeply issues arising as the data emerged. This approach also provided the opportunity to triangulate emerging data and thus increase confidence in the findings. Throughout the project the researcher was particularly sensitive to the ethical dimensions of the methodology employed and the research was presented to the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee on two occasions.

Chapter Five: Findings

Demographic profile

The cohorts

Strand One of Phase One of this research comprised two cohorts of Year Two Teacher Education students. The first study cohort, Cohort 2A included 81.1% of the total population of one hundred and twenty-seven students in the year group 2002/2003 (n=103). The second study group, Cohort 2B was made up of 76.6% of the total population of one hundred and ninety-eight student teachers from the year group 2003/2004 (n=151).

For Strand Two, both complete year cohorts were surveyed in their final year of study. Cohort 2A was now in Year Four and this group, Cohort 4A, consisted of 81.5% of the total population of one hundred and thirty student teachers in 2004/2005 (n=106). Similarly Cohort 2B was surveyed again in Year Four and this group, Cohort 4B, comprised 78.2% of the total population of one hundred and ninety-three students for the academic year 2005/2006 (n=151).

Table X: Percentage of overall population in each study cohort

	POPULATION SIZE	STUDY COHORT SIZE	STUDY AS PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL POPULATION
Cohort 2A	n = 127	n = 103	81.1%
Cohort 2B	n = 198	n = 151	76.2%
Cohort 4A	n = 130	n = 106	81.5%
Cohort 4B	n = 193	n = 151	78.2%

Table XI: Gender breakdown of study cohorts compared with overall population

	POPULATION GENDER BREAKDOWN		STUDY COHORT GENDER BREAKDOWN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Cohort 2A	56.7%	43.3%	59.2%	40.8%
Cohort 2B	64.7%	35.4%	66.2%	33.8%
Cohort 4A	55.4%	44.6%	55.7%	44.3%
Cohort 4B	64.8%	35.2%	63.6%	36.4%

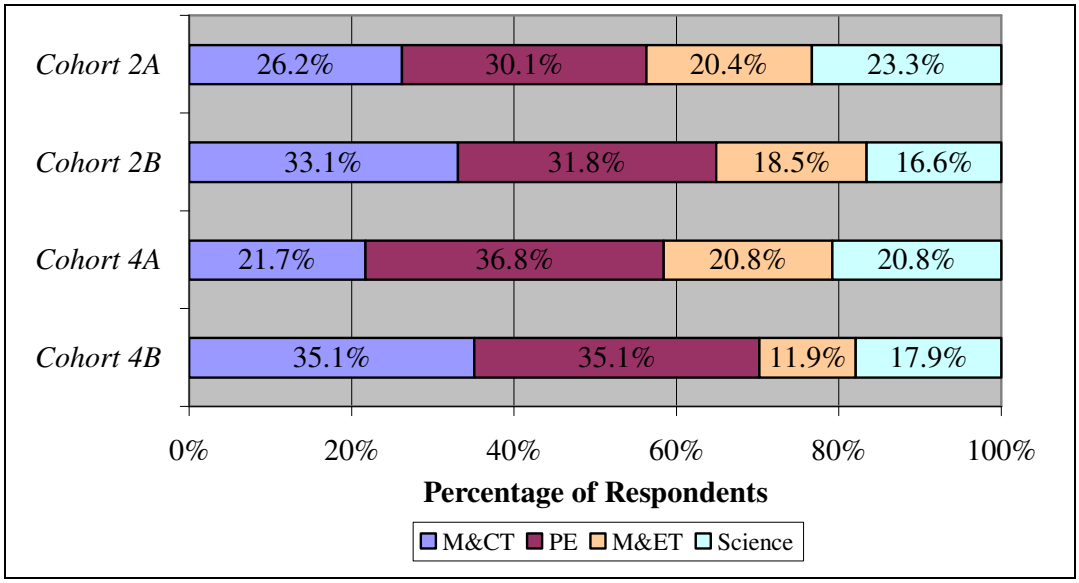
Gender

As illustrated in Table XI on the previous page, the gender stratification of the respondents in each study cohort at both times of testing was illustrative of the gender breakdown of the overall student teacher populations from which the study groups were drawn. From the gender stratifications it is also evident that each study cohort and year group was comprised of a greater percentage of males than females.

Respondents' course of study

At both times of testing, student teachers from all four programmes participated in this study. Within Cohort 2A, 26.2% (n=27) of the student teachers were studying Materials and Construction Technology (M&CT), 30.1% (n=31) Physical Education (PE), 20.4% (n= 21) Materials and Engineering Technology (M&ET) and 23.3% (n=24) Science Education (Science). Within Cohort 2B, 33.1% (n=50) of the participants were studying M&CT, 31.8% (n=48) PE, 18.5% (n=28) M&ET and 16.6% (n=25) Science. Similarly in Year Four, within Cohort 4A, 21.7% (n=23) of the participants were studying M&CT, 36.8% (n=39) PE, 20.8% (n=22) M&ET and 20.8% (n=22) Science. Again in Cohort 4B, 35.1% (n=53) of the participants were studying M&CT, 35.1% (n=53) PE, 11.9% (n=18) M&ET and 17.9% (n=27) Science.

Figure IV: Percentage of respondents enrolled per Teacher Education programme



When these distributions are compared to the course of study breakdown of the overall year groups from which participants volunteered, it was observed that in all cases, the distribution of participants was largely reflective of the overall constitution of the

student population undertaking each of the programmes (please see Appendix R Table I for complete course of study breakdown within the overall populations).

Gender and course of study

Analysis highlighted an association between gender and course of study for both cohorts at both times of testing, which revealed that males accounted for a much larger percentages of the students enrolled in both M&CT and M&ET than females.

Table XII: Percentages of males & females enrolled in each programme

	Cohort 2A		*Cohort 2B*		*Cohort 4A*		*Cohort 4B*	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
M&CT	**85.2%**	**14.8%**	**96.1%**	**3.9%**	**82.6%**	**17.4%**	**90.6%**	**9.4%**
PE	**41.9%**	**58.1%**	**36.2%**	**63.8%**	**33.3%**	**66.7%**	**43.4%**	**56.6%**
M&ET	**85.7%**	**14.3%**	**96.4%**	**3.6%**	**90.9%**	**9.1%**	**94.4%**	**5.6%**
SCIENCE	**29.2%**	**70.8%**	**32.0%**	**68.0%**	**31.8%**	**68.2%**	**29.6%**	**70.4%**

As can be seen from the table above, in each study group, over 82.6% of M&CT students and over 85.7% of M&ET students were male. In PE and Science the gender breakdown was less polarised with approximately one-third males and two-thirds females. The strength of this association between gender and course of study was relatively strong, as for all data sets V[11]> .507 (2A =.507, 2B =.653, 4A =.539, 4B =.557, p<.01) [12].

Course of study and Lucent School

For all cohorts except Cohort 4B a number of student teachers undertook their Teaching Practice (TP) in schools that were classified as *Lucent schools.* These were schools where specially trained mentor teachers worked with and supported the students during their TP. No students from Cohort 4B (the last cohort surveyed) were placed in Lucent schools as the Lucent Mentoring Programme had ceased during the previous academic

[11] *V* represents Cramer's V. This is a measure of association between two variables, using Chi-Square that ranges from 0-1, 0 indicating no association and 1 equalling a perfect relationship. Cramer's V is not affected by the size of the table. Cramer's V is utilised because the variables being analysed are nominal level data.

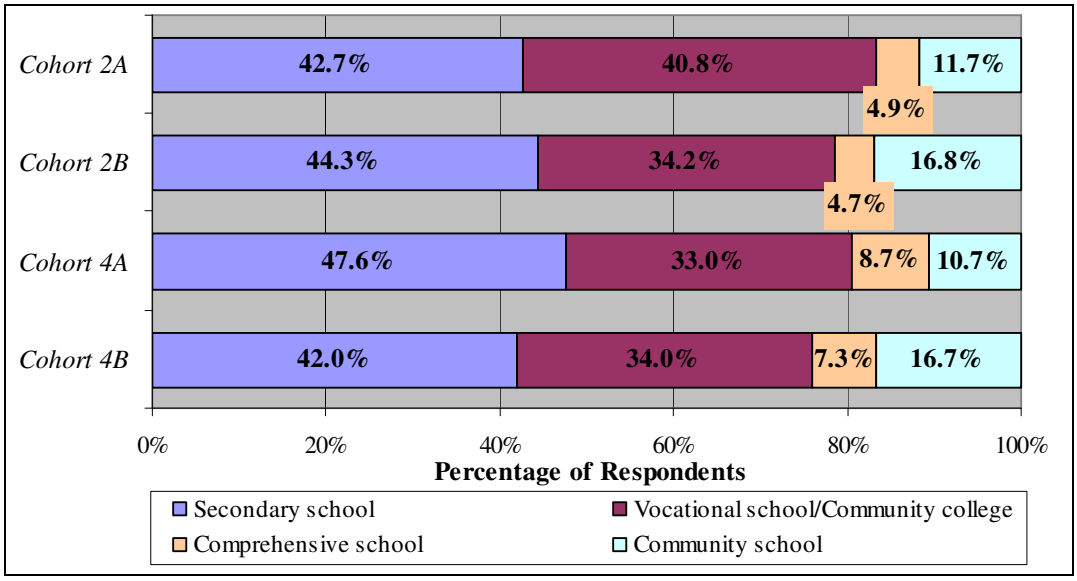
[12] Because the present study does not use randomly sampled data, significance tests are not appropriate for inferential analysis. However, significance is reported here as an arbitrary criterion in deference to its widespread use in social science for exploratory analysis of non-random data.

year. Within the other study cohorts however, a strong relationship emerged between course of study and attending a Lucent school, as only Science students completed their teaching practice in Lucent schools (2A, *V*=.526, 2B, *V*=.533, 4A, *V*=.595, p=.000).

Teaching practice schools – sector and status

The post-primary school sector comprises 55% secondary schools, 31.5% vocational schools / community colleges, 3.5% comprehensive schools and 10% community schools and all four different school types, as categorised by the Department of Education and Science (DES) were included in the questionnaire (DES, 2005(a): iii). It was found that student teachers carried out their teaching practices in all four school sectors, but due to the practical nature of the subjects being taught, a larger proportion of students in both study groups selected to undertake their TP in schools / colleges other than secondary schools. Nonetheless as seen in Figure V below, the national distribution of school types was reflected in the overall school placements selected by the students.

Figure V: Percentage breakdown of types of school attended on TP



While females showed a preference for undertaking TP in secondary schools, between sixty-five and eighty per cent of student teachers who went to vocational schools were male. It is not surprising that when school sector was analysed in relation to course of study, it was found that an average of sixty per cent of Materials and Engineering students choose vocational schools for TP as did approximately forty per cent of Materials and Construction students.

The participants were also asked if their TP schools were designated disadvantaged schools. In Year Two, 22.3% of Cohort 2A (n=23) and 24.8% of Cohort 2B (n=37) stated that their TP school was designated disadvantaged. This was found to be largely representative of the national distribution of schools where 28% are designated disadvantaged (DES, 2005(b): 14). In Year Four however, the percentage of students who selected to undertake their final TP in a disadvantaged school was much reduced with 16.5% of Cohort 4A (n=17) and 17.0% of Cohort 4B (n=25) choosing such schools. It must be noted that the selection of schools for teaching practice is not made by the University but by student teachers themselves and is therefore reflective of the students' own personal choices regarding the type of school in which they wish to complete their teaching experience. On further analysis it was observed that at both times of testing a lower percentage of females than males choose to attend designated disadvantaged schools and this was particularly evident at Year Two.

Academic achievement / level of educational attainment

To aid in the interrogation of the results from the questionnaire a comprehensive picture of the each respondent's level of academic achievement was sought. Three educational measurements were examined for the participants in Phase One, namely Teaching Practice grade, the grade awarded in educational studies and Quality Credit Average (QCA). The grades analysed for each of these measures were taken at the chronologically appropriate time, i.e. the end of Semester Four and Semester Seven, as these were the semesters in which Teaching Practice occurred.

Teaching Practice grades

When the grades for Year Two TP were examined, the grade obtained by the highest percentage of Cohort 2A at 26.2% was a B_1 (n=27) and the median grade was a B_2 with a semi-interquartile range of 1.00 (median = 4.00). Within Cohort 2B the grade obtained by the highest percentage of the cohort was also a B_1, with 19.9% of the cohort receiving this grade (n=30). The median grade here also was a B_2 with a semi-interquartile range of 1.50, so a greater spread around the median was evident (median=4.00).

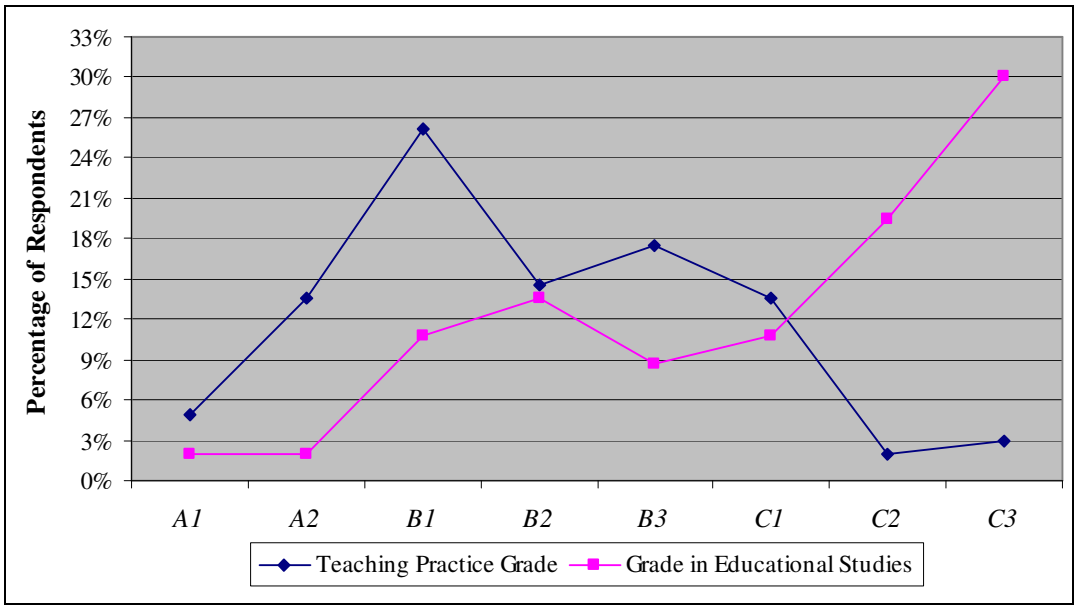
An analysis of the grades awarded for Year Four TP revealed that the grade obtained by the highest percentage of Cohort 4A (25.5%) was an A_2 (n=27), while the median grade was a B_1 (median = 3.00) with a semi-interquartile range of 1.00. For Cohort 4B the

median grade was also found to be a B_1 (median=3.00) with a semi-interquartile range of 1.00 and this was also the grade obtained by the highest percentage of the cohort at 33.1% (n=50). See Appendix R Table II for the exact breakdown of teaching practice grades obtained by each cohort.

Grades awarded for educational studies

In relation to the educational achievement of Year Two students, the grades awarded in educational studies at the end of Semester Four were analysed. Within Cohort 2A the median grade was C_2 with a semi-interquartile range of 2.00 and therefore a varied spread of grades around the median was evident (median=7.00). In this case the grade received by the highest percentage of the study cohort was C_3 (30.1%, n=31). For Cohort 2B the median grade was B_1 (median=3.00) with a semi-interquartile range of 1.00. This was also the grade received by the highest percentage of this study cohort at 31.8% (n=48).

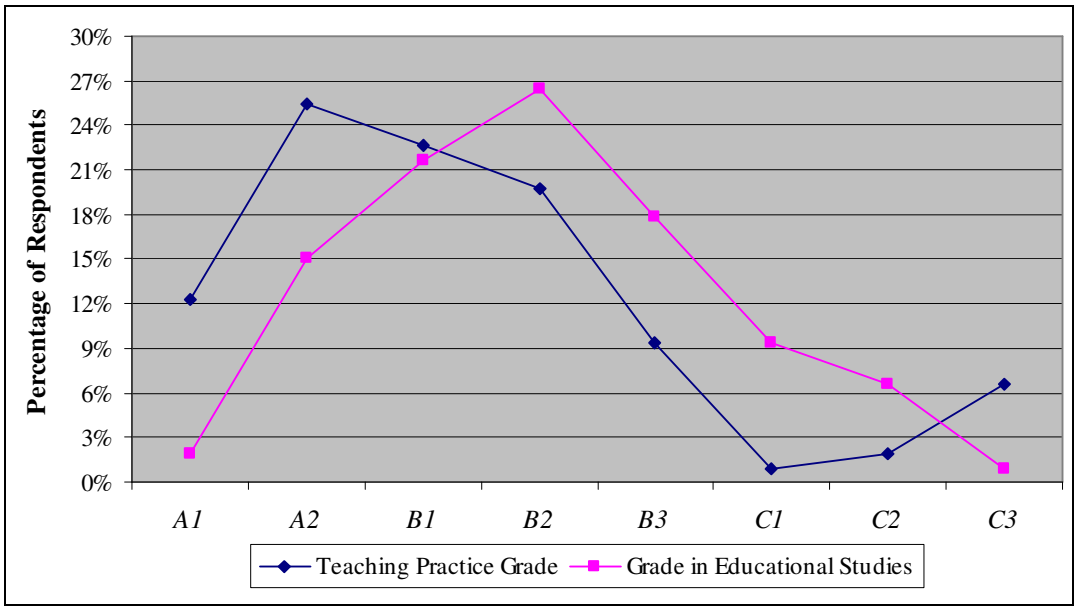
Figure VI: Distribution of grades for TP and in educational studies – Cohort 2A



Within Strand Two of the research the grades received by Year Four students in educational studies at the end of Semester Seven were analysed. For Cohort 4A the median grade was a B_2 with a semi-interquartile range of 1.00 and therefore a similar variation of grades spread around the median was evident (median=4.00). In this case the grade received by the highest percentage of the study cohort was a B_2 at 26.4% (n=28). Within Cohort 4B the median grade was also a B_2 with a semi-interquartile

range of 1.00. 25.2% of the cohort received this grade and the exact same percentage received a B_3 (n=38) (median=4.00). See Appendix R Table III for the exact breakdown of grades in educational studies awarded to each cohort at both times of testing.

Figure VII: Distribution of grades for TP and in educational studies – Cohort 4A



The figures above amalgamate the attainment in both educational studies and teaching practice for Cohorts 2A and 4A respectively.

Grade in educational studies and TP grade

At Year Four a low association between the grade awarded for educational studies and TP was observed within both cohorts. In Cohort 4A, 30.8% of those awarded an A_1 grade for TP (n=4) and 22.2% of those awarded an A_2 grade for TP (n=6) received an A grade in their educational studies. No student who received a B_3 grade or lower for TP was awarded higher than a B grade for their educational studies (r_s[13]=.264, p=.006).

In Cohort 4B, 35.3% (n=6) of those awarded an A_1 grade for TP and 19.4% of those awarded an A_2 grade for TP (n=7) received an A grade in their educational studies. No student who received a grade in the C range for teaching practice was awarded higher

[13] r_s refers to Spearman's rho, which is a measure of the relationship for ordinal data such as grades received for TP and Educational studies. The variables discussed previously were all nominal and this is why Cramer's V could only be utilised. Spearman's rho provides more information about the relationship between variables than Cramer's V. It is similar to Pearson's r in that the direction of the relationship between variables (0.0 indicative of no relationship and a + 1.0 or –1.0 indicating either a perfect positive or negative relationship) can be found.

than a B grade for their educational studies and were predominately also awarded grades within the C category for educational studies (r_s=.264, p=.004).

Figure VIII: Grade awarded for educational studies and TP grade – Cohort 4A

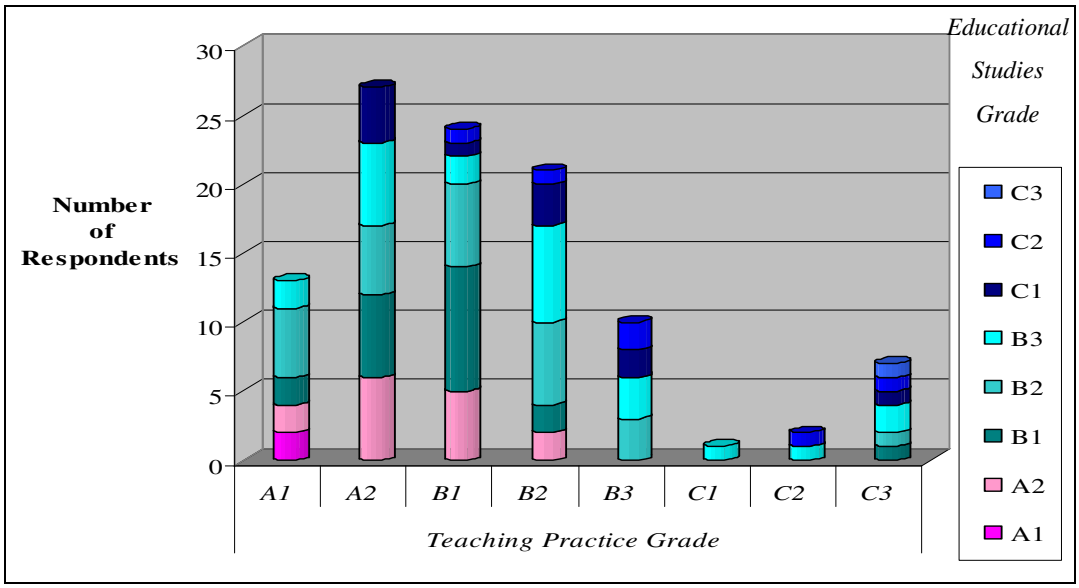
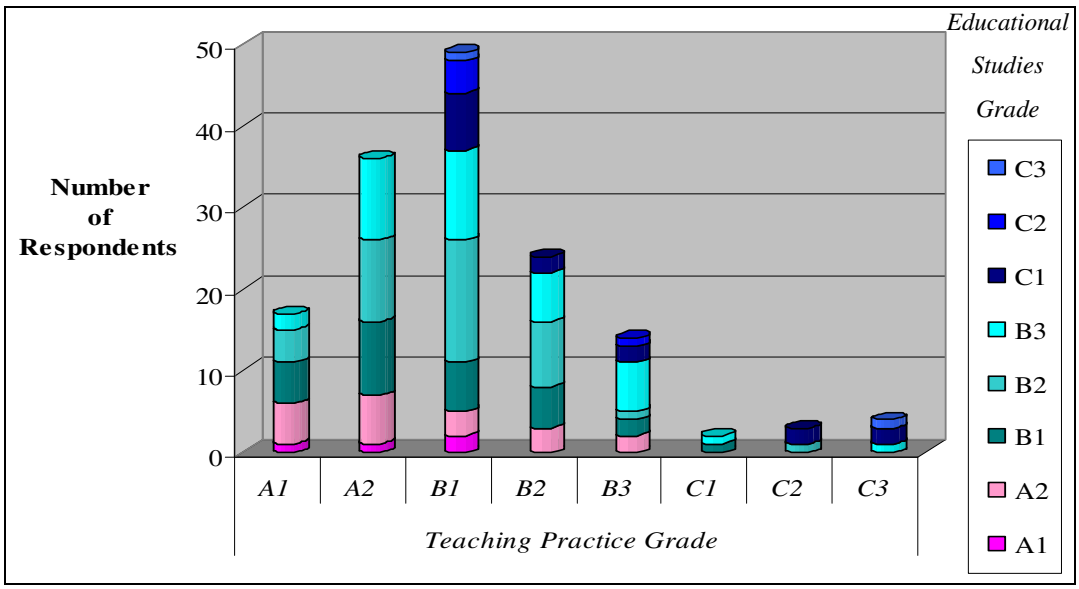


Figure IX: Grade awarded for educational studies and TP grade – Cohort 4B



It must be noted that their educational studies during the particular semesters where educational measures were gathered were not classroom-based but rather were focused on reflective practice, educational policy, curriculum and professionalism. Therefore credit gained in educational studies was not the same as for TP, as the aspects assessed within modules differed significantly.

Gender and TP grade

With Cohort A, a relationship between gender and TP grade was observed at both Year Two and Four. This highlighted that female students received higher grades than their male counterparts. At Year Two, 24.4% of females (n=10) compared with 15.8% of males (n=9) received an A grade for TP, but 26.86% of females (n=11) proportionate to 45.6% of males (n=26) received a grade ranging from B_3 to C_3. Correspondingly, at Year Four, 46.8% of females (n=22) compared with 31.7% of males (n=19) received an A grade for TP, but 12.8% of females (n=6) relative to 25.0% of males (n=15) were awarded a grade in the B_3 to C_3 range.

The strength of association was moderate at Year Two but was observed to be stronger at Year Four (Cohort 2A V=.273, Cohort 4A V=.401, p<.05). See Appendix R Figures I and II for the corresponding graphs. Within Cohort B the findings showed close similarity, as in this cohort too, male students were found to have been awarded proportionately more grades in the lower range than their female counterparts.

Gender and grade in educational studies

With respect to grades received for educational studies, a moderate association was also observed with gender, but in this case was evident for both cohorts at both times of testing. This highlighted that in relation to educational studies, again male student teachers achieved a greater percentage of the grades in the lower range than females.

At Year Two, within Cohort A, no male student but 9.5% (n=4) of female students attained an A grade, but 78.7% of males (n=48) compared with to 61.0% of females (n=26) were awarded grades in the B_3 to C_3 range. Similarly within Cohort 2B, 14.9% of males (n=15) were awarded an A grade, but double that percentage of females scored the same grade (32.0%, n=16). 29.7% of male students (n=30) however achieved a grade in the B_3 to C_3 range, whereas a lesser proportion of females at 16.0% (n=28) attained a grade lower than a B_2 (Cohort 2A V=.335, Cohort 2B V=.298, p<.05).

Correspondingly at Year Four within Cohort 4A, 10.2% (n=6) of the male student teachers compared with 25.5% (n=12) of their female counterparts received an A grade. While 45.8% of males (n=27) were awarded grades ranging from B_3 to C_3, less than half that percentage at 21.3% of females (n=10) attained grades in that range. Also in Cohort 4B, while 13.5% (n=13) of male students received an A grade, 18.2% (n=10) of their

female counterparts obtained an A grade. 68.1% of males (n=47) however, compared with 29.1% of females (n=16) were awarded grades ranging from B_3 to C_3 (Cohort 4A, *V*=.367, Cohort 4B, *V*=.265, p<.05). See Appendix R Figures III to VI for the graphical representation of these findings for all four cohorts.

TP school type and TP grade

For Cohort A at both times of testing an association between the TP grade awarded to students and the type of school in which they completed their teaching practice was detected. At Year Two, as can be seen from the first graph overleaf, while a percentage of students who attended all four school types were seen to received a C_1 grade for TP, only students who completed their TP in vocational schools were awarded C_2 or C_3 grades. It is also noteworthy that while the same number of students went to both secondary and vocational schools, only 4.8% (n=2) of those who attended secondary schools received a C grade but 27.5% (n=11) of those who completed TP in vocational schools/community colleges were awarded grades in this range. The association between these variables was medium in strength (*V*=.310, p=.034).

Again at Year Four a relationship between school attended for TP and grade awarded was exhibited. This association highlighted that while students in all schools received A grades, students who attended secondary schools received the largest percentage of A grades overall (51% n=25), with between thirty and forty percent of community and comprehensive school attendees receiving an A grade and the lowest percentage of A grades going to those who when to vocational schools (17% n=6). Only 4% (n=2) of those who went to secondary schools were awarded C grades for TP but 18% (n=6) of those who completed their TP in vocational schools/community colleges received C grades. This was a moderate association (*V*=.356, p=.026).

It is clear from these findings that students who went to vocational schools/community colleges received the lowest grades overall and when we examine the gender breakdown of vocational school attendees, it is evident that 65 to 80 per cent of student teachers who went to these schools were males, as females predominately choose secondary schools for their teaching practices. Similarly when vocational school attendance was analysed in relation to course of study, it was found that between 60 and 70 per cent of Materials & Engineering students choose vocational schools for their teaching practices, as did approximately 40 per cent of Materials & Construction students.

Figure X: TP School and TP grade – Cohort 2A

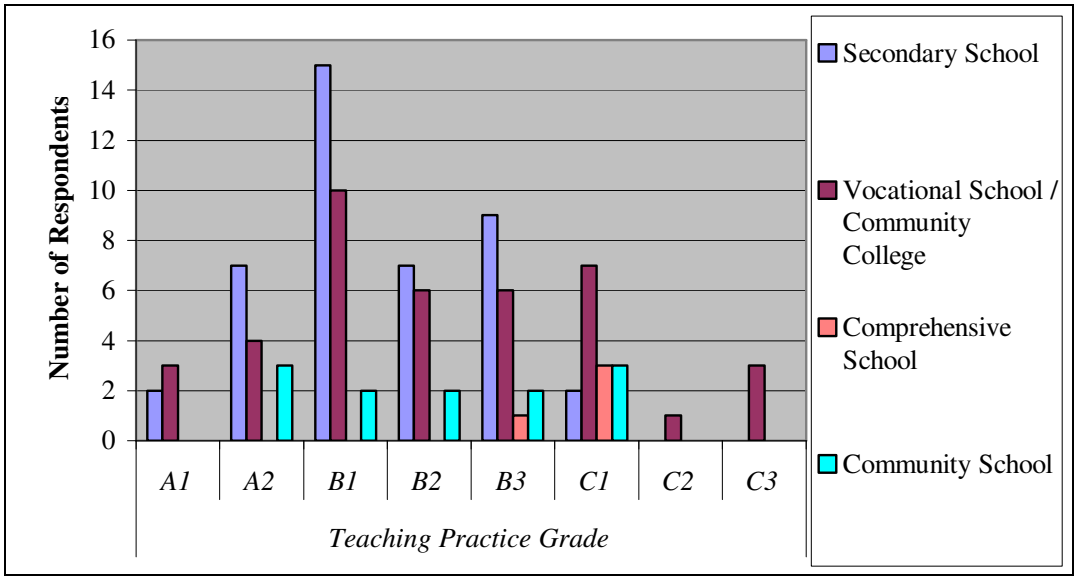
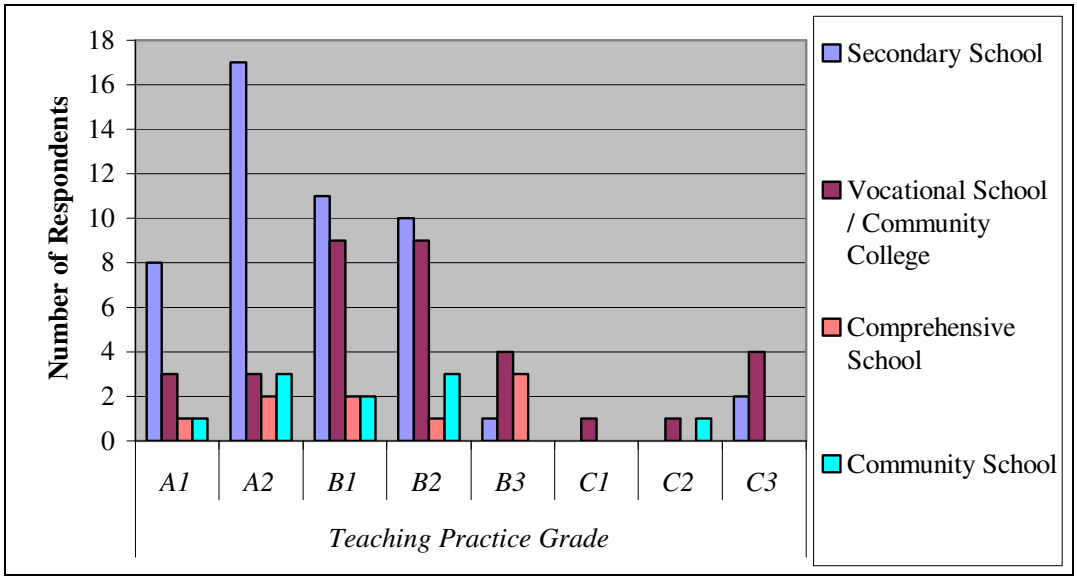


Figure XI: TP School and TP grade – Cohort 4A



QCA

As QCA is a continuous scale variable it was necessary to analyse the distribution of the data received prior to performing any further analysis with this data. Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test the probability of the data set being normally distributed was calculated. The higher the probability (P>0.05) the closer the data are to normal distribution. P (denoted Sig. in Table XIII) was found to be 0.2 for both cohorts at each time of testing; therefore all data sets are normally distributed. This conclusion is supported by the normal probability plots (see Appendix R Figures VII -X) as the data

points are evenly distributed along the diagonal line, a dispersal pattern indicative of normally distributed data.

Table XIII: Normality Test QCA – All cohorts

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	**Df**	**Sig.**
QCA Cohort 2A	**.035**	**103**	**.200**
QCA Cohort 2B	**.047**	**151**	**.200**
QCA Cohort 4A	**.067**	**106**	**.200**
QCA Cohort 4B	**.065**	**151**	**.200**

For Strand One the mean QCA of the respondents from Cohort 2A was found to be 2.99 with a standard deviation of 0.289 and within Cohort 2B a mean QCA of 2.92 was observed with a standard deviation of 0.283. For Strand Two the mean QCA of the respondents from Cohort 4A was found to be 3.10 with a standard deviation of 0.326 and within Cohort 4B a mean QCA of 3.04 was observed with a standard deviation of 0.293. As the distribution of QCA in all cases was found to be normal, these sample means can be used as estimates for the entire populations and tests based on normal distribution can be employed. The histograms of QCA distribution of all cohorts can be found in Appendix R Figures XI-XIV.

Course of study and QCA

When the QCA of respondents was examined in relation to their course of study, a difference in the mean QCA of student teachers pursuing the four different teacher education programmes was observed and further analysis highlighted a strong association between course of study and QCA in all four data sets.

At Year Two as can be seen from the first graph overleaf, Materials and Construction students displayed the highest mean QCA of 3.19 for Cohort 2A and 3.01 for Cohort 2B, PE the second highest mean QCA, Materials and Engineering the second lowest and Science the lowest mean QCA of 2.81 for Cohort 2A and 2.70 for Cohort 2B (V=.840 for Cohort 2A, V=.741 for Cohort 2B, p=.000).

Figure XII: Mean QCA and course of study – Year Two

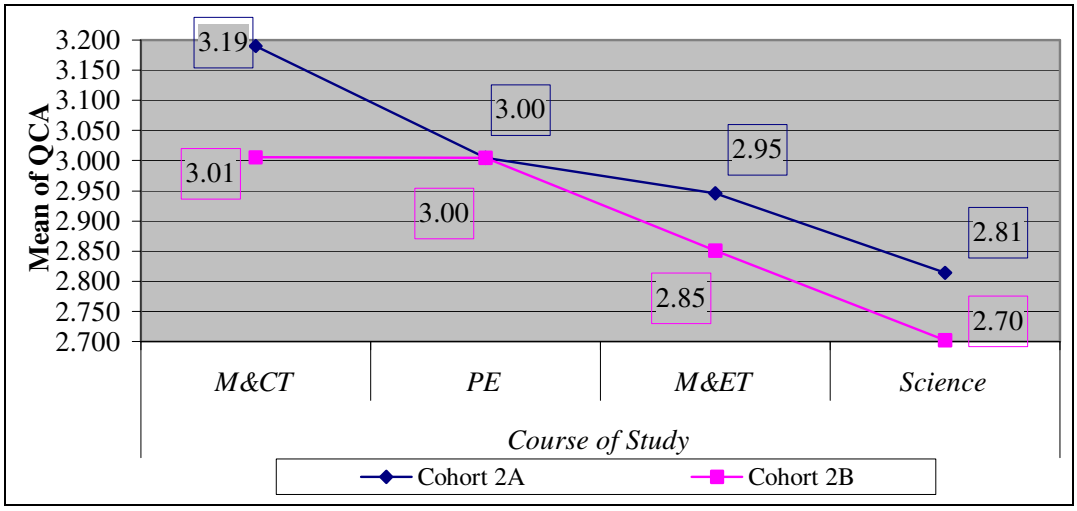
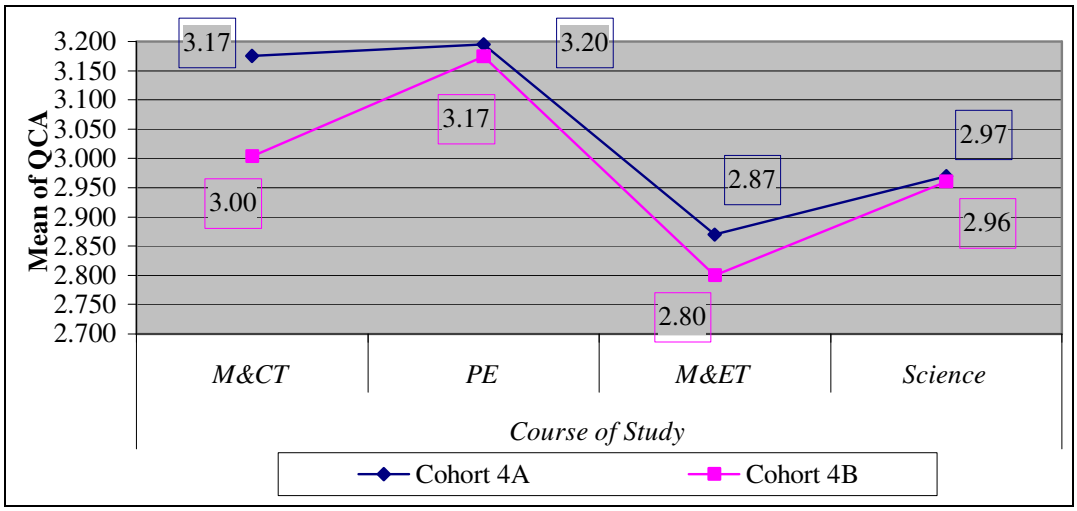


Figure XIII: Mean QCA and course of study – Year Four



At Year Four a difference between in the mean QCA for the four teacher education programmes was also observed, but as is evident in Figure XIII above, the pattern had changed somewhat from Year Two. Within Strand Two, PE student teachers now showed the highest mean QCA of 3.20 for Cohort 4A and 3.17 for Cohort 4B and M&CT the second highest mean QCA. Science Education students now had the second lowest mean QCA and M&ET the lowest, with QCA means of 2.87 for Cohort 4A and 2.80 for Cohort 4B (Cohort 4A V=.780, Cohort 4B V=.776, p<.01). What is most noteworthy about these results is that while Science and PE students show an increase in QCA from Year Two to Four, the mean QCA of both M&CT and M&ET students have remained mainly stagnant and even dropped in some cases. This finding was further amplified when the QCA scores were analysed in relation to gender. This

analysis highlighted that while males exhibited the highest mean QCA in both cohorts at Year Two the reverse was evident at Year Four where female students displayed the highest mean QCA.

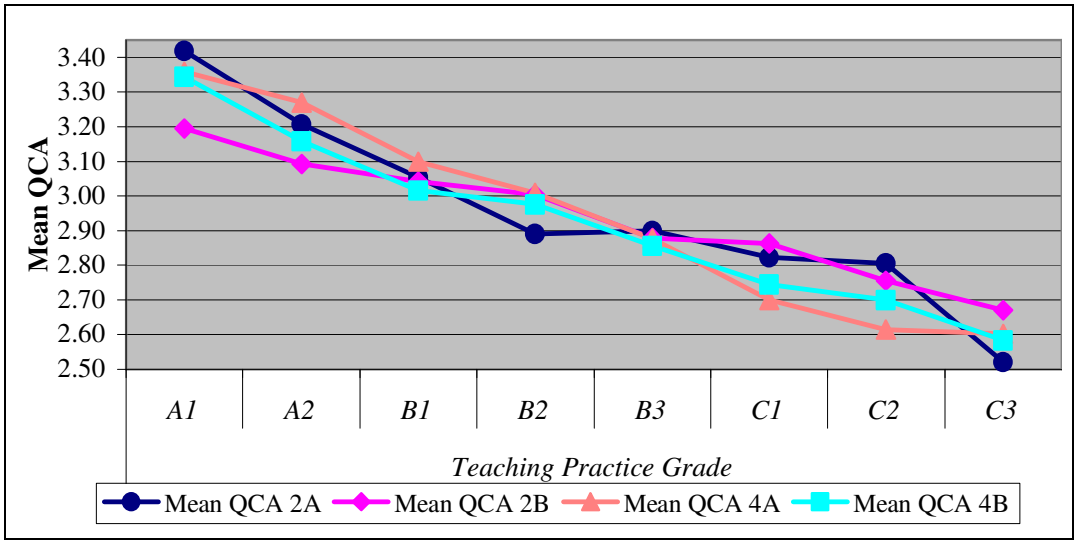
Table XIV: Mean QCA and gender – All cohorts

	Mean QCA			
	Cohort 2A	***Cohort 2B***	***Cohort 4A***	***Cohort4B***
Male	3.0008	2.9447	3.0508	3.0355
Female	2.9900	2.889	3.1515	3.0596

Teaching practice grade and QCA

Within both study groups at Year Two and Four a moderate relationship between the grade respondents were awarded for their teaching practice and their QCA was identified. When we examine the mean QCA of students who received each TP grade, irrespective of the year of study, students who had higher TP grades as compared with other students generally had higher QCA rankings and those with lower TP grades had lower QCAs than those with high TP grades (Cohort 2A r_s=-.508, Cohort 2B r_s=-.495, Cohort 4A r_s=-.580, Cohort 4B r_s=-.51, p=.000).

Figure XIV: Teaching Practice grade and QCA – All cohorts



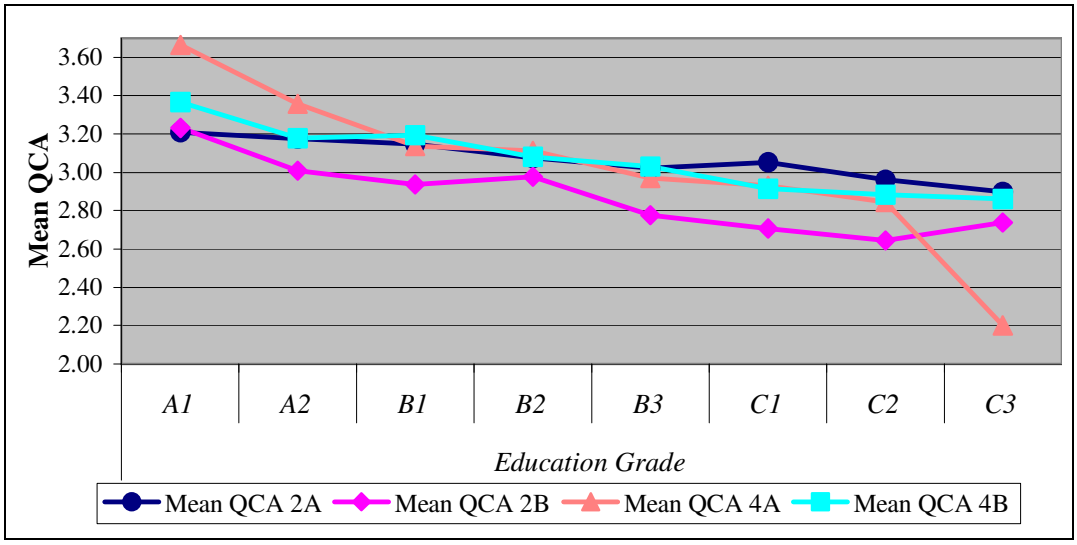
It is noteworthy however that the teaching practice module is doubly weighted at Year Two and three times weighted at Year Four, meaning that this module is worth double

or triple the marks of any other module studied. Consequently it is not surprising that TP grade had an effect on student teachers' overall QCA.

Educational studies grade and QCA

Grade awarded for educational studies also exhibited a relationship with QCA for all study cohorts. Again here what analysis of the mean QCA against educational studies grade illuminated was that student teachers who were awarded higher grades in their education studies generally had higher QCAs when compared to students with lower grades in educational studies, who in the main exhibited lower QCAs. It must be noted that the modules in educational studies, which students undertook, have a single weighting only and therefore their effect on QCA would not be as strong as that of the doubly weighted TP grade. This is mind, the association between grade in educational studies and QCA although weak at Year Two (r_s=-.259 for Cohort 2A, r_s=-.392 for Cohort 2B, p<.001) increased in strength at Year Four, where the relationship was moderate (r_s=-.485 for Cohort 4A, r_s=-.439 for Cohort 4B, p=.000).

Figure XV: Grade awarded for educational studies and QCA – All cohorts



Summary of findings

At each time of testing over three quarters of the year groups from which the study cohorts emerged were surveyed. Therefore a very high response rate (76%-81%) was achieved, which was all the more pointed given the fact that the respondents in the study cohorts were self-selecting. The fact that such a large percentage of the overall

year cohorts involved were surveyed had an impact of both the analysis and credibility of the findings.

Both the overall year groups and the study cohorts had disproportionately more males than females, with on average a 60:40 divide indicating the unique nature of the teacher education programmes at UL and of this research at a time when both the teaching profession and the third-level population are becoming increasingly feminised. This gender divide was most evident in relation to particular programmes namely Materials and Construction Technology and Materials and Engineering Technology, reflecting prevailing attitudes to typically male subjects.

Although the national distribution of school types was largely replicated in the overall school placements selected by the students at each time of testing, the practical nature of the subjects being taught was reflected in a larger proportion of students in all study groups selecting to undertake their TP in schools / colleges other than secondary schools than the national distribution of schools might suggest. While a quarter of Year Two respondents selected disadvantaged schools for TP, there was a reduction in the number of students selecting disadvantaged schools by Year Four. At both times of testing, a lower percentage of females than males chose to attend designated disadvantaged schools and this was particularly evident at Year Two.

Between 65 and 80 per cent of student teachers who attended vocational schools were males, while females predominately chose secondary schools for their teaching practices; between 60 and 70 per cent of Materials and Engineering students in each cohort chose vocational schools for their teaching practices closely followed by approximately 40 per cent of Materials and Construction student teachers.

The TP grade received by students increased from a B_2 to a B_1 average from Year Two to Year Four in both cohorts. The educational studies grade changed from an average C_2 to B_2 in Cohort A and B_1 to B_2 in Cohort B. In general, students achieved higher grades on practicum than in educational studies and while improvements were evident in all areas over the course of their undergraduate programme, the increase in their TP grades was greater than that for their educational studies. Typically students who did well in educational studies achieved high grades on TP.

A greater proportion of female students achieved A grades in both TP and educational studies than males, while far fewer females achieved the lower range of grades (B_3 to C_3) than males. Student teachers who selected vocational schools for TP did less well than their colleagues, and 65 to 85 per cent of the students teaching in these schools on TP were male.

Both cohorts showed an overall increase in educational attainment over the course of their pre-service programme, as the mean QCA of student teachers in Cohort A moved from 2.99 to 3.10 and in Cohort B moved from a 2.92 to 3.04 average from Year Two to Year Four. Although males exhibited the highest mean QCA at Year Two, it was females as a group who demonstrated the highest QCA at Year Four. While PE and Science students illustrated improvements in QCA from Year Two to Four, there was no positive change in the QCA of M&CT students or M&ET students from Year Two to Year Four. The predominantly male population in Materials and Construction however, achieved much higher QCAs than their peers in Materials and Engineering at both times of testing.

Student teachers' perceptions of planning and reflective practices

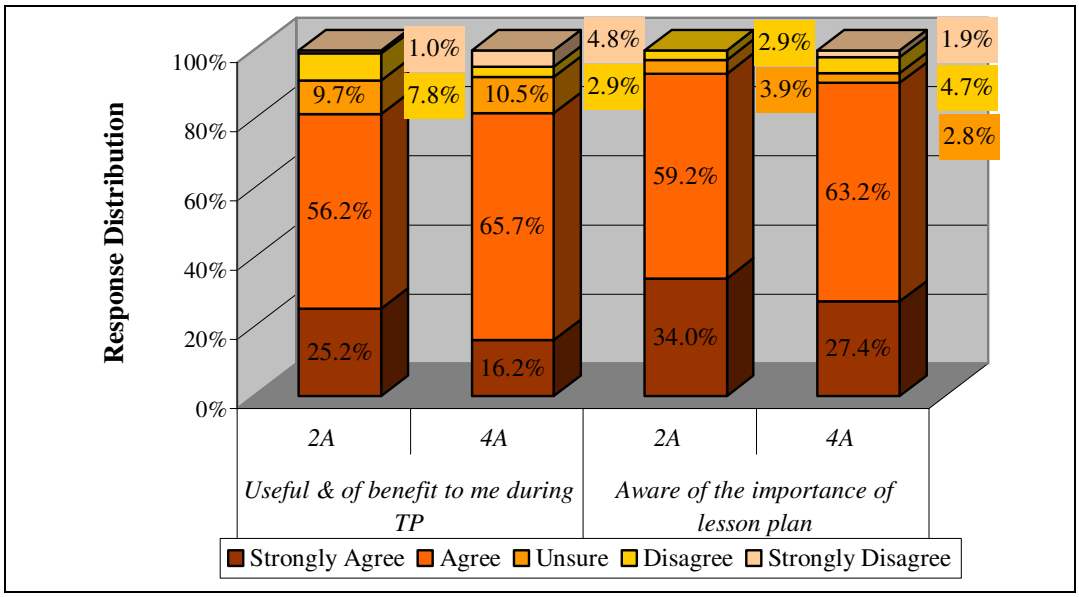
Introduction

In order to gain as holistic a view as possible of the student teachers' perceptions of the different planning and reflective elements of their pre-service programme, the respondents were asked their opinions of reflective practice in general and specifically their use of lesson plans, post lesson appraisals (PLAs) and weekly observations.

Lesson plans

Participants in each cohort were asked to respond to three statements regarding lesson plans, two of which were positive and one negative.[14] The findings revealed that at each time of testing, respondents expressed overall agreement with the first statement with 81.6% (n=84) of respondents in Cohort 2A and a lower percentage (68.2%) of Cohort 2B (n=103) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they found lesson plans useful and of benefit during TP. Similarly 81.9% (n=86) of respondents in Cohort 4A and a lower percentage (67.6%) of Cohort 4B (n=102) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure XVI: Perceptions of lesson plans 1 – Cohort A



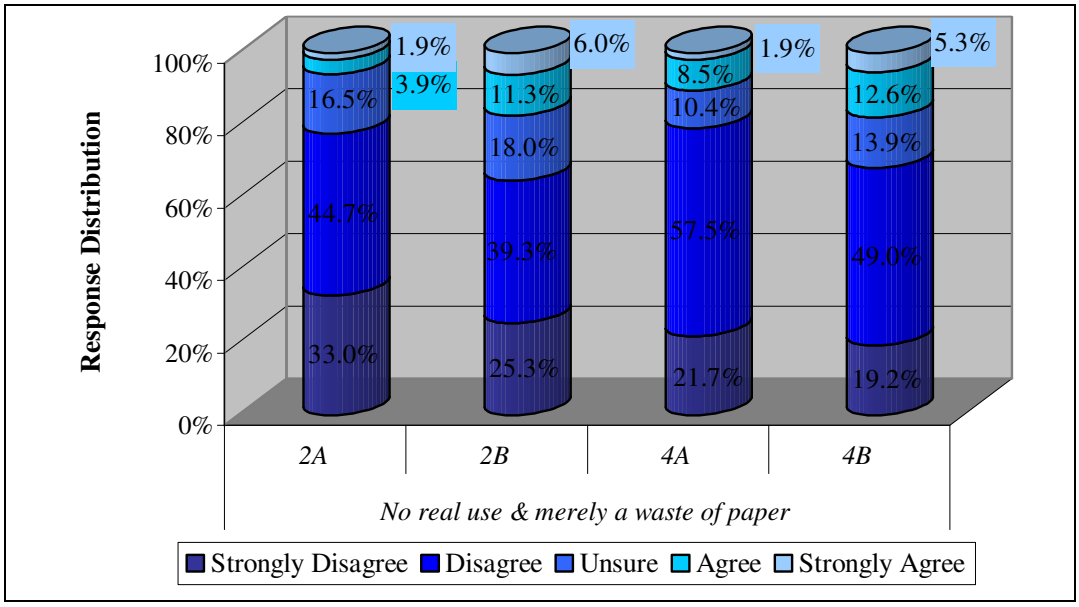
The intensity of agreement with the first statement was higher within Cohort A in both Year Two and Four. The exact breakdown of the corresponding results for Cohort B in both strands can be found in Appendix S Figure I.

[14] Statement 1: I found lesson plans useful and of benefit to me during Teaching Practice
Statement 2: I was aware of the importance of a lesson plan
Statement 3: Lesson plans were no real use and were merely a waste of paper

The second statement also elicited a very positive response from both cohorts within Strand One and Strand Two. 93.2% of respondents within Cohort 2A agreed that they were aware of the importance of lesson plans (34.0% strongly agreed (n=35) and 59.2% agreed (n=61)), while within Cohort 2B 82.8% indicated agreement (strongly agree 26.5% (n=40) agree 56.3% (n=85)) with the statement. When invited to respond to the same statement in Year Four, 90.6% of Cohort 4A agreed (27.4% strongly agreed (n=29) 63.2% agreed (n=67)) and within Cohort 4B 83.9% agreed (strongly agreed 23.5% (n=35) and agreed 60.4% (n=85)).

When posed with a reverse order value statement, which was included in the questionnaire to test the consistency of the findings of the positive statements above, as can be seen from Figure XVII below, participants in both strands rejected the assertion that lesson plans were of 'no real use and were merely a waste of paper'. Within Strand One, 77.7% of Cohort 2A (n=80) and 64.6% of Cohort 2B (n=97) rejected the statement. In their final year of study, 79.2% of Cohort 4A (n=84) and 68.2% of Cohort 4B (n=103) also rejected this statement.

Figure XVII: Perceptions of lesson plans 2 – All cohorts



Although the intensity of disagreement was consistently higher within Cohort A at both Year Two and Four, the level of disagreement had nonetheless increased in both cohorts at the second time of testing.

TP grade and opinion of lesson plans

At Year Two, within Cohort 2B, a low association was observed with the statement "I found lesson plans useful and of benefit", as student teachers with higher TP grades as generally showed greater levels of agreement with this statement. 100% of those who received an A_1 (n=4) and 82.4% of those who were awarded and A_2 (n=14) were found to agree or strongly agree that they found lesson plans useful and of benefit, but this percentage decreased to 30.0% and 37.5% of those who attained a C_2 or C_3 (n=3). In general, as the grade awarded decreased, the frequency of student teachers who disagreed or strongly disagreed intensified (r_s=.354, p=.032).

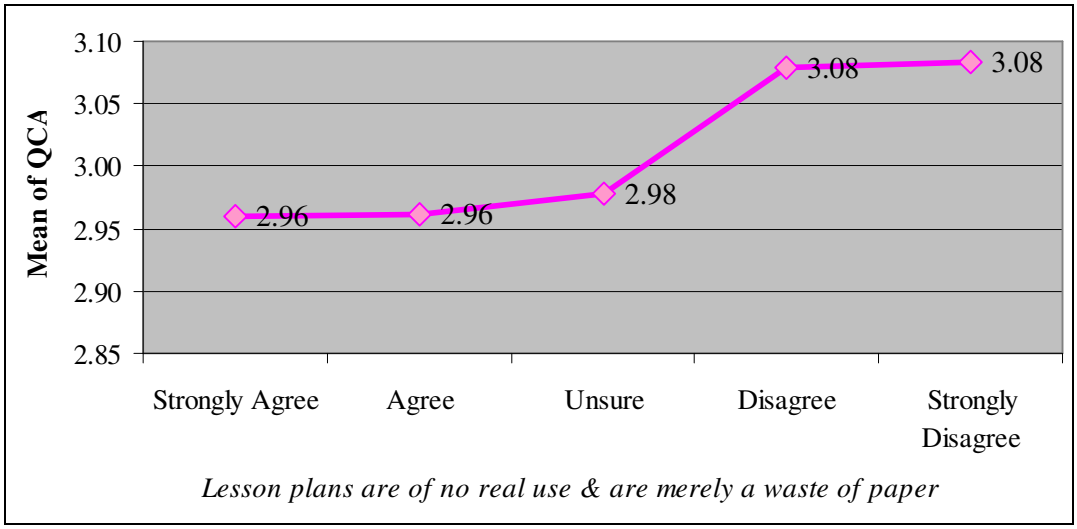
A moderate negative relationship between TP grade and the statement, "lesson plans are of no real use and are merely a waste of paper" was also observed. This highlighted that as the grade received decreased, so to did the proportion of participants who indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that lesson plans were of no real use. While between 0.0% and 11.8% (n=2) of those in the A grade category agreed at some level that lesson plans were of no use, this percentage was found to increase to between 13.3% (n=4) and 17.9% (n=5) in the B grade range and to between 21.4% (n=3) and 22.2% (n=2) in the C grade range (r_s=-.474, p=.002). The graphical representations for these associations can be found in Appendix S Figures II and III.

QCA and opinions of lesson plans

At Year Four, a notable difference in the mean QCA of respondents in relation to their opinions of lesson plans was observed within Cohort 4B, as student teachers with higher QCAs were generally more positive about lesson plans than those with lower QCAs, who agreed in greater numbers that lesson plans were of no real use.

The relationship, which is displayed in Figure XVIII overleaf highlights that the mean QCA of those who strongly disagreed or disagreed was 3.08, whereas those who strongly agreed and agreed that lesson plans were of no real use had a lower mean QCA of 2.96. The strength of association between QCA and opinions of lesson plans was very weak (r_s=.160, p=.049). For Cohort A the strength of this association was negligible, but in that cohort also those who agreed that lesson plans had limited use were generally found to have lower QCAs.

Figure XVIII: QCA and opinion of lesson plans – Cohort 4B



Post-lesson appraisals

Respondents from both strands of Phase One were presented with six statements about post-lesson appraisals to which they were invited to indicate their level of agreement; four of these were positive[15] and the remaining two negative.

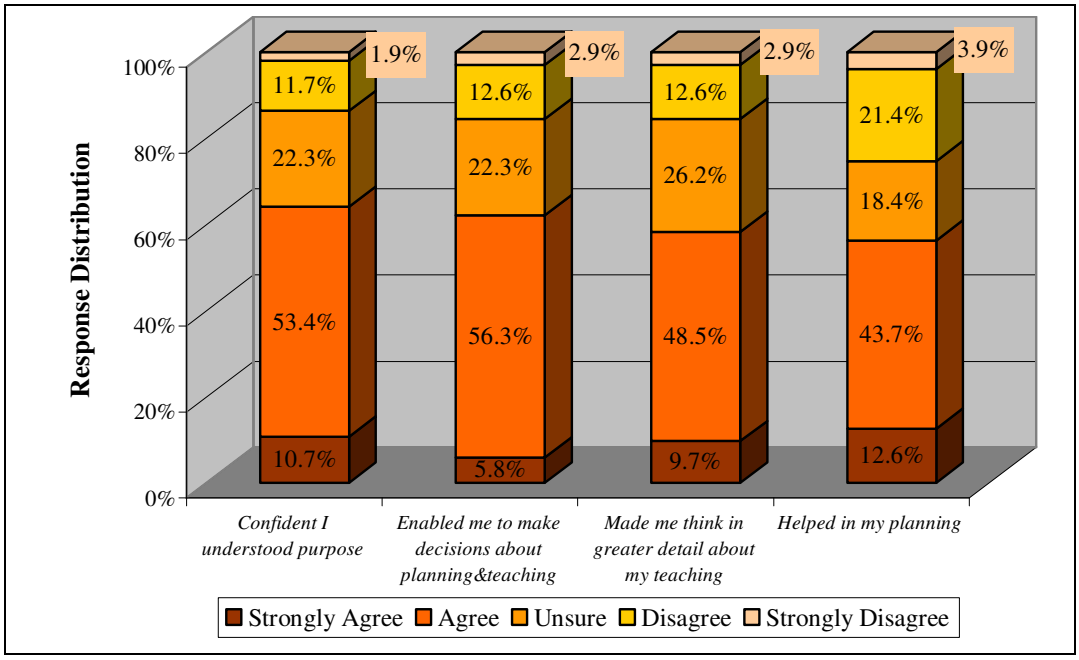
The statement, which received the highest percentage of overall agreement from respondents in Year Two and Four, was "I was confident that I understood the purpose of post-lesson appraisals. In Strand One 64.1% (n=66) of Cohort 2A and 74.8% (n=113) of Cohort 2B agreed they understood the purpose of PLAs. Similarly in Strand Two 77.1% (n=81) of Cohort 4A and 70.2% (n=106) of Cohort 4B agreed with this statement. Concomitantly this statement also showed the lowest percentage of overall disagreement from all cohorts. The statement, which was ranked second in order of agreement by both study cohorts in Strand One, was that "writing post-lesson appraisals enabled me to make decisions about my planning and teaching". Similarly this was also ranked second by Cohort 4A and third by Cohort 4B.

The statement which received the highest percentage of unsure responses at 26.2% (n=27) from Cohort 2A and 22.5% from Cohort 2B (n=34) was that "post-lesson appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching". This statement was ranked third when the participants' levels of both agreement and disagreement with all

[15] Statement 1: Post-lesson appraisals helped me in my planning for subsequent lessons.
Statement 2: I was confident that I understood the purpose of post lesson appraisals.
Statement 3: Post-lesson appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching.
Statement 4: Writing post-lesson appraisals enabled me to make decisions about my planning and teaching.

four statements were analysed. This statement also received the highest percentage of unsure responses from both cohorts at Year Four with 16.0% (n=17) from Cohort 4A and 17.2% from Cohort 4B (n=34) indicating they were unsure. This statement was also ranked third overall by Cohort 4A and fourth overall by Cohort 4B.

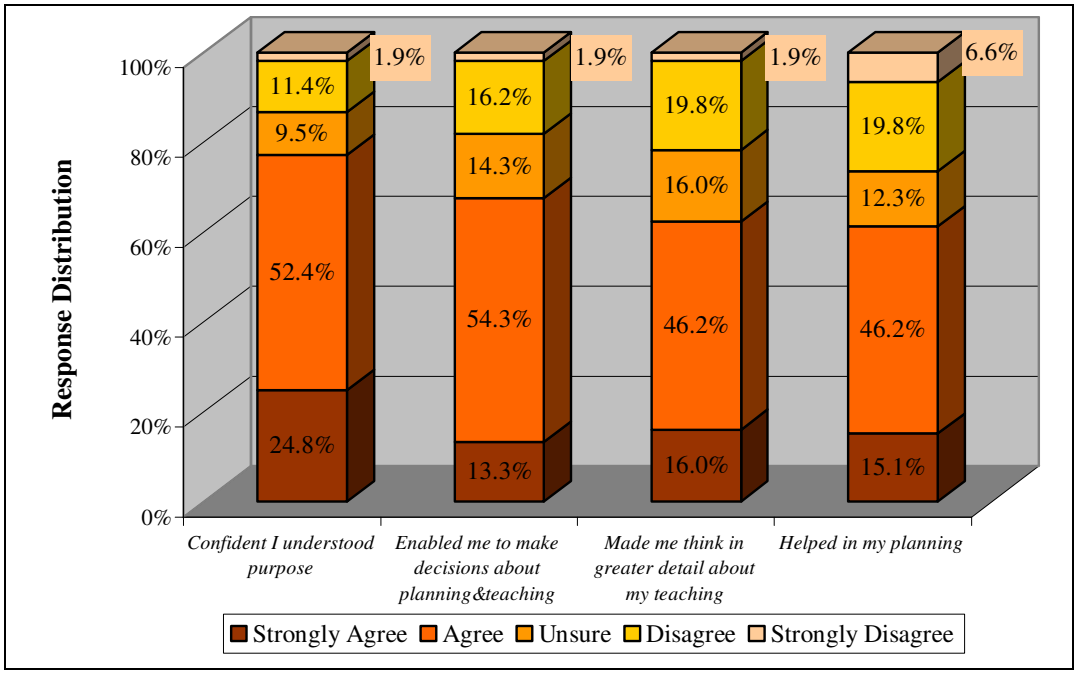
Figure XIX: Positive perceptions of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2A



The statement "post-lesson appraisals helped in my planning for subsequent lessons" received the lowest overall agreement ranking from both study groups in Strand One. Over a quarter of both cohorts indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that post-lesson appraisals were helpful in planning subsequent lessons (25.3% (n=26) of Cohort 2A and 30.4% (n=46) of Cohort 2B disagreed with this statement).

At Year Four, this statement also evoked the highest percentage of overall disagreement from Cohort 4A of whom more than one-quarter indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that post-lesson appraisals were helpful in planning subsequent lessons (Cohort 4A, 26.4% (n=29)). It also received the lowest overall agreement ranking from this study group. The statement which merited the highest percentage of disagreement from participants in Cohort 4B was that "post-lesson appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching" with 30.5% of the cohort indicating disagreement with this statement (n=46). This statement also received the lowest overall agreement ranking from this study cohort.

Figure XX: Positive perceptions of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 4A



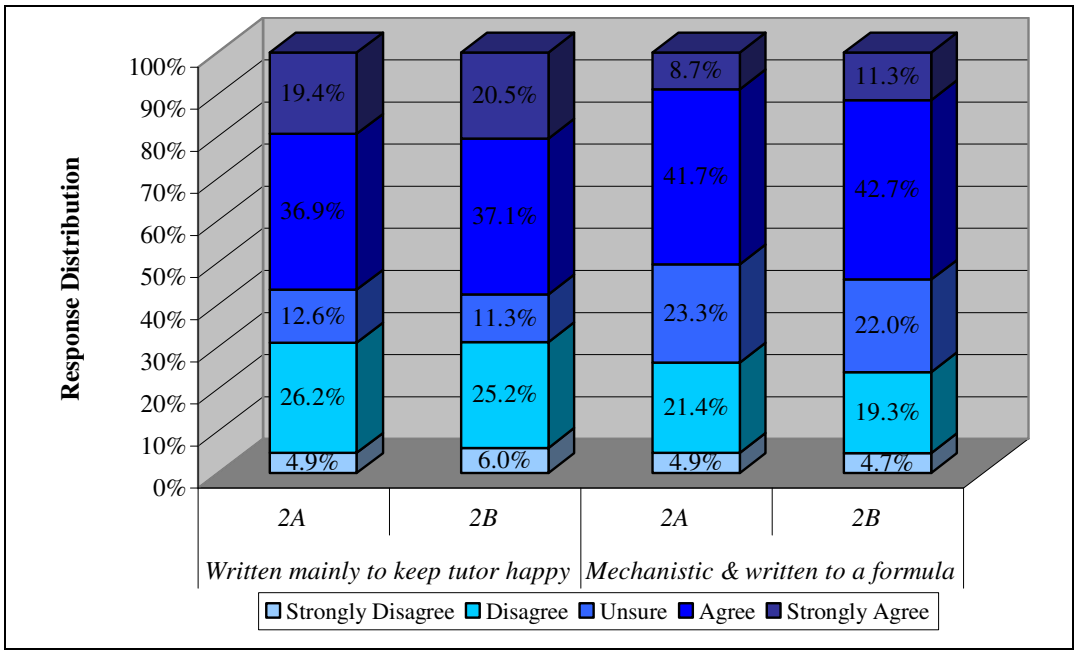
In both strands of Phase One, more than fifty per cent of each study cohorts indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with all of the positive statements. While there is consistency in relation to the levels of agreement with all four statements within Strand One (Cohorts A and B) and also within Strand Two (Cohort A), there is some variation in this agreement within Cohort 4B. While this latter cohort was consistent in the ranking of the first two statements, their ranking of the second two assertions are reversed. However, as the difference between students' levels of agreement from Cohort 4B was within two per cent in each case, little inference can be drawn from the variation in the lower order ranking.

In Cohort 2A the percentage of respondents who categorised themselves as 'unsure' for each of these statements was high, varying from 26.2% to 18.4% at Year Two. By Year Four the percentage of respondents who subsequently categorised themselves as 'unsure' was reduced; responses to three of the four statements illustrated a reduction of 33% to 38% in the levels of uncertainty, while the level of uncertainty in relation to the statement "I was confident that I understood the purpose of PLAs" was reduced by 57%. As a consequence the levels of agreement with each statement rose from Year Two to Year Four. Nonetheless there was a persistent group of students, between 9.5% and 16%, who remained unsure. A similar trend was evident in Cohort B from Year

Two to Year Four, Please refer to Appendix S Figures IV and V for the graphical representation of the findings for Cohort B.

When we examine the two negative statements on PLAs[16], the findings show that more than fifty per cent of respondents in both cohorts of Strand One expressed overall agreement that "post-lesson appraisals were written mainly to keep my university tutors happy" (Cohort 2A, 56.3% (n=58) Cohort 2B, 57.6% (n=87)) and that "my post-lesson appraisal were mechanistic and written to a formula" (Cohort 2A, 50.4% (n=52) Cohort 2B, 54.0% (n=81)). However, although 26.3% of Cohort 2A (n=27) and 24.0% of Cohort 2B (n=36) disagreed that appraisals were mechanistic and written to a formula, almost the same percentage from both study groups were unsure if this was really the case (Cohort 2A, 23.3%, (n=24) Cohort 2B, 22.0% (n=33)).

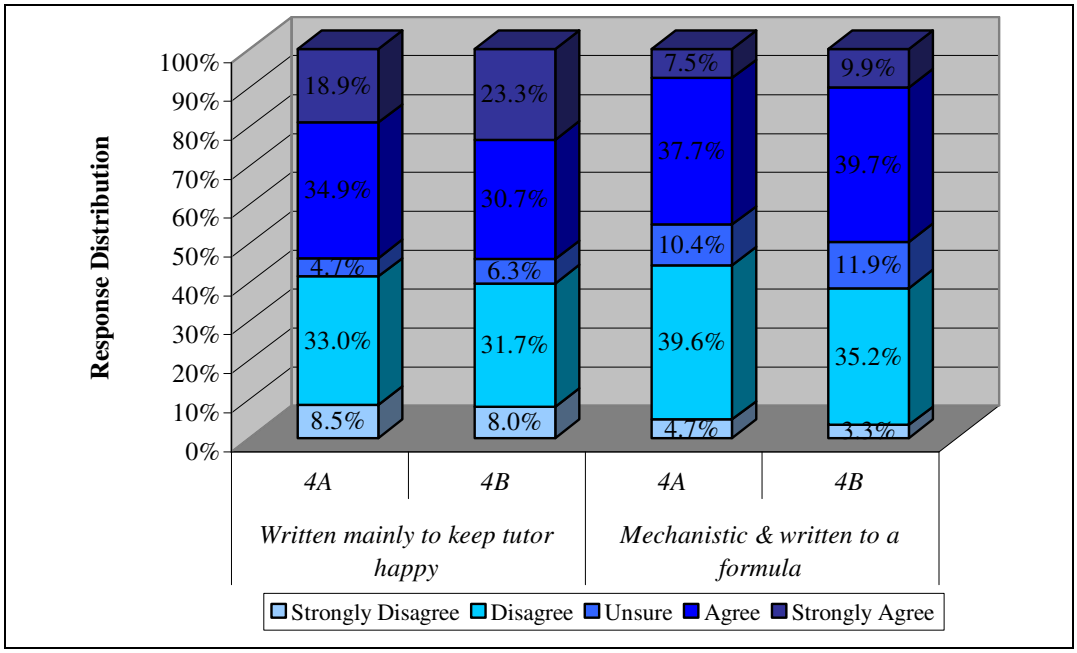
Figure XXI: Negative perceptions of post lesson appraisals – Year Two



Similarly in Strand Two more than fifty per cent of participants expressed overall agreement that "post-lesson appraisals were written mainly to keep my university tutors happy (Cohort 4A, 53.8% (n=57) Cohort 4B, 54.0% (n=81)). A high percentage at 45.3% from Cohort 4A (n=48) and 49.6% from Cohort 4B (n=75) also agreed that "my post-lesson appraisal were mechanistic and written to a formula".

[16] Statement 5: Post-lesson appraisals were written mainly to keep my university tutor happy.
Statement 6: My post-lesson appraisals were mechanistic and written to a formula.

Figure XXII: Negative perceptions of post lesson appraisals – Year Four



Phase One data from Year Two to Year Four reveal an evident positive shift in attitudes to PLAs. The percentage of respondents in both cohorts who indicated their lack of certainty in relation to the function of post-lesson appraisals was reduced significantly in the time period, contributing to an increase in the percentage of respondents who disagreed with both negative statements.

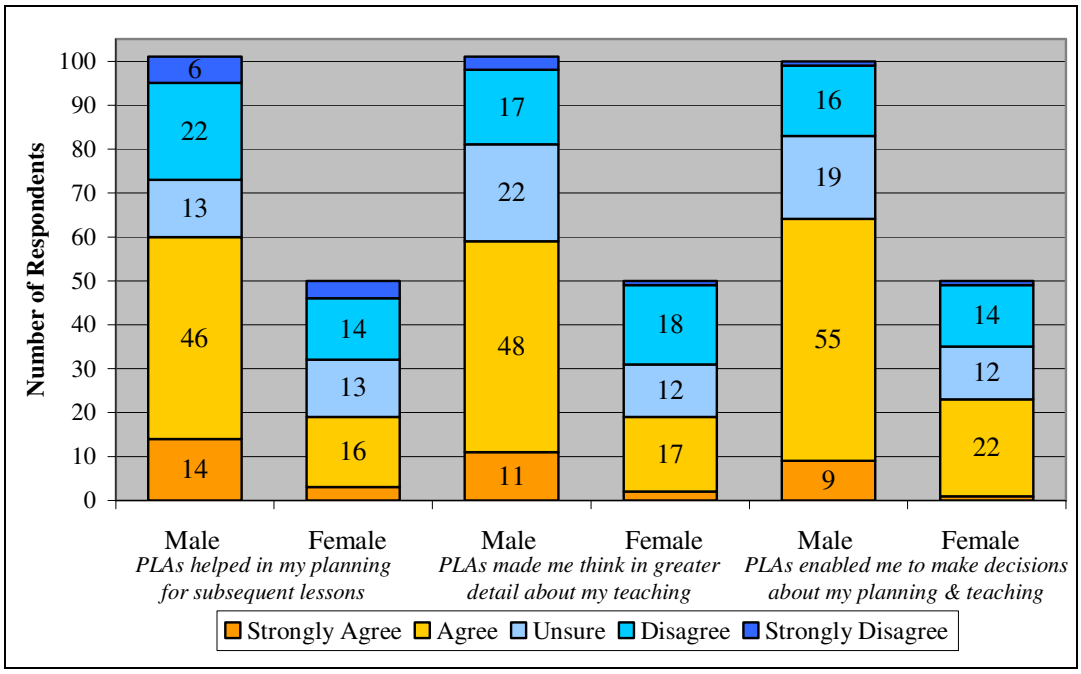
Gender and opinions of PLAs

Within Phase One, a relationship between gender and respondents' views of post-lesson appraisals was observed within Cohort 2B. Analysis highlighted that proportionately more male students than their female counterparts agreed that PLAs helped in their planning for subsequent lessons, made them think in greater detail about their teaching and that writing PLAs enabled them to make decisions about planning and teaching.

Overall in relation to three of the four positive statements about PLAs, the number of males who indicated that they agreed was appreciably higher than the corresponding number of females and correspondingly, the numbers of males who specified they were unsure, or disagreed were lower than anticipated. The levels of male agreement ranged from 59.4% (n=60) for the first statement, 58.4% (n=59) for the second statement, and 64.0% (n=64) for the third statement. The levels of agreement within the female cohort were lower at 38% (n=19) for the first two statements and 46.0% for the third statement

(n=23). These relationships were medium in strength (*V*=.222 for statement one, *V*=.241 for statement two, *V*=.205 for statement three, p<.05).

Figure XXIII: Gender and opinions of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2B

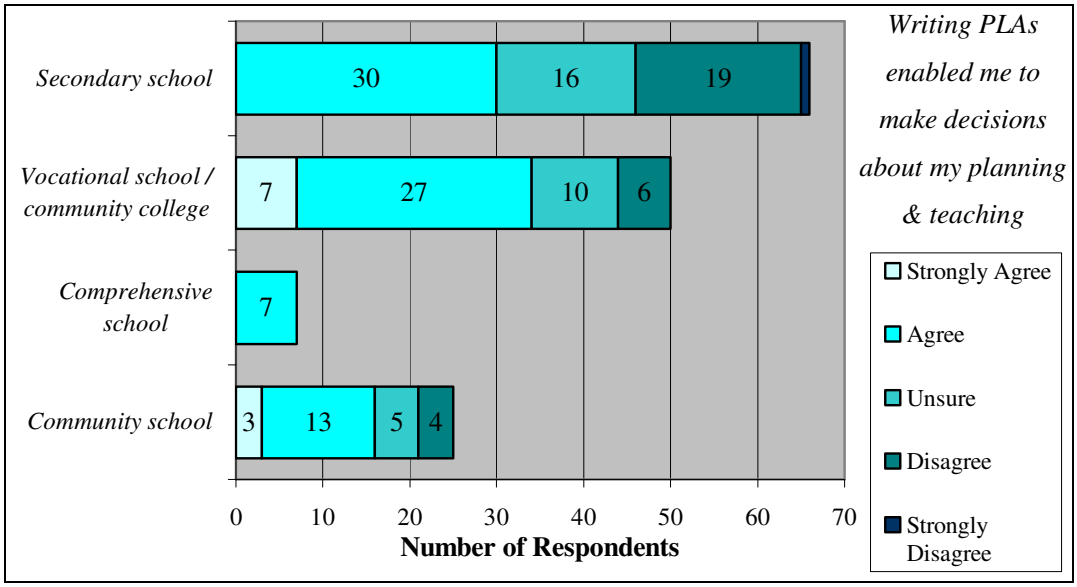


TP school type and opinions of PLAs

Within Cohort 2B, analysis highlighted an association between the type of school attended for TP and student teachers' opinion of post-lesson appraisals.

It was observed that 30.3% (n=20) of students who attended secondary schools responded negatively when asked if their PLAs enabled them to make decisions about their planning and teaching and the only respondents who strongly disagreed attended secondary schools. With regards to the three other school types, 16.0% (n=4) from community schools, 12.0% (n=6) from vocational schools/community colleges and no students from comprehensive schools disagreed that writing PLAs enabled them to make decisions about planning and teaching. Correspondingly proportionately more student teachers from these schools than from secondary schools both agreed and strongly agreed that PLAs helped in their decision-making regarding planning. Again here, the strength of the association was moderate (*V*=.230, p=.003).

Figure XXIV: TP school type and opinion of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2B



TP grade and opinions of PLAs

Within both Year Two cohorts, relationships also emerged between TP grade and the respondents' opinions of post-lesson appraisals.

Within Cohort 2A it emerged that TP grade and agreement with the statement "PLAs were written mainly to keep my tutor happy" were inversely related as student teachers who received higher TP grades were more dismissive of the notion that their post-lesson appraisals were completed primarily to satisfy their tutors. 40.0% of those who were awarded an A_1 (n=2) and 28.5% of those who were awarded an A_2 (n=4) were found to disagree or strongly disagree, as were 44.4% of those who attained a B_1 (n=12) and 53.4% of those who received B_2 (n=8). Correspondingly, as can be seen from Figure XXV overleaf, no respondent awarded a grade of C_2 or C_3 was found to disagree and all student teachers' in this cohort who were awarded a C_2 or C_3 agreed or strongly agreed that their PLAs were written mainly to satisfy their university tutors. The strength of this relationship was low and negative (r_s=-.262, p=.008).

A parallel finding emerged in relation to post-lesson appraisals in Cohort 2B. The relationship in this case highlighted that when asked if their PLAs made them think in more detail about their teaching, greater proportions of students in the A_1 to B_2 grade categorises agreed with this statement than did their counterparts in the B_3 to C_3 range. Correspondingly, in the latter range, higher proportions of respondents were found to disagree that PLAs had a role of this nature. While 75.0% of those who were awarded

an A_1 were found to agree or strongly agree (n=3), a lesser percentage of 37.5% of those who attained a C_3 indicated agreement (n=2). Similarly, no respondent who received an A_1 was found to disagree at any level, but 50.0% of those awarded a C_3 disagreed that PLAs made them think in greater detail about their teaching (n=4). This association was weak (r_s =.167, p=.041).

Figure XXV: TP grade and beliefs about post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2A

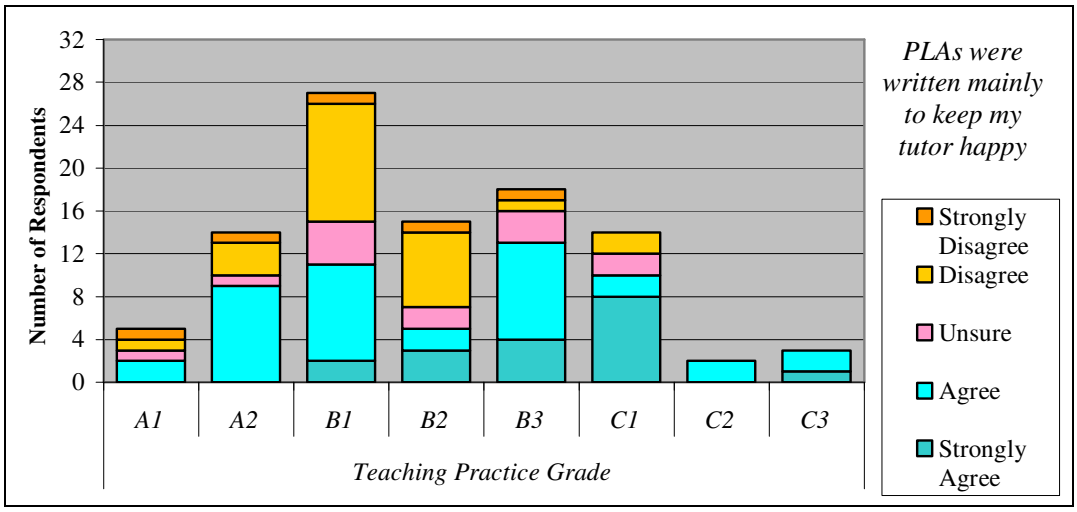
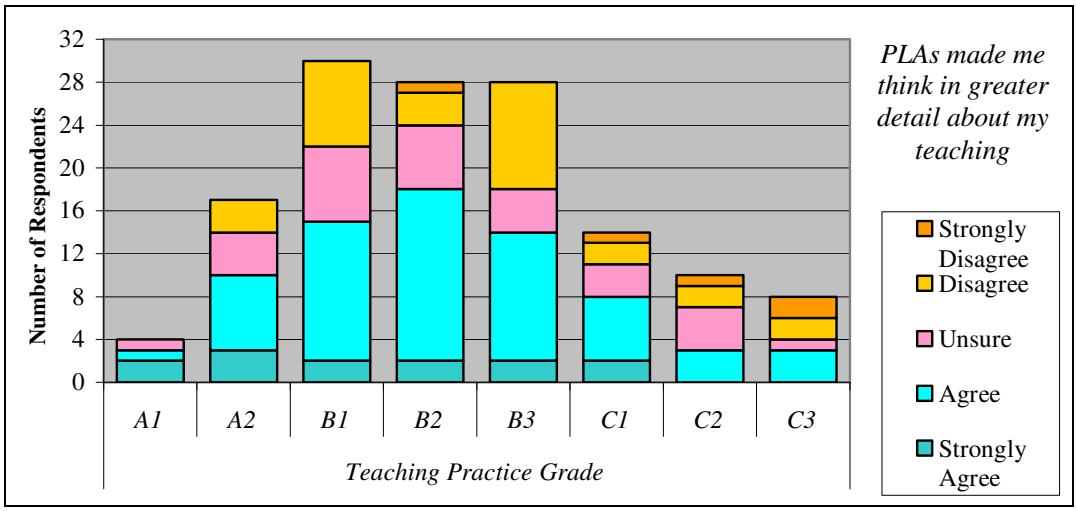


Figure XXVI: TP grade and beliefs about post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2B



Educational studies grade and opinions of PLAs

Within Cohort 2A an association between the grade respondents were awarded for their educational studies and their responses to two of the statements about PLAs was observed. For the first of these statements it was found that student teachers who were awarded grades ranging from B_3 to C_3 had a more negative perception of PLAs, as

higher frequencies of respondents with these grade categories as compared with other student teachers were found to strongly agree and agree that their PLAs were written primarily to satisfy their tutors. 55.5% of those awarded a B_3 (n=5), 63.7% (n=7) of those who attained a C_1, 60.0% of those awarded a C_2 (n=14) and 64.5% of those who attained a C_3 (n=20) agreed or strongly agreed that PLAs were written mainly to keep their university tutors happy. No student who received either an A_1 or A_2 grade however agreed that this was why they completed appraisals. Interestingly an identical association emerged when TP grade was cross-tabulated with the same statement about post-lesson appraisals. Again this relationship was low and negative (r_s=-.278, p=.004). (See Appendix S Figure VI for corresponding graph).

Regarding the second statement about post-lesson appraisals, analysis revealed a minor positive relationship between educational studies grade and student teacher's opinions in relation to whether or not PLAs aided them in their decision making about planning and teaching. Student teachers who received an A grade only, agreed that writing PLAs enabled them to make decisions about their planning. As the grade received decreased however, the levels of disagreement were seen to increase as within the B grade range, between 9.1% and 14.3% were found to disagree, but this increased to between 15.0% and 27.3% in the C grade range. Only students who received a C grade were found to strongly disagree that PLAs had a role in decision making about planning and teaching. Also noteworthy is the fact that as the grade attained declined, the percentage of unsure responses was seen to increase (r_s=.260, p=.005). The graphical representation of this relationship can be found in Appendix S Figure VII.

Weekly observations

In relation to weekly observations, Phase One respondents were presented with two statements[17]. In Strand One a total of 48.5% of respondents from Cohort 2A agreed that "weekly appraisals formed part of my professional development and planning while on Teaching Practice" (n=50). Similarly in Cohort 2B 44.1% in total agreed with this statement (n=67). At Year Four a total of 52.3% were found to agree in Cohort 4A (n=55) with comparable results for Cohort 4B (48.9%, n=72). From Year Two to Year Four a positive shift in student teachers perceptions of the role of weekly observations was evident, as the percentage of respondents who indicated a lack of sureness had

[17] Statement 1: Weekly observations formed part of my professional development & planning on TP.
Statement 2: I did not see the point of weekly observations.

decreased slightly, leading to an increase in the percentage that agreed that weekly appraisals formed part of their professional development on TP.

Figure XXVII: Perceptions of weekly appraisals 1 – All cohorts

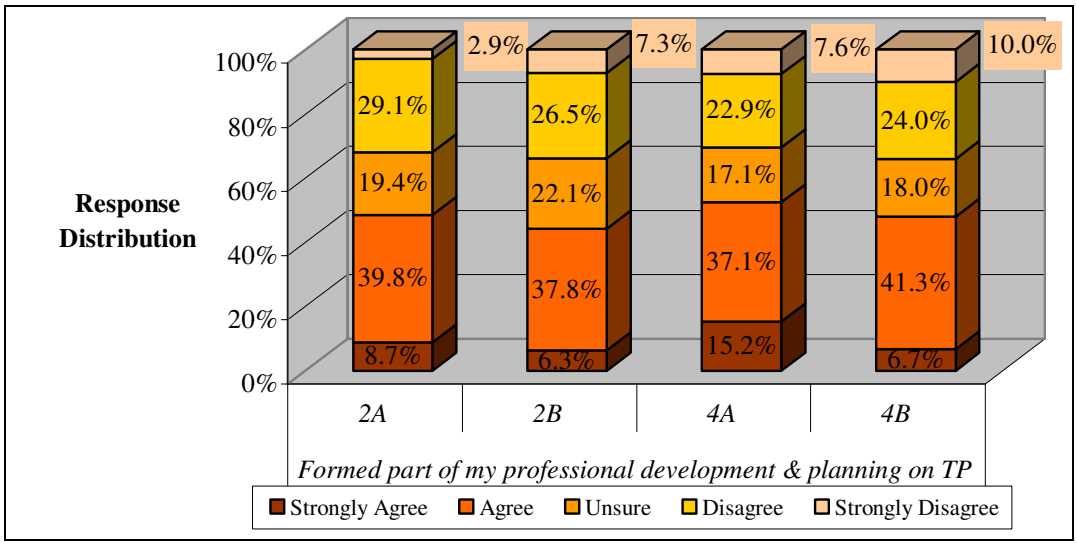
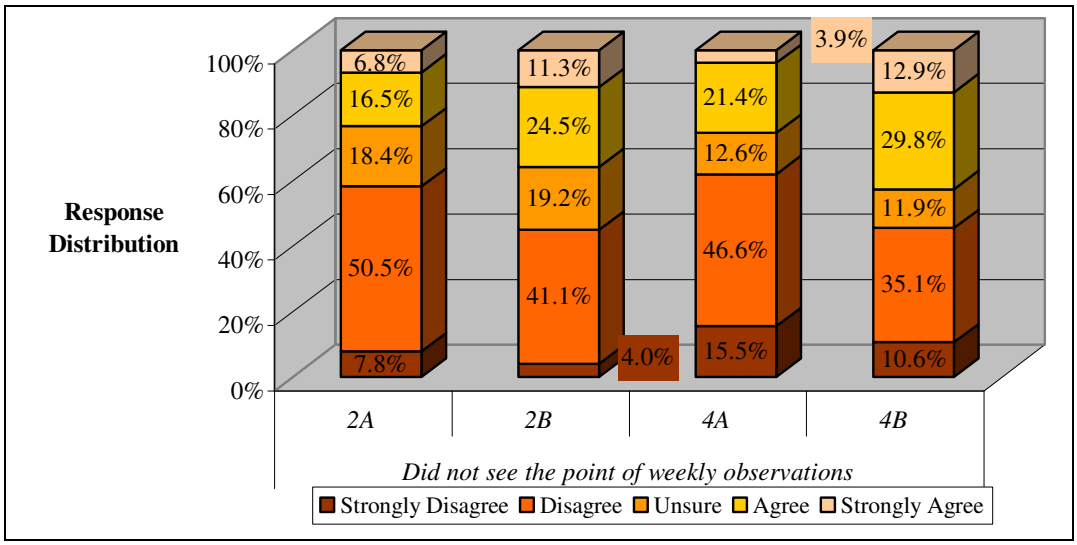


Figure XXVIII: Perceptions of weekly appraisals 2 – All cohorts



In response to the second statement on weekly observations, 58.3% of Cohort 2A (n=60) and a lesser percentage (45.1%) of Cohort 2B either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they did not see the point of weekly appraisals (n=68). In both cohorts at Year Two, higher percentages of participants disagreed with this than agreed but approximately 20% of each group categorised themselves as unsure. At the second time of testing, in total over half of Cohort 4A (62.1%) disagreed that they did not see the

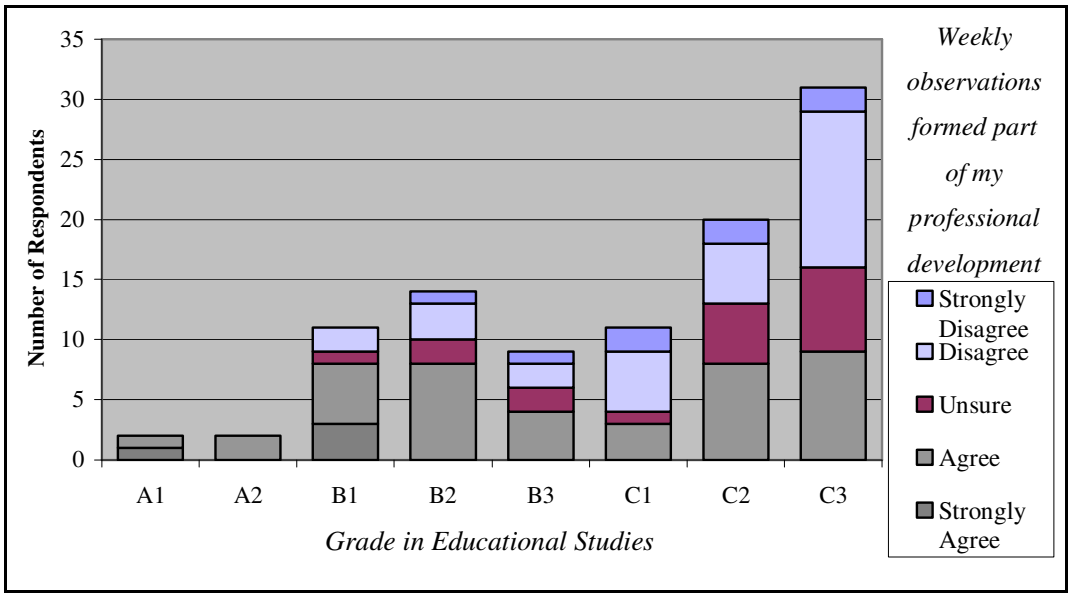
point of weekly appraisals. As at Year Two, a lesser percentage of 45.7% from Cohort 4B were found to disagree (n=69).

The number of participants who categorised themselves as unsure had decreased in both cohorts by Year Four. Subsequently a higher percentage of respondents disagreed that they did not see the point of weekly observations and the number of respondents who agreed also increased at the second time of testing both study cohorts.

Educational studies grade awarded and opinions of weekly observations

In Cohorts 2A and 4B a relationship between the award received by respondents for their educational studies and their opinions regarding whether weekly observations formed part of their professional development was observed. Within both cohorts, the level of agreement with the statement was paralleled with the grade the student received, as students who ranked high as compared with other students in their TP grade were found to be proportionately more agreeable that weekly observations played a part in their planning and professional development than student teachers who received lower TP grades.

Figure XXIX: Educational grade & view of weekly observations – Cohort 2A

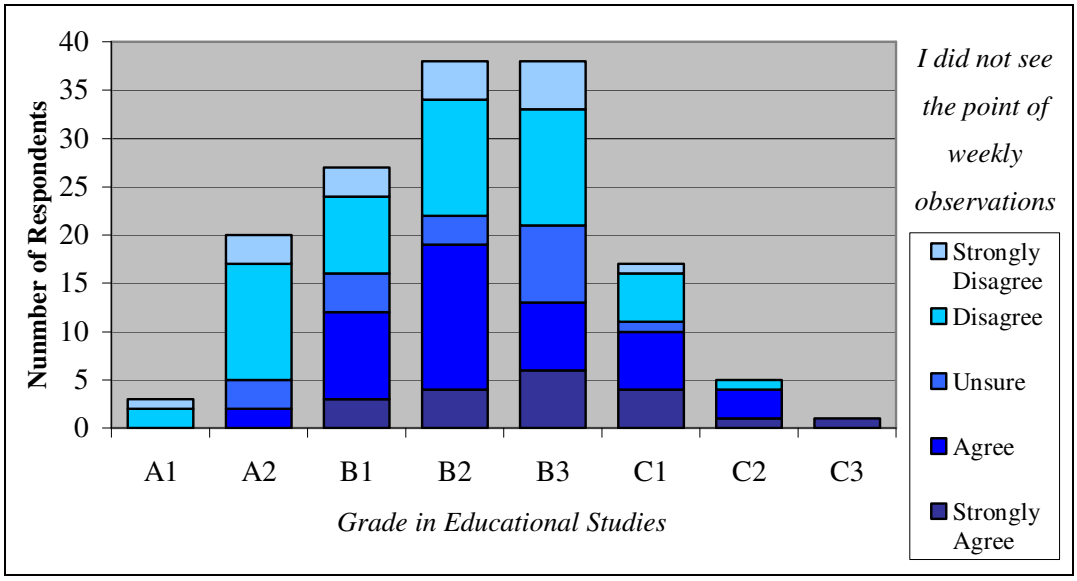


As can be seen from graph above, as student grade decreased so to did the level of overall agreement. 100% of those awarded an A grade agreed, but only 27.3% of those awarded a C_1 (n=3), 40.0% of those awarded a C_2 (n=8) and 29.0% of those awarded a

C_3 (n=9) were found to agree that weekly appraisals played a role in their planning and professional development. Similarly within Cohort 4B, while 100% of those who received an A_1 (n=3) and 75.0% of those awarded an A_2 (n=13) agreed, this reduced to 41.2% agreement (n=7) in the C_1 category and to zero in other C grades. The corresponding graph of this association for Cohort 4B can be found in Appendix S Figure VIII and both of these relationships were low and positive (r_s=.253 for Cohort 2A, r_s=.211 for Cohort 4B, p<.05).

An additional association between the student teachers' perception of weekly observations and the grade received for their educational studies was evident within Cohort 4B. In unison with the findings at Year Two regarding the perceived role of weekly observations in students' professional development and planning, here also when presented with the statement "I did not see the point of weekly observations", intensity of agreement with this statement was inversely related to respondents' educational studies grade.

Figure XXX: Educational grade & attitude to weekly observations – Cohort 4B

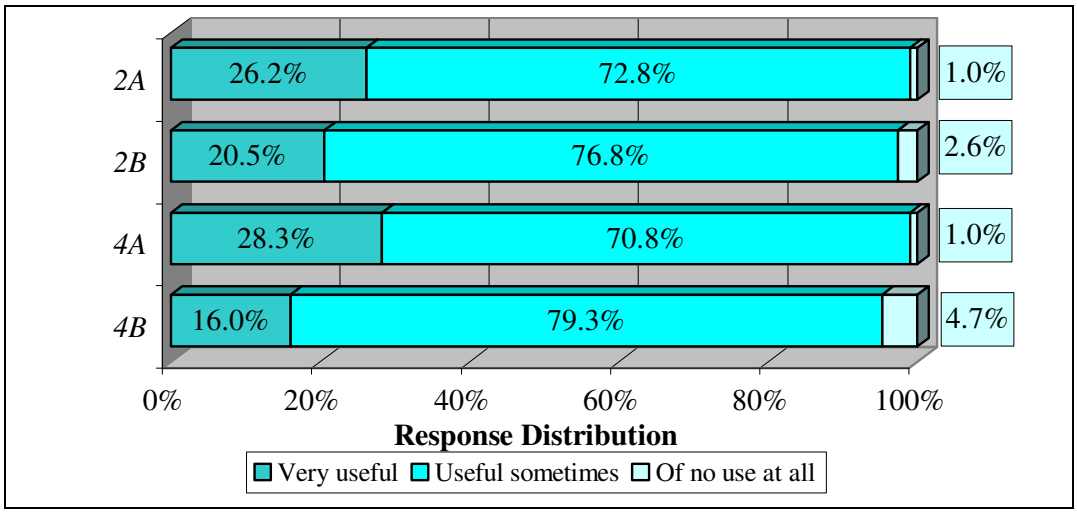


As the graph above depicts, no student that received an A_1 and only 10.0% of the those who were awarded an A_2 (n=2) agreed that they did not see the point of weekly observations, but the level of agreement was seen to increase within the B grade range (B_1= 44.4% (n=12), B_2= 50.0%, (n=19), B_3= 34.2%, (n=12)) and increase again within the C grade categories (C_1= 58.8%, (n=10), C_2= 80.0%, (n=4), C_3= 100% (n=1)). This association was negative and very weak (r_s=-163, p =.046).

Reflective practice

Respondents in Phase One were also asked to rate the usefulness of reflection. In general and at both Year Two and Four, participants predominantly specified that they perceived reflection to be useful sometimes (72.8% of Cohort 2A (n=75), 76.8% of Cohort 2B (n=116), 70.8% of Cohort 4A (n=75) and 79.3% of Cohort 4B (n=119)).

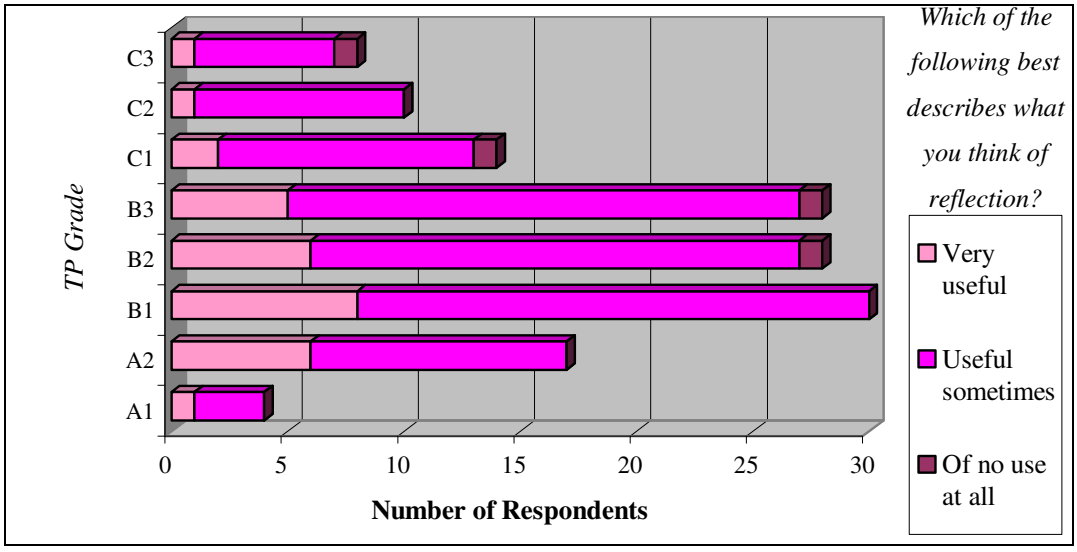
Figure XXXI: How respondents view reflection



TP grade and opinion of reflection

A small positive relationship was observed between TP grade and respondents' view of reflection in Cohort 2B, as student teachers wither higher TP grades were generally found to be more positive about the usefulness of reflection.

Figure XXXII: TP grade and view of reflection – Cohort 2B



As can be seen from Figure XXXII on the previous page, 25.0% (n=1) of those who received an A_1, 35.3% (n=6) of those who received an A_2 and 26.7% (n=8) of those who received a B_1 indicated that they thought reflection was very useful. This percentage dropped to between 21.4% (=6) and 17.9% (n=5) for the other B grades and to between 14.3% (n=2) and 10.0% (n=1) in the C grade category. Also noteworthy is the fact that all of the respondents who specified that they felt reflection was of no use were in the B_2 to C_3 range (r_s=.250, p=.022).

Qualitative findings

Qualitative data emerged from both phases of this research. While Phase Two was the main qualitative aspect of this study, within Phase One students selected to contribute additional comments within the questionnaire format. Throughout both strands of Phase One, allowing for variation in the intensity and emphasis, there was evident consistency, within the comments volunteered by respondents. Data emanating form the guided discussion groups[18] paralleled much of the contributions within Phase One, however the nature of the data collection allowed for greater depth and extended discussion.

On analysis, student comments from Phase One and the contributions to discussions in Phase Two were generally observed to be favourable or unfavourable and therefore are presented in this format. Within each category the qualitative data will be presented under a number of key themes.

Reflection and planning received much attention in the personal responses of all participants in Phase One. Within Strand One, one hundred and forty-eight individual comments were made about reflection and planning by Cohort 2A and one hundred and seven comments were made by Cohort 2B. Within Strand Two one hundred and four individuals from Cohort 4A commented on this area as did seventy-nine members of Cohort 4B (please see Appendix T for details of the number and type of comments received on each area of planning and reflection practice). Reflection and planning was also a prominent area of discussion within Phase Two. Where comments in relation to planning and reflective practices were classified as favourable a number of themes emerged, namely;

[18] Within this thesis, the terms guided discussion group, focus group and discussion group will be used interchangeably in referring to the findings from Phase Two of the research.

- planning and reflective practices were helpful and of benefit to teaching
- planning and reflective practices as enablers of student teacher reflection
- appreciation of the role of reflection.

Planning and reflective practices were helpful and of benefit to teaching

In relation to lesson plans, of the sixty-three favourable comments received in Phase One, fifty-five indicated that lesson plans were helpful or that students' teaching benefited from using them. This fact was also highlighted in the guided discussion groups, as respondents in the main indicated that aside from any issues they had, they recognised the personal benefit of lesson planning.

Lesson plans were extremely helpful and my teaching benefited (respondent 2A: 18)

I found that lesson plans were of huge benefit to me (respondent 2B: 2)

I found lesson plans helped me focus and though I never adhered to them 100%. I did see the point in them, they gave me direction (respondent 4A: 11)

It is the lesson plans that really help me, things that I look at more so than anything else (GDG member: 16)

The fact that students saw lesson plans as helpful and of benefit was emphasised more fervently by the remainder of students, who referred to this aspect of their planning as necessary, essential and vital. The pivotal value of lesson planning was recognised more readily by Year Four student teachers, a greater number of whom indicated that their lesson plans were vital.

Lesson plans were essential (respondent 2B: 94)

Lesson plans are vital in preparing, questioning and organising a lesson properly (respondent 4A: 49)

Lesson plans and planning was vital for a successful lesson (respondent 4B: 67)

Similarly participants in both phases commented favourably on PLAs, stating in the main that they were helpful, useful or of benefit to their teaching.

Post lesson appraisals were helpful in organising my lessons (respondent 2A: 87)
PLAs are good to help improve teaching (respondent 2B: 138)

Teaching practice would not be as beneficial without the use of lesson plans and appraisals. I would never consider them a waste of time (respondent 4A: 79)

I found them quite helpful because when you look over the lesson and it kind of puts a time there where you have to look at the lesson and go through what worked and what didn't work and then you can kind of look back. You know if you juggle a few different classes it is hard to remember what works with which one and especially the different pupils… because you forget a lot of stuff because you are dealing with a lot of classes (GDG member: 21)

Twenty of the fifty-three students across Phase One who made favourable comments about PLAs articulated why they perceived these so positively. They stated that PLAs enabled them to evaluate their current practices and make decisions about their subsequent planning and teaching based on this evidence. This level of articulation while evident at Year Two, was more prevalent among Year Four participants, particularly those who participated in the guided discussion groups.

The post lesson appraisals allowed me to evaluate my teaching (respondent 2A: 6)

I found that my PLAs especially were useful to my teaching [sic], they helped me to evaluate what I needed to focus more attention on (respondent 4A: 99)

What my PLAs were, they were a way that I could improve on my teaching, things that I used that did work or didn't work. So I would know in the future I could go back and say "oh this didn't work I won't use it again" or "this did I will use it" (GDG member: 20)

Planning and reflective practices as enablers of student teacher reflection

Only at Year Four did a small number of students write specifically of the role of post-lesson appraisals in supporting their personal reflection. Students elaborated on this issue during discussions and highlighted that it was only now, at this point in their development that they realised the purpose and value of PLAs for reflection.

Even though I didn't like doing post-lesson appraisals, I understood the benefit of them. They made me think and reflect when otherwise I wouldn't have (respondent 4A: 98)

I only realised the importance of lesson plans and PLAs in 4th year and felt it was experience and your own method of writing one to make it worthwhile [sic] (respondent 4A: 26)

PLAs made you reflect as well, because you might have 5 or 6 classes in a day some days and by the time you get around to that class maybe the next week again, even just to have it to look back on as a record (GDG member: 11)

Focus group participants also stated that they found it easy and straightforward to write post-lesson appraisals. For some PLAs were perceived to be a more accessible route to reflection because of their individual and personalised nature.

> *Because it was completely based on what happened in the class, they didn't take me long to do, just write down 5 things that went well and then I just went home and I would do a post lesson appraisal in ten to fifteen minutes (GDG member: 2)*

> *I think it was for me anyway [sic], it was that the post lesson appraisals actually happened they were all true, that's why I didn't feel under pressure doing them (GDG member: 16)*

Final year student teachers in both phases of the research also spoke of how their weekly observations were worthwhile and linked to their personal reflection. Seven respondents in Phase One referred to the role of weekly observations in their personal reflection, an area that was discussed in two of the four focus groups.

> *Weekly observations are vital and do a much better job on reflection than post lesson appraisals (respondent 4A: 37)*

> *I agree with the idea of weekly observations in order to evaluate our performance and development as teachers (respondent 4A: 24)*

> *With the observations and that…you're suppose to keep on top of problems you encounter, reflect on it and try and decide what makes life easier and then by 4th year you are able to see things coming (GDG member: 5)*

Appreciation of the role of reflection

Student teachers also spoke about reflection as a process and not merely as an outcome of PLAs and weekly observations. Within Phase One, of the twelve Year Two respondents and four Year Four respondents who addressed this topic, the majority identified the benefit of reflection for highlighting key issues in their teaching. Others however, recognised reflection as a necessary part of learning to teach and were aware of how their own reflective skills and practices had improved during their TP placement.

> *Reflections helped in highlighting key issues, which I would have otherwise over looked (respondent 2B: 124)*

> *If you don't reflect on what happened, I don't think it would be possible to improve (respondent 2A: 101)*

PLAs and reflection are relevant but a lot of the time it's the same thing again and again. Useful when you have an actual problem (respondent 4B: 26)

These perceptions were mirrored in the way participants spoke about reflection in Phase Two, as discussions centred on the value these students placed on reflection. More specifically students demonstrated conscious awareness of how reflecting on problems and issues encountered informed their subsequent teaching methods and practices.

I was the same, I felt reflection was valuable. Even before I would go out of the class I would be like, what did I think about there? What did I do? What should I have done? What would I do next week? (GDG member: 3)

It's good to reflect because if you reflect you're going to improve, because you see your problems and you can also work on your strengths. It's not all about weaknesses, it's about strengths as well, you know your strengths going ok I'm good at that and keep doing that (GDG member: 10)

Very valuable, unless you reflect and think about what went wrong and decide to change it you cannot learn. If you don't know what went wrong you cannot make a decision to change it but it is something that I think happens naturally (GDG member: 5)

Where comments in relation to planning and reflective practices were classified as unfavourable, a number of themes emerged. Students perceived planning and reflective practices to be;

- too detailed and time consuming
- repetitive and too structured
- written to suit tutor

Planning and reflective practices were too detailed and time consuming

Forty-nine respondents at Year Two and forty-eight at Year Four indicated that they felt that the college required excessive detail within lesson plans. In each of the focus groups this was also discussed and there was agreement that an unnecessary level of detail is required for lesson plans.

Lesson plans are important but not always in as much detail as has to be done. Bullet points of what you want to do would be sufficient (respondent 2A: 49)

Lesson plans were very helpful but detailing every movement & the time of movement is a joke! (respondent 4B: 78)

Every one of my lesson plans it was 5 pages, it was just ridiculous amount, 5 columns taking up 5 pages it was just a crazy amount (GDG member: 25)

Because for me if I'm doing a lesson plan…I know how it is organised, I know why I'm doing it, why do I need to write that out in such detail? (GDG member: 5)

The aims and objectives element of lesson plans was the only area specifically identified by students in Phase One as requiring an unnecessary level of detail, with eighteen students across both strands purposely highlighting aims and objectives as necessitating unwarranted detail. Within Phase Two the group members were specifically asked if there were any aspects of lesson planning that they felt were unnecessary or overly demanding. In this context aims and objectives were again identified as the primary area which students felt required excessive detail.

The lesson plans – design of learning sequence proved useful and necessary. However, I found none of the other material was relevant e.g. "aims & objectives" did not benefit my performance as a teacher (respondent 4B: 117)

While lesson plans do help you, there is only a need to write teacher and pupil activities. Objectives / aims etc. – pointless (respondent 2B: 17)

The structure of them there is way too much…Like the aims and objectives every time, fair enough if you were doing one topic over 5 lessons or something, but there is no need to be doing [them] each time (GDG member: 24)

Because of the level of detail required, students rejected the appropriateness of continued lesson planning as they developed. Members of the guided discussion groups also alluded to this and voiced their perception that lesson plans have a limited role in the everyday lives of practicing teachers. They were of the opinion that they would not write lesson plans when they entered full-time teaching.

Lesson plans have some use but only to a trainee teacher, other than that I feel they are impractical (respondent 2B: 96)

Too much emphasis is placed on the lesson plan and it does not reflect teaching as a profession (respondent 4A: 60)

Lesson plans are probably too detailed for teaching in reality (respondent 4B: 144)

You shouldn't have been doing 10 pages on lesson plans at the end of TP, because you are never going to do that in the real world, so why are they trying to teach us something that we would never do? (GDG member: 10)

Students' perceptions of the excessive demands required for planning were mirrored in their comments in relation to PLAs. Seven respondents at Year Two and three respondents at Year Four referred to the level of detail required for PLAs, which was perceived to be unnecessary and excessive. In the discussion groups students were in agreement that the level of detail expected was unwarranted.

> *I felt at times I was 'bogged down' with the formalities of TP e.g. post-lesson appraisals – too much info [sic] required (respondent 4A: 91)*

> *There is too much emphasis on the paperwork. They require you to go into so much detail on post lesson appraisals and really if you just jotted down a point where you think you can improve I think that would be grand (GDG member: 19)*

The associated length of time required to write lesson plans was also identified by Phase One respondents, as twenty-four participants at Year Two and thirteen at Year Four indicated that lesson plans were too time consuming. The length of time needed to complete PLAs emerged as the most frequent area of comment in Phase One, with twenty-one students in Strand One and thirteen in Strand Two expressing the view that they felt appraisals were too time consuming and absorbed time that could have been spent on resource preparation. The focus group participants also questioned the time involved in completing PLAs.

> *Lesson plans take up so much time and you end up writing the same things every time (respondent 2B: 7)*

> *Lesson plans take too long to do and the result is not having enough time to prepare material to teach (respondent 4B: 76)*

> *Post-lesson appraisals wasted valuable preparation time as we all know how good or bad we performed during a lesson without having to write it (respondent 2A: 23)*

> *Post-lesson appraisals consume a lot of time that could serve a better purpose if channelled into preparing for the next lesson (respondent 4A: 37)*

> *PLAs they can be done, they should be like that, short and to the point [sic]. If we were doing 3 or 4 short bullet points on what you feel, 3 good things 3 bad things instead of having to write out 200 words for every lesson. I had to type it out and then send it in every week, some waste of time that was (GDG member: 14)*

Planning and reflective practices were repetitive and too structured

Within Phase One, twenty-nine respondents across Year Two and Four expressed the view that as TP progressed, PLAs became both monotonous and repetitive and some

even commented that they just repeated the same PLAs for different classes, copied pieces from one appraisal into another or just slightly varied the content of appraisals. Members of the focus groups also touched on this issue and in particular highlighted that they felt that after a few weeks on TP, when they were experiencing less problems, appraisals became repetitive. They also spoke of how as time went on, they found it increasingly challenging to come up with real issues for consideration.

> *I found that PLAs were monotonous and I was filling in mostly the same ideas each day. Maybe there were exceptions to this at times, but mostly it was the same repetitive information (respondent 2B: 72)*
>
> *PLAs were sometimes useful however I feel that the same points were continuously coming up (respondent 4B: 54)*
>
> *For the first few weeks I was grand. I could get 200 words from a lesson no bother because there was stuff going wrong. But then after the midterm break I felt that my lessons were going really a lot smoother and I would have nothing to say. But they kept getting longer and longer to write, making up stuff, making up bits of problems (GDG member: 14)*

Similarly within Phase One, twelve students at Year Two and seven at Year Four expressed the view that weekly observations became monotonous or repetitive over time and this was reiterated in Phase Two. Fifteen students in Phase One also commented on how they found lesson plans repetitive.

> *I felt that after doing post-lesson appraisals all week that the weekly observation was very repetitive (respondent 2A: 6)*
>
> *Weekly observations are some help but many are very repetitive and mainly done to please the tutors (respondent 4B: 136)*
>
> *The weekly observations…you have to go back over all your post lesson appraisals for the week then and say yeah this is what I did wrong. Half the time I would just be making them up... I would just let them go for about a week without doing them and then I would be making them all up at the weekend (GDG member: 1)*

The set format of lesson plans and PLAs was also mentioned by eleven respondents in both strands of Phase One, who believed the current fixed structure was unnecessary and that student teachers should be allowed to adapt this format to suit their own subject and personal requirements. In discussions, the students also stated that they felt the format should be flexible so as to suit each individual's varying requirements.

Planning and reflection are important elements of teaching for me. Having to produce them in a set format ensured they were useful for my tutors – it did not make them as useful for me (respondent 2B: 68)

I found that both lesson plans and PLAs were beneficial but I disagree with having to stick to a set formula (respondent 2A: 77)

A lesson plan should be for you and should suit your needs (GDG member: 7)

Yeah there is a lot of concentration on the lesson plans, it is a guide for us really more than anything else (GDG member: 16)

Planning and reflective practices were written to satisfy tutors

In both strands of Phase One, eighteen participants expressed the opinion that plans were primarily written to keep their university tutors happy or satisfy the specifications of individual tutors. This was also very prominent discussion point within the focus groups and participants spoke at great lengths about how they felt lesson plans were written in a particular way and to a specific level of detail to fulfil the requirements of their TP tutors.

Lesson plans are beneficial but you could leave some parts of them out. I had to put in some things to keep my tutors happy and they were a waste of time (respondent 2A: 19)

Lesson plans were mainly written to keep tutors happy, lesson plans should have more variation, not always stuck to 'teacher-activity / pupil-activity' rubbish (respondent 4B: 64)

Lesson plans in general were too long, too detailed and full of waffle to appease my tutor (respondent 4A: 97)

You have your own lesson plans separate to get you through the lesson, but then you have to add in all the flowery ingredients to make sure that it is what your tutor wants (GDG member: 2)

A number of these respondents from the first phase commented that they encountered difficulty satisfying the specifications of individual tutors who had differing requirements. This difficulty was experienced by students in both strands and what was referred to as a '*lack of consistency'* (respondent 2A: 61) between tutor requirements by one individual was highlighted by a notable number of other participants. During the focus groups, participants spoke of how they met with varying requirements, which were tutor dependant, and participants perceived that there were inconsistencies between tutor specifications for lesson plans.

There is no common ground. Different tutors are looking for different things in lesson plans and post lesson appraisals. What keeps some happy will not do for others (respondent 2A: 22)

It can be hard to juggle lesson plans to suit 2 different tutors. Sometimes they want them done their way not your way (respondent 4A: 59)

The worst thing about the lesson plans is the difference in what tutors want. In 2nd year I was trained how to write them one way, brought them into my tutor in 4th year that way and was told scrap them and go home and write them all again his way. It takes weeks getting used to writing them that way when you're thinking of the old way you were taught (GDG member: 14)

In both strands of Phase One, ten students perceived that the level of detail expected for post-lesson appraisals was primarily included to satisfy the specifications of individual tutors. The perceived inconsistency between the individual requirements of tutors was again highlighted in relation to PLAs.

Post lesson appraisals were usually just written to show the tutors what they wanted to see (respondent 2A: 60)

The varying requests from tutors in relation to PLAs and lesson plans were very annoying. There should be a clear set of guidelines in relation to this (respondent 2B: 134)

I found it frustrating that TP seems to be a lot to do with keeping your tutors happy and doing what they would do. I was advised to change the layout of my PLAs and to write under pre-determined headings and I found this lead to me not being able to express FULLY how my lessons went. If it worked for me it should have been satisfactory for my tutor to allow me to continue the PLAs in my own way and allowed me to be myself and to be reflective (respondent 2B: 98)

The significance of the TP tutor as a factor in determining the level of detail and format of appraisals was a strong discussion point in each of the focus groups

I think writing down a PLA is definitely for the tutor to come in and read it. The problem being that tutors are so opinionated…You know they are basically telling you how you should think even though you are your own person, especially in 4th year (GDG member: 5)

I found I was sitting down to write my PLAs and I was trying to fill a page. I might have had only one thing to say about that class, but because my tutor was reading it I was sitting there kind of going right what else could I say? (GDG member: 8)

Student recommendations for planning and reflective practices

As part of the qualitative data that emerged from both phases of the research it was noted that some of the comments received were recommendatory in nature. Suggestions in the main focused on lesson plans with student teachers in both phases calling for a more flexible structure as well as a reduction in content.

> *Would say a new method for lesson plan format, concise or condensed, needs consideration (respondent 4A: 71)*
>
> *They should make lesson plans more simplistic and straightforward (GDG member: 10)*
>
> *Lesson plans should not require so much detail only a brief guide to go on [sic] (respondent 2B: 107)*

Recommendations regarding lesson plan content

Participants in both strands of Phase One suggested that students should be allowed to present their plans either in a bullet point format or as a more simplified plan with fewer headings containing a few bullet points of information. This proposal was echoed in discussion, as the predominant suggestion voiced was that students should be able to present their plans in a bullet point format that required a much-reduced level of detail.

> *Plans should be more formatted – E.g. 6-8 headings, 3-4 bullet points. Open format too vague (respondent 2A: 38)*
>
> *Lesson plans were repetitive and after a while I felt that there was no real need to continue writing them to a formula. A few bullet points would easily suffice (respondent 2B: 105)*
>
> *Bullet point format lesson plans of planned activities may serve purpose better (respondent 4A: 61)*
>
> *I think most people do the bullet points and then go back to the lesson plan the way it should be done and write out 4 of 5 points, whereas I think if right was right it should just be using them 4 or 5 points (GDG member: 4)*

Within Phase One participants also indicated their belief that a lesson plan needs only to contain a guide or brief notes of what the teacher intended to do as well as a list of intended questions, as this was seen as an adequate level of detail. Again this was reiterate in the guided discussion groups.

> *Not needed in such detail. Small notes would be adequate (respondent 4B: 89)*

Lesson plans – are not necessary, but preparation of resources, list of what you're going to do, questions you're going to ask etc. are important (respondent 2A: 10)

Going out next year we are never going to write a lesson plan again, we will write little paragraphs on what we might do or little points or whatever... I think by the end of TP that's what we should have being working towards (GDG member: 10)

Both in written comments and in discussions the student teachers suggested that the actual content of lesson plans should be simplified, requiring less detail and recommended that a simpler format such as diagram or flow chart or a straightforward outline of what they intended to do would be more appropriate.

I think lesson plans should be broken down to a simpler formula such as ray diagram or flow chart, so as to ensure the teacher is not pulled back by the lesson (respondent 2A: 34)

Lesson plans don't need to be as detailed as we do them, should give an outline [sic] (respondent 4A: 82)

It should be an outline of what you are going to do rather than so much detail [sic] (GDG member: 19)

Recommendations regarding lesson plan structure

Students at Year Two made the suggestion that lesson plans should follow a set structure at the start of TP, but that as students became more experienced, plans should not be so detailed. They held the opinion that the structure should be down to the individual and should reflect the format that each student teacher finds most suitable for themselves. At Year Four an increased number of respondents commented that as TP progressed they perceived that the need for detailed notes diminished. Some students connected the reduction in the level of detail to their professional progression and identified that the level of detail required for plans was commensurate with experience and should reflect student teachers' development and levels of confidence.

At the start lesson plans should be detailed but leeway should be given at the later stages of TP – shouldn't have to give so much detail [sic] (respondent 2B: 90)

Maybe there shouldn't be a necessity for lesson plans for every lesson or maybe less detailed plans for 4th year TP, they get a bit tedious (respondent 4A: 122)

At the beginning lesson plans were a good help, but as I became more confident I no longer needed them and they were a pain to do as I could form a plan in my head (respondent 4B: 135)

I think if you introduce the bullet points straight away in 1st year that would be a bad idea, because people would just be lazy from the beginning. Not that I don't agree that we should have to write ten pages for a lesson plan. But I do think we have to go through that and now we can summarise… but if you start off and say for your lesson plan I just want ten points, don't have to say why you are doing it, I don't care what the previous knowledge is, I don't think that would be good (GDG member: 2)

Recommendations regarding post-lesson appraisals

Within Phase One, at Year Four student teachers enunciated that post-lesson appraisals should be done less frequently and that there should not be an onus on students to write an appraisal for every single lesson. Similarly, although the focus group members acknowledged the benefits of reflecting on their teaching, they questioned the continuously strong emphasis placed on writing PLAs.

Writing post lesson appraisals is a waste of time and repetitious. It would be much better if we could write 5-6 post lesson appraisals a week on relevant issues rather than 15-16 of no relevance (respondent 4B: 24)

It is good to reflect, but I think the emphasis on PLAs is just too much (GDG member: 10)

Consequently it was suggested that a daily appraisal would be more suitable and feasible for student teachers. Although more frequently proposed by Year Four students, a small number of Year Two students also suggested this. Respondents further commented that if a daily appraisal were required instead of a PLA for each lesson, they would find it easier to present a more honest and reflective account of their progression.

Daily appraisals are enough because so many other parts of preparing for classes take over time [sic]. It adds too much work, one a day would be a truthful and honest reflection (respondent 2A: 5)

I do feel it is necessary to have your lesson planned out. However, I think it would be better to have a daily appraisal as opposed to an appraisal after every single lesson (respondent 4A: 38)

Even if it was something like, that you could have done them for the first couple of weeks and then after that have found some other way even a daily reflection or rather than each lesson [sic], something like that (GDG member: 24)

Summary of findings

At both times of testing, students accepted the value of writing and planning for teaching. They observed that lesson plans were helpful and of benefit to them and

actually used these to chart their own growth and progress, but the benefit of lesson planning was more widely acknowledged by higher academic achievers. There was an awareness that detailed plans were appropriate at a specific phase of development and were most useful for student teachers.

Although three quarters of respondents understood the purpose of PLAs and felt these helped them to make decisions about their teaching, students were less articulate about the role of PLAs in their thinking about teaching and future planning. At Year Four however, there was increased evidence that students found PLAs a useful tool for thinking about their teaching. While student teachers were clearly aware of the value of PLAs, they were cognisant of the impact of their tutor and ultimately their TP grade on the writing of the their PLAs.

Males were more positive towards the role and function of PLAs and this was reflected in the opinion of PLAs vis-à-vis school type. Students with lower TP and educational studies grades highlighted more frequently the functional / instrumental nature of PLAs and their role within the assessment of TP. Only those with higher educational studies grades reported the usefulness of PLAs in their decision-making about planning.

At both times of testing students were less appreciative of the role of weekly observations in their professional development. Although this improved at Year Four, still only half of the respondents felt that weekly observations had a productive role. While those with higher educational studies grades acknowledged their value, those with lower grades were more dismissive of the value of weekly observations.

A progressive appreciation of lesson plans, PLAs and weekly observation was evident from the student teachers' qualitative comments. While at Year Two, students were positively disposed to all aspects, their appreciation, utilisation and level of articulation had deepened at Year Four. For those who didn't write to a prescribed formula, PLAs in particular were described as personalised and practical enablers of reflection.

There was universal acceptance of the value of reflection at both Year Two and Four, but students were particularly aware of the benefit of reflection as a tool when dealing with specific incidences. Student teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of reflection were however paralleled with TP grade, with higher achievers more strongly

commending the usefulness of reflection. At both times of testing, respondents clearly articulated reflection as a process and not merely as an outcome of PLAs and weekly observations. While the majority of students who addressed this topic identified the benefit of reflection for highlighting key issues in their teaching, others clearly recognised reflection as a necessary part of learning to teach and were aware of how their own reflective skills and practices had improved during TP. Final year students demonstrated conscious awareness of how reflecting on problems and issues encountered informed their subsequent teaching methods and practices.

While recognising the value of their planning and reflective work, students needed greater flexibility and autonomy in carrying out this work. Some participants voiced dissatisfaction with the requirements of planning and reflective work associated with TP, how this was mediated by their tutors and aligned with their own stage of professional development. They were primarily concerned with the level of detailed and associated time they perceived was expected. Aims and objectives were the only aspect of written work highlighted as requiring excess detail, but students must have included a high level of specificity as they referred to lesson plans as mutli-page documents. The impracticality of maintaining this level of detail suggested to them that lesson plans were inappropriate for more experienced teachers.

Students were also critical of the level of detail required for PLAs and weekly observations, the subsequent time afforded to PLAs and the requirement to write a PLA for each lesson taught, which effected the authenticity of their writing and reflection.

They vocalised a perceived high level of inconsistency between tutor requirements regarding the length and level of detail needed for lesson plans, PLAs and weekly observations. In a practicum situation were they had two supervisors coming from different disciplines the challenge of meeting the varying tutor requirements was accentuated.

Student teachers advocated greater flexibility to suit their subject area and style of learning, but also to reflect their changing professional development, maturation and competence. They recommended a more flexible structure and reduction in content and the acceptance of non-literary formats and felt that a daily appraisal would alleviate issues around repetition and enable them to focus on authentic critical incidences.

Student teachers' experiences of the school community and environment

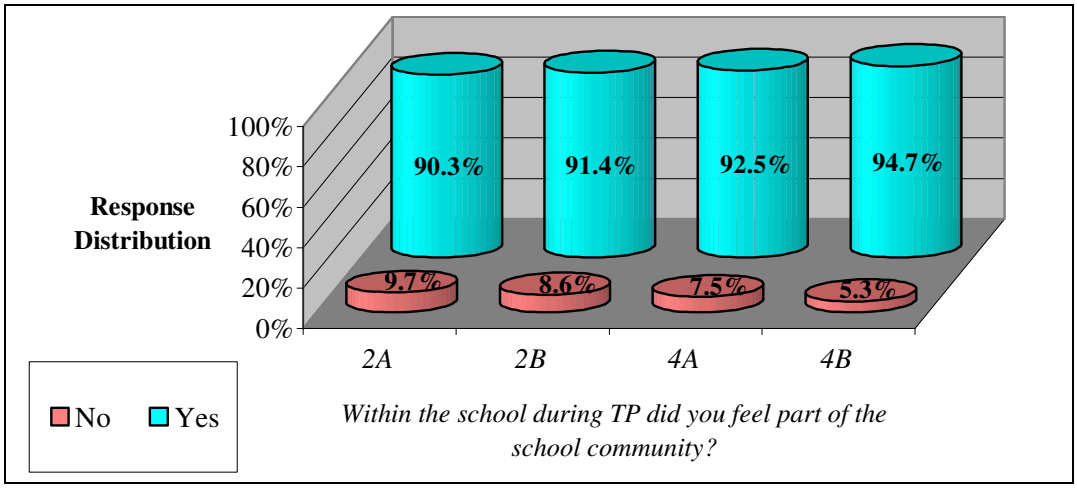
Introduction

In order to gain as holistic a view as possible of the student teachers' experiences of the school community and also their perceptions of their own place within the school environment, the study participants in both strands of Phase One were asked about their experiences of the school environment and community, and the school staff, in particular their co-operating teacher/s.

Perceptions of the school community and students' place within the school

When asked if during their time within the school they felt part of the school community at both Year Two and Four, respondents overwhelmingly agreed. Within Strand One, 90.3% (n=93) from Cohort 2A and 91.4% (n=138) from Cohort 2B indicated that they did feel a part of the school community. Correspondingly within Strand Two, a majority of 92.5% (n=98) of Cohort 4A and 94.7% (n=142) of Cohort 4B highlighted that they felt part of the school community. Therefore, at both Year Two and Four irrespective of the type of school attended, nine out of ten student teachers identified that they felt part of the school community while on TP.

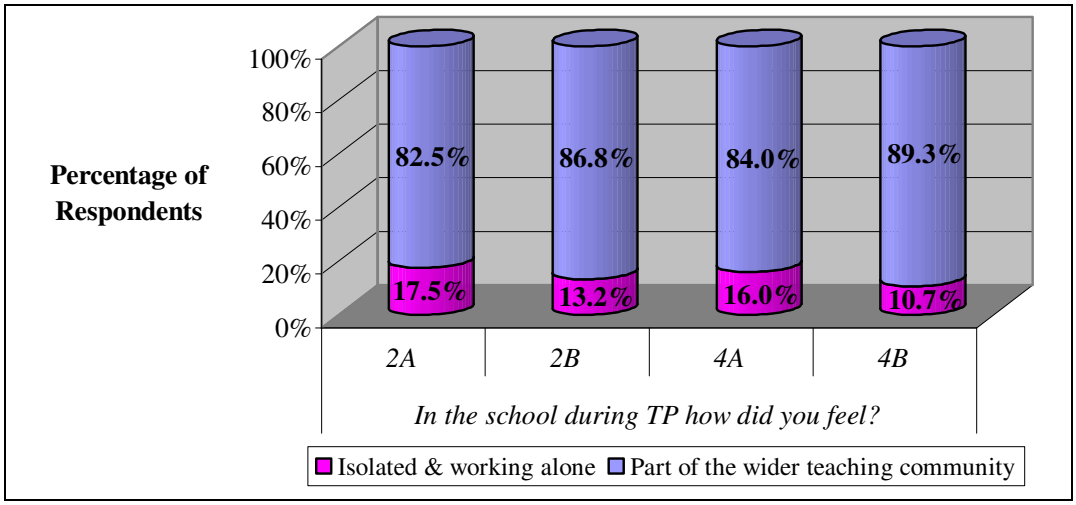
<u>Figure XXXIII:</u> Respondents' perception of their place within the school community



When questioned further, regarding how they felt personally while working in the school environment, the findings illuminated a similitude in the perceptions of student teachers in both strands of Phase One. At Year Two 82.5% (n=85) of the first study

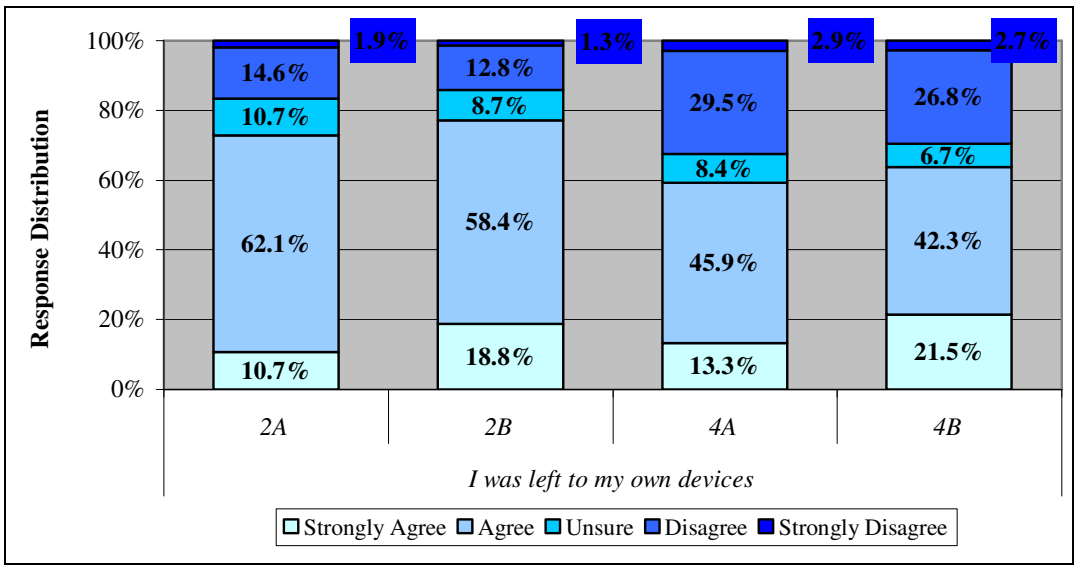
cohort and 86.8% of the second study group specified that they were made to feel part of the wider teaching community (n=131). Likewise, 84.0% (n=89) from Cohort 4A and 89.3% from Cohort 4B (n=133) indicated that they personally felt part of the community within the school.

Figure XXXIV: How student teachers felt in the school during TP



Within Strand One, 72.8% from Cohort 2A (n=75) and 77.2% from Cohort 2B (n=115) indicated they felt they had been left to their own devices during TP. Approximately ten per cent of each cohort classified themselves as unsure (Cohort 2A 10.7% (n=11), Cohort 2B 8.7% (n=13)) and approximately 15% disagreed that they were left to their own devices during TP (Cohort 2A 16.5% (n=17), Cohort 2B 14.1% (n=21)).

Figure XXXV: Were student teachers left to their own devices during TP

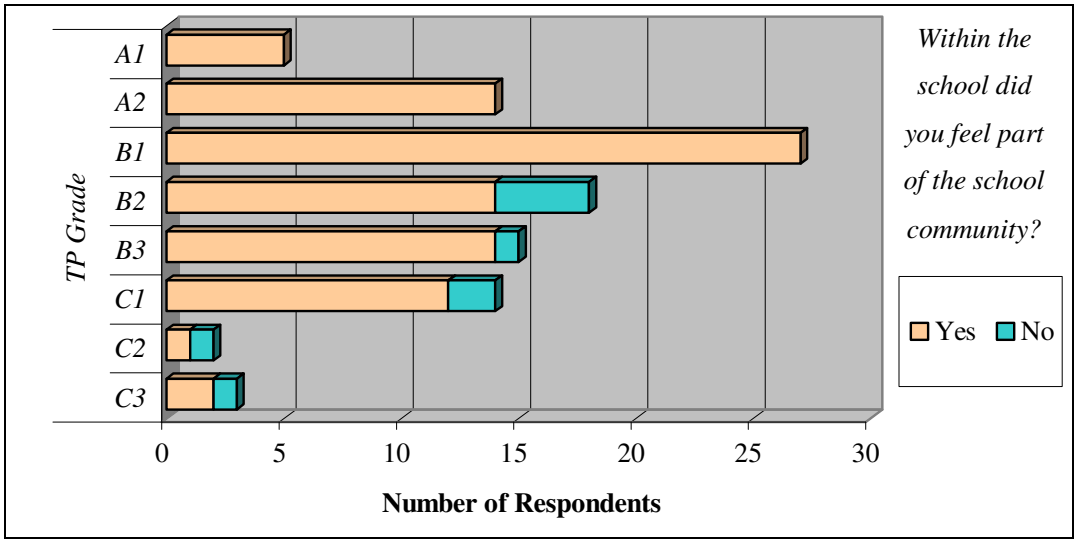


At Year Four the overall percentages who agreed they had been left to their own devices during TP had decreased, with a total of 59.2% in Cohort 4A (n=63) and 63.8% in Cohort 4B (n=96). Similarly lesser percentages of 8.4% (n=9) from Cohort 4A and 6.7% (n=10) classified themselves as unsure. Increased percentages of 32.4% (n=34) form Cohort 4A and 29.5% (n=44) from Cohort 4B stated that they weren't left to their own devices during TP. Therefore at Year Four the percentage who disagreed that they were left to their own devices had doubled from Year Two.

TP grade and student teachers' feelings within the school

In relation to teaching practice grade an association emerged between the grade respondents received and their feelings within the school community within Cohort 2A. As the graph below shows, all respondents in the grade range A_1 to B_1 were positive about their experiences in the school, and indicated that they felt part of the school community. In all of the grades below a B_1 however, a proportion of the students highlighted that they did not feel part of the school community. In general the percentage that stated that they didn't feel part of the community in the school, which ranged from 6.6% to 50% increased as the grade range lowered. This relationship was moderate in strength (V=.333, p=.031).

<u>Figure XXXVI:</u> TP grade and feelings within the school – Cohort 2A

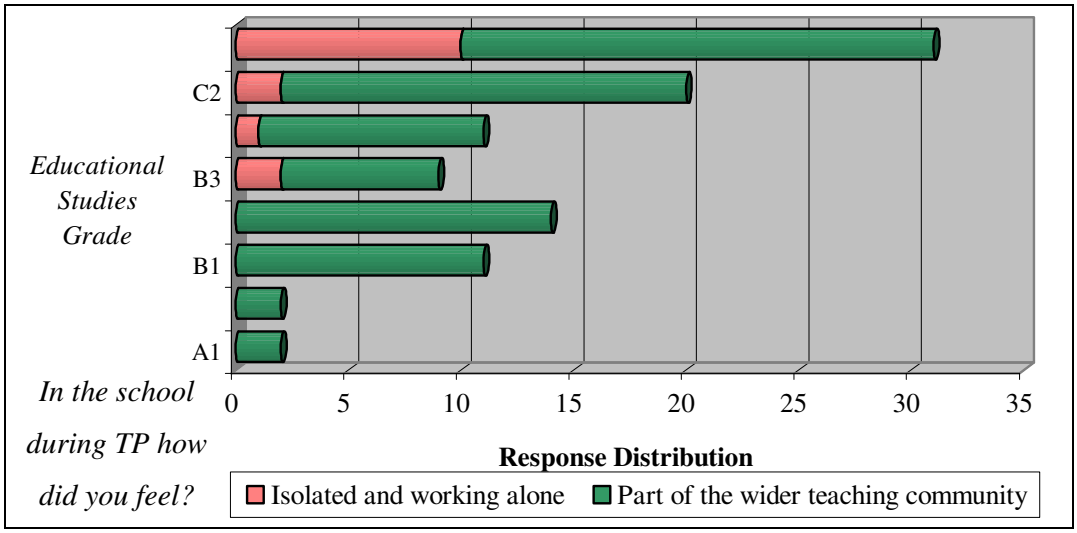


Grade in educational studies and student teachers' feelings within the school

Within that same cohort at Year Two, a moderate relationship was also observed between the grade received for educational studies and student teachers' judgement of

how they felt in the school during TP. The findings highlighted that only students in the grade range B_3 to C_3 specified that they felt isolated and alone. No student in the A_1 to B_2 grade range indicated they felt isolated and alone in the school. Even in the B_3 to C_3 range where students did indicate they felt alone, these percentages ranged from 9.1% (n=1) to 32.3% (n=10), so the majority in each category saw themselves as part of the wider teaching community (*V*=.388, p=.001).

Figure XXXVII: Educational studies grade and feelings in the school – Cohort 2A



Student teacher's opinions and experiences of their TP school community were addressed in the personal responses received in Phase One. In Strand One, forty-four individual comments were made about the school community by Cohort 2A and thirty-five were made by Cohort 2B. Within Strand Two, sixty-eight individuals from Cohort 4A and forty-one from Cohort 4B commented on this aspect of their experience. This was also addressed in the discussion groups of Phase Two. Where comments in relation to the school community were classified as favourable[19] two themes emerged, namely;

- student teachers' feelings about their place within the school community
- aspects of the school community that aided inclusion.

Student teachers' feelings about their place within the school community

The quantitative findings highlighted that in the main, student teachers felt and were made to feel part of the school community. This was reiterated in the written

[19] Frequency of favourable comment: Cohort 2A = twenty-four, Cohort 2B = twenty, Cohort 4A = fifty-one, Cohort 4B = twenty-five.

submissions, as in the vast majority of comments, students alluded to the fact that they felt at ease in the school, and really felt included and part of the school community. This was also the case within the discussions, although participants were less focused on discussing their feelings of inclusion and more focused on why they felt included.

Felt at ease and was made feel very comfortable (respondent 2B: 9)

I was made most welcome and felt part of the school community (respondent 4B: 76)
I have to say the atmosphere was fantastic. From the first morning I walked into the staff room, even the earlier meetings, staff all [sic] very friendly, very welcoming and really made an effort (GDG member: 9)

Contributing factors to inclusion in the school community

From the qualitative data generated in both phases of the research, four aspects of the TP experience were identified as specifically impacting on student teachers' integration within the school community;

- involvement in school activities
- the dynamics of the school environment
- relationships between existing staff
- the timing of TP.

Involvement in school activities

Twenty-three respondents at Year Two and thirty-two at Year Four attributed the fact that they felt they had become a part of the community to their involvement in extra-curricular or other school activities outside of their classroom teaching. Although not as prominent a theme in Phase Two, the students did discuss to some degree how they felt involvement in aspects of school life, additional to their classroom teaching, complemented their integration into the school community.

I loved the staff room, I mixed well with all the staff and took part in activities during my free classes. Felt like I fitted in (respondent 2B: 78)

I got involved in the football team, which made me feel part of the school community (respondent 4B: 3)

My TP school it was great. It allows for a more relaxed relationship with the pupils and allows you to get to know them outside of the classroom. I was involved in the school play and things like that which was great, whereas in my old school there wasn't anything really like that (GDG member: 8)

The dynamics of the school environment

Five respondents from Cohort 2A and four from Cohort 2B specified that it was the dynamics of the school environment in particular that helped them to settle in and feel part of the school community. The fact that the school was a fun place and had an enjoyable and professional atmosphere was cited by respondents as helping them to settle in. At Year Four, student teachers highlighted a personal awareness regarding types of schools and how they believed the school type, culture etc. had an impact on their integration into the school.

> *Very positive school environment, always felt welcome and the treatment of student teachers was favourable (respondent 4A: 11)*
>
> *It was a very warm and professional environment (respondent 2A: 6)*
>
> *This aspect can depend a lot on the school and the community within the school (respondent 4A: 72)*

The dynamics of the school environment was the most prominent area of discussion within Phase Two and participants indicated that if the school was a fun and enjoyable place it made them feel more at ease. In particular the students displayed an appreciation of different school types and articulated how different school cultures, norms, atmospheres etc. affected their experiences and integration within the school. There was general agreement that how well one integrates into the school, 'it depends I think, it depends on what school you go to, what kind of school you are in and the personality of the teacher' (GDG member: 10).

> *I think of when I was in school and my teaching practice school, the cultural difference between them. In the school that I went to, there was nothing going on, there was no relationship between teachers and pupils, there was [sic] no activities, nothing was encouraged…whereas on [sic] both my teaching practice schools, which were community schools / community colleges the culture around the school was just fabulous. It's relaxed it's laid back, there is [sic] teacher pupil tournaments, there is a relationship there, but there is also respect there as well on both sides. It works both ways (GDG member: 8)*

Relationships between existing staff

Respondents from both strands of Phase One also stated that relationships between the existing staff and the student teachers were of importance. They noted that the unity and camaraderie between staff and the interest that the staff showed in the student teachers aided their feelings of inclusion. This was again touched on in Phase Two, with the

focus group members talking about how being included by the staff facilitated their sense of belonging and ease within the school.

> *I feel this depends on the school. The school I was in already had a strong sense of unity and support. This was a big factor (respondent 2A: 40)*
>
> *The staff were very open and honest and they integrated well with each other and also well with new staff (respondent 4A: 56)*
>
> *4th year school was in stark contrast to my 2nd year teaching practice school, which was a bigger staff. They tended to be sort of isolated in small groups, whereas this one was much more open. Everyone got on and was really made to feel part of the team (GDG member: 19)*

The timing of TP

Within Phase Two, some participants voiced the belief that they felt included, because their Year Four TP had commenced early in September, so they started contemporaneously with the other teachers. This was different to Year Two, as that TP began in March so the student teachers felt they didn't have the same opportunity to establish themselves within the school community.

> *Because we started in September so early like, [sic] some of them a lot of the new teachers say [sic] young teachers, they started off at the same time as me so everyone was all getting to know each other at the same time. Whereas in 2nd year, we were kind of put in [sic] the middle of the year when everyone knows each other already. When we were leaving they were like it's so weird without you because they didn't know the school without us (GDG member: 21)*

Where comments in relation to the school community were classified as unfavourable[20] a number of themes emerged, namely;

- contributing factors to isolation within the school community
- feeling part of school community took some time
- students alternated between feeling isolated and accepted during TP.

Contributing factors to isolation within the school community

In fifteen of the personal responses received from Year Two respondents and eighteen from participants at Year Four, the student teachers exclusively wrote of feeling isolated

[20] Frequency of unfavourable comment: Cohort 2A = twenty, Cohort 2B = fifteen, Cohort 4A = seventeen, Cohort 4B = sixteen.

or of not feeling part of the school community. Similarly within Phase Two, four respondents spoke of feeling isolated during their time within the school.

> *Staff rooms seem to have some very well defined "cliques" and I often felt like an intruder, especially considering the age profile of my particular staff room on TP (respondent 4A: 103)*

In Phase One, respondents in the main ascribed this isolation to the amount of planning and reflection that had to be completed on a daily basis and pinpointed this as secluding them and preventing them from experiencing the school environment as a normal practising teacher might.

> *It sometimes felt like I was a little isolated, as I always seemed to have work to be doing (respondent 2B: 69)*

> *No real chance to properly integrate due to forced isolation due to workload (respondent 4B: 75)*

Within the guided discussion groups, a different basis for feeling isolated was highlighted. In this case the primary reason alluded to was that the practising teachers in the school were significantly older than the students and they found it difficult to relate to the teachers, which in turn made them feel isolated.

> *I felt in mine the staff were really old, there was [sic] no young people there. The youngest person there was my (subject) cooperating teacher and he was about 35 and they were all from the area because it is a country school, so they all knew everybody and I was coming in from the city and I was getting really weird looks. At the end while I did feel like they were all so friendly, there was just nobody that I could even relate to there and it was kind of difficult (GDG member: 25)*

Feeling part of school community took some time

Within Phase One, eleven students at Year Two and an identical number at Year Four expressed the belief that irrespective of any other factors, settling into the school community just took time. One reason articulated for this was that student teachers feel nervous or anxious when beginning in a new school and the time it took for this to abate depended on how they were received and treated in the school community. Some focus group members also elucidated that they found it took time to feel included and settle into the school community.

It takes time to feel part of a team (respondent 2B: 76)

TP moves from feeling [sic] of isolation through to being part of staff. It took a few weeks, but by the end I felt comfortable in the staff room (respondent 4B: 92)

All the young women sat over at this table and individually they would all talk to me, but together as a group I just never felt that I could go over and sit down over there and for the first couple weeks it was a bit odd …the only people who talked to me for the first 2 weeks were men and middle aged women. After that I said ah well feck it [sic], I don't care, I started getting on an awful lot better with them and even Christmas parties, I dunno [sic] but just started to really feel like part of the school community (GDG member: 15)

Student teachers alternated between feeling isolated and accepted

Another viewpoint that emerged from Phase One was that some participants alternated between feeling isolated and accepted throughout their TP experience. These students never felt fully accepted nor utterly isolated and alone; rather they placed themselves somewhere between. This prompted some to comment on the benefit they saw in placing student teachers together in schools to support one another. This was also addressed in discussions, where the dialogue highlighted the advantage students believed it was for all involved when student teachers are placed together in schools.

At times I did feel isolated and continually under examination (respondent 2A: 41)

Felt isolated at times, as it would be better if you had someone else on TP in your school who you could discuss matters with (respondent 4A: 9)

I had another student up with me till mid term break. He was a repeat so he was just doing the 5 weeks and I felt then that the 2 of us were [sic], I was lucky to have him we would talk to each other, made things a lot easier (GDG member: 14)

Potential role of a school-based TP co-coordinator

Based on their combined experiences of TP at Year Two and Four, some focus group members suggested that schools should have a designated person or TP co-ordinator on site, who would introduce student teachers to the everyday workings of school life and make them aware of relevant school information which would aid in their integration.

I just think that the school communicates, different schools communicate in such different ways. Whether you talk to the principal or you talk to the vice principal, whether [sic] who is not talking to who in the classroom, who has fights with who and that, is such a huge part of the school. How to find out stuff like that, who to go to. I think if a school is prepared to take a student for teaching practice they should be prepared to have a co-ordinator for that (GDG member: 15)

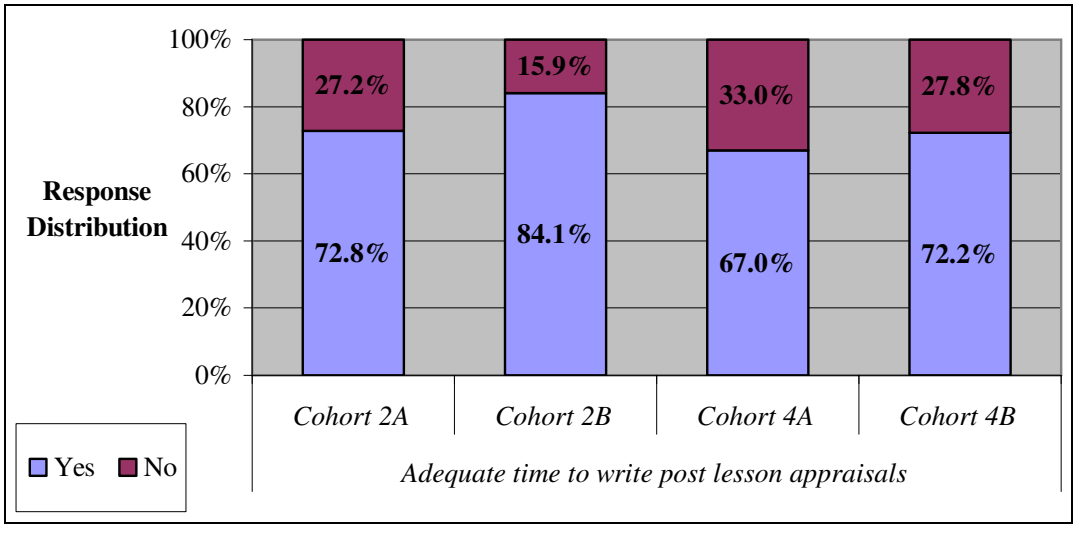
The school I was in was an amalgamation between 2 local schools and they had just taken on that September, had taken on 10 new teaching staff. So they had this new teacher mentor it was called, he was the (subject) teacher but he was a character and like that… it does, it breaks the whole thing. Makes you twice as relaxed when you are in there and at least then if something goes wrong you have someone to go back to (GDG member: 17)

How well the school environment accommodated different aspects of the student teachers' work

Within Phase One the student teachers were asked if they had the opportunity to focus on reflective aspects of their development within the school environment and particularly, if their needs in relation to this were accommodated. Most specifically the respondents were asked if within the school, they were given adequate time to write their post-lesson appraisals and if they had access to a quiet place to do so.

At Year Two, 72.8% (n=75) of respondents from Cohort 2A at and within Cohort 2B a higher percentage (84.1%) indicated that they felt they had adequate time during the school day to complete PLAs (n=127). At Year Four, lower percentages of both cohorts at 67.0% from Cohort 4A (n=71) and 72.2% from Cohort 4B (n=109) signalled that they perceived they had adequate time to write PLAs.

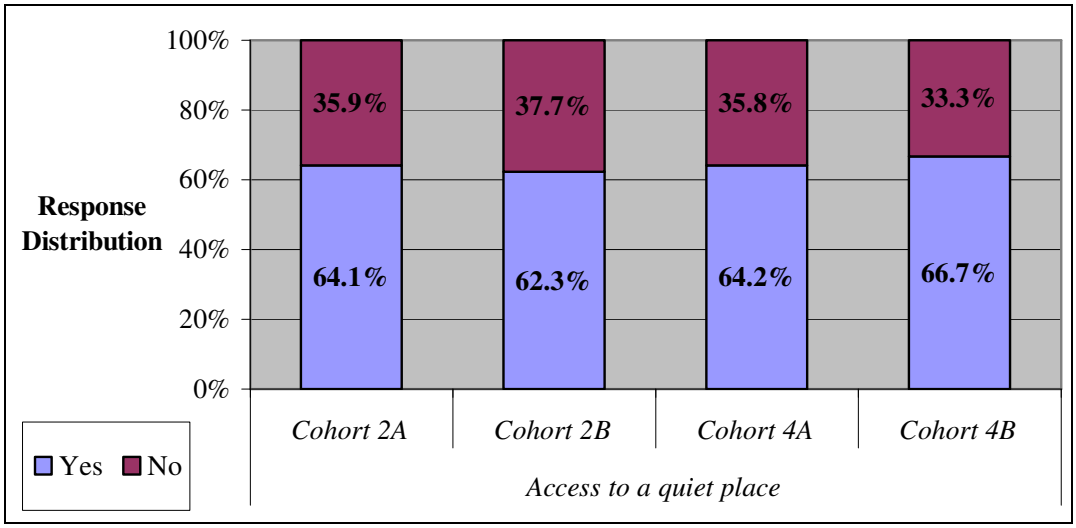
<u>Figure XXXVIII:</u> Respondents' perception of time available to write PLAs



A parallel in the perceptions of both Year Two cohorts was evident with regards to having access to a quiet place to work, as 64.1% of Cohort 2A (n=66) and 62.3% of Cohort 2B (n=94) participants agreed that they had access to a quiet place to work. Student teachers' perceptions in Strand Two were also comparable, as 64.2% of Cohort

4A (n=68) and 66.7% of Cohort 4B (n=100) agreed that they had access to a suitable area where they could reflect. It is notable that approximately one third of all respondents did not feel they had access to a suitable place to do their work.

<u>Figure XXXIX:</u> Participants' opinions of the access available to a suitable work area



The staffroom

Within Strand One a total of eighteen respondents commented on the staffroom environment within their TP school as did thirteen from Strand Two. Within Phase Two, although the staffroom was mentioned in relation to the issues already addressed regarding school culture and staff dynamics, this area did not receive any deeper consideration during discussions, except in relation to the staffroom as a place to work, which was touched on in two of the groups.

In the majority of comments from Phase One, respondents highlighted that they found it difficult to work in the staffroom, with some specifically stating that they completed their written work at home due to this. This was the only reference made to the staffroom in the focus group discussions.

Difficult to do any work in the staff room (respondent 2A: 28)

Had to go home to do my reflective journal. 1 staff room only (respondent 4A: 106)

Inside in the staff room, you wouldn't get any time to do your post lesson appraisals (GDG member: 23)

In both strands of Phase One, the predominant reason given for this was that the staffroom was a noisy and busy place, which made it difficult to concentrate on work. Coupled with this a small number of respondents stated that they felt it was rude to work when teachers were making an effort to include them in conversations. Eleven respondents at Year Two and five at Year Four highlighted that their school staffroom had neither the space nor facilities they needed to do their work.

> *I usually wrote PLAs at home most of the time, because it was quieter and I could think about the class (respondent 2B: 86)*
>
> *Sometimes felt rude [sic] as other teachers didn't have to do all the paper work and I was there working all the time (respondent 4A: 55)*
>
> *No quiet area or even desk was provided. Had to sit in the staff room in unsuitable noisy conditions (respondent 2B: 24)*

With whom respondents identified most in the school

In order to gain further insight into how the student teachers felt they fitted into the school community and to expand our understanding of their perceptions of themselves and their role at this early stage in their teaching career, the respondents were asked with whom they identified most at the beginning of teaching practice.[21]

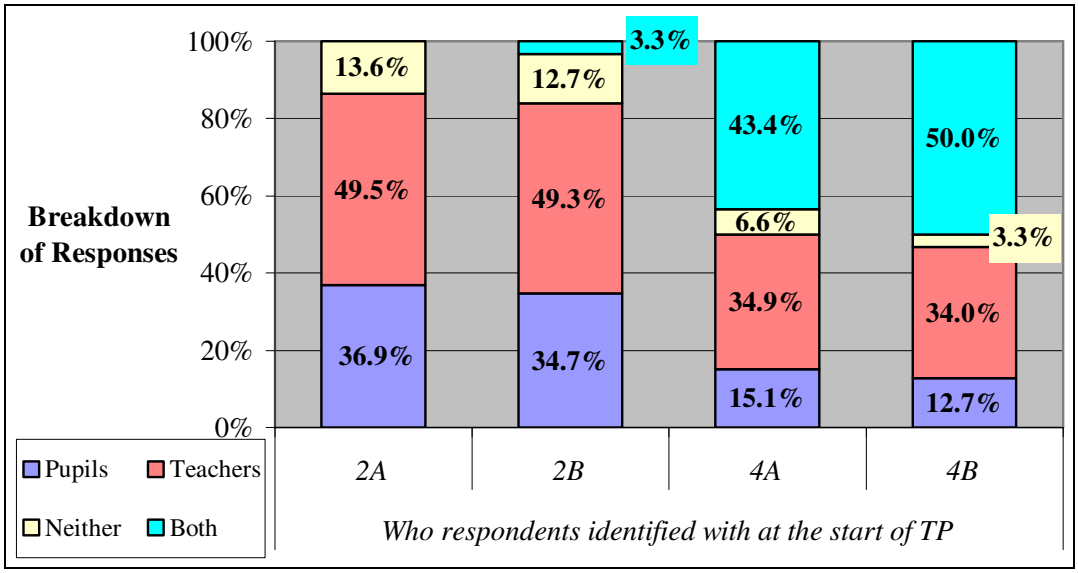
In Year Two, although 49.5% of Cohort 2A (n=51) and 49.3% of Cohort 2B (n=74) stated that they identified most with the teachers, 36.9% of respondents from Cohort 2A (n=38) and 34.7% from Cohort 2B (n=52) indicated that they felt they related most to the pupils. Lower percentages of 13.6% from Cohort 2A (n=14) and 12.7% from Cohort 2B (n=19) specified that they did not identify with either group at the start of TP. Interestingly, only 3.3% of the study group B indicated that they identified with both teachers and pupils at Year Two (n=5).

At Year Four, although percentages of 34.9% of Cohort 4A (n=37) and 34.0% of Cohort 4B (n=51) stated that they identified most with teachers, these percentages had decreased from Year Two. So too had the percentages who identified most with pupils, which had decreased by twenty-two per cent in both cohorts. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who signalled that they did not identify with either group had also

[21] Respondents were presented with four answer options; the teachers, the pupils, neither or both, except in Cohort 2A where only three possible options were provided namely; the teachers, the pupils or neither.

reduced by 6% in Cohort A and 9.4% in Cohort B. The most noteworthy change was in the percentage of participants who specified that they identified with both teachers and pupils as 43.4% of Cohort 4A (n=46) and 50.0% of Cohort 4B (n=75) highlighted that they identified with both, an increase of over forty per cent from Year Two.

Figure XL: Whom respondents identified with most at the beginning of TP



Many of the student teachers in Phase One made further comments regarding their feelings about the pupils and the teachers within their co-operating schools. Within Phase Two, discussions about the teaching staff and pupils in the school were not specific but rather emerged as part of other issues being discussed, predominately in relation to their co-operating teachers. These will therefore be dealt with in the context within which they arose for greater clarity and to avoid inaccurate interpretation.

Feelings about the pupils

Thirteen student teachers from Cohort 2A and seven from Cohort 2B, together with eight from Cohort 4A and seven from Cohort 4B specifically mentioned the pupils within their co-operating school. Respondents specifically referred to how pupils treated them like "real" teachers, a point which was highlighted in many of the personal responses. It became clear that this feeling of acceptance was important to student teachers as a means of determining their place within the school and their status as a teacher.

Treated as a 'proper' teacher by students (respondent 4B: 59)

Yes was accepted very well by students which was very important to me, to be seen as a proper teacher (respondent 2A: 88)

The staff and pupils were very helpful. I was awarded the respect of a teacher from pupils and teachers alike (respondent 2B: 98)

Feelings about the school staff and student teachers' relationships with teachers

Within Phase One a large number of student teachers in all cohorts added further comments about the general teaching staff in their TP schools[22]. From the comments received four themes emerged which identified that the teaching staff;

- were helpful and supportive of the student teachers
- offered advice to the student teachers
- were welcoming, friendly and nice
- treated the students like real teachers.

Teaching staff were helpful and supportive of the student teachers

The cohorts overwhelmingly agreed that the teachers in their TP schools were obliging and respondents when describing the teaching staff most frequently used the adjective "helpful". Teachers were also perceived to be very supportive and fifty-three respondents from Cohort 2A, forty-nine from Cohort 2B, thirty-two from Cohort 4A and twenty-three from Cohort 4B described them in this manner. A number of participants at both times of testing also referred to the fact that they found the younger staff members more helpful and supportive than the older or longer practicing teachers.

The teachers in the staff room were very helpful, they encouraged me and really welcomed me (respondent 2A: 32)

Yes, all teachers not only in my subject areas were very supportive and helpful, especially the young staff (respondent 4B: 146)

The teachers offered advice to the student teachers

Throughout the responses at Year Two and Four, students wrote of how teachers offered them advice on aspects of their teaching from dealing with discipline and classroom management to issues relating to subject knowledge. As part of this, some Year Four respondents highlighted that a sharing of information existed between the

[22] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = one hundred and thirteen, Cohort 2B = eighty-five, Cohort 4A = eight-three, Cohort 4B = sixty-seven.

teachers and wrote of being included in discussions with other teachers about students, classroom management etc. which aided in their feelings of inclusion within the school.

Teachers went out of their way to help. Gave me loads of advice about the job that you can't learn in lectures (respondent 2A: 95)

Any teacher I approached helped me out and gave advice (respondent 4B: 13)

Always involved by other teachers about topic relating to teaching methods or particular students and strategies. A sharing of info existed (respondent 4A: 30)

The teaching staff were welcoming, friendly and nice

Twenty respondents from Cohort 2A and sixteen from Cohort 2B together with thirty from Cohort 4A and twenty from Cohort 4B commented that the teachers in their TP schools made them feel very welcome. Because of the reception they received, words like "friendly" and "nice" were frequently invoked to describe the teaching staff. Students also stressed how important it was to be welcomed and included, as this made them feel at ease in the school and aided in them having a positive experience. Only nine participants across both strands of Phase One expressed the view that they didn't feel welcomed by the staff and linked this to the fact that they were student teachers.

I found the teachers very friendly and they did their best to make me feel comfortable (respondent 2A: 84)

The staffroom was very welcoming and made TP easier (respondent 4A: 57)

Teachers / school were very welcoming and supportive, so issues related to them did not arise (respondent 2B: 12)

The teachers in the school weren't very welcoming to be honest. Difficult to fit in totally when only there in a temporary role (respondent 4B: 63)

The teaching staff treated the student teachers like real teachers

As with their personal comments about the pupils, the issue of being accepted as a teacher or being treated like any other teacher by the staff was highlighted as important by the student teachers. Thirteen participants from Cohort 2A and eight from Cohort 2B specifically referred to this, as did twelve from Cohort 4A and eleven from Cohort 4B.

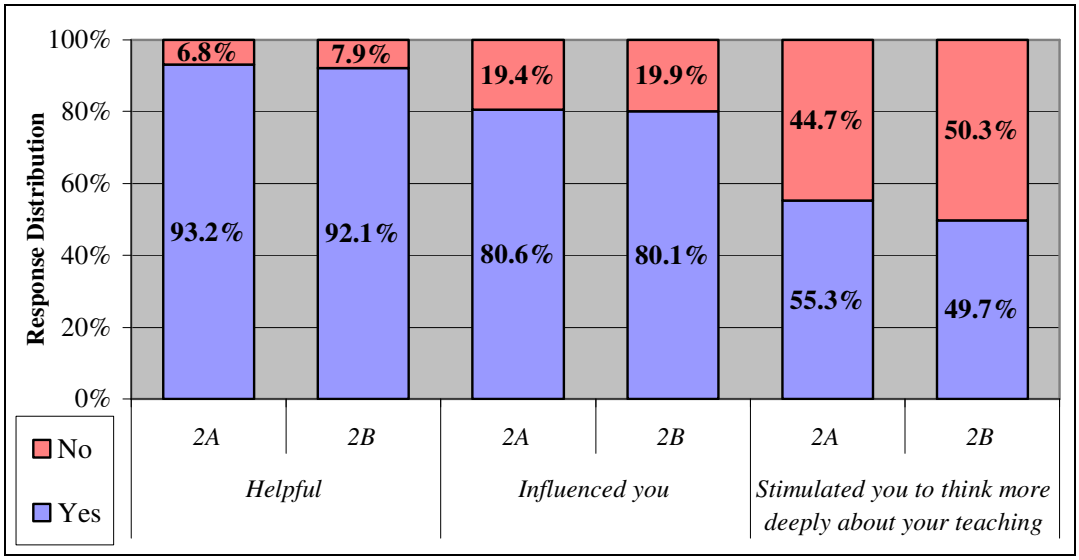
Staff didn't treat me as if I was a student teacher, was always treated like a member of the teaching staff. Were all very helpful, I helped them, they helped me. Became really good friends with a lot of the staff, was one of them (respondent 2A: 90)

Made me feel welcome was treated as a full teacher. Left to teach my classes and included in staff meetings (respondent 4B: 56)

Opinions of their co-operating teachers

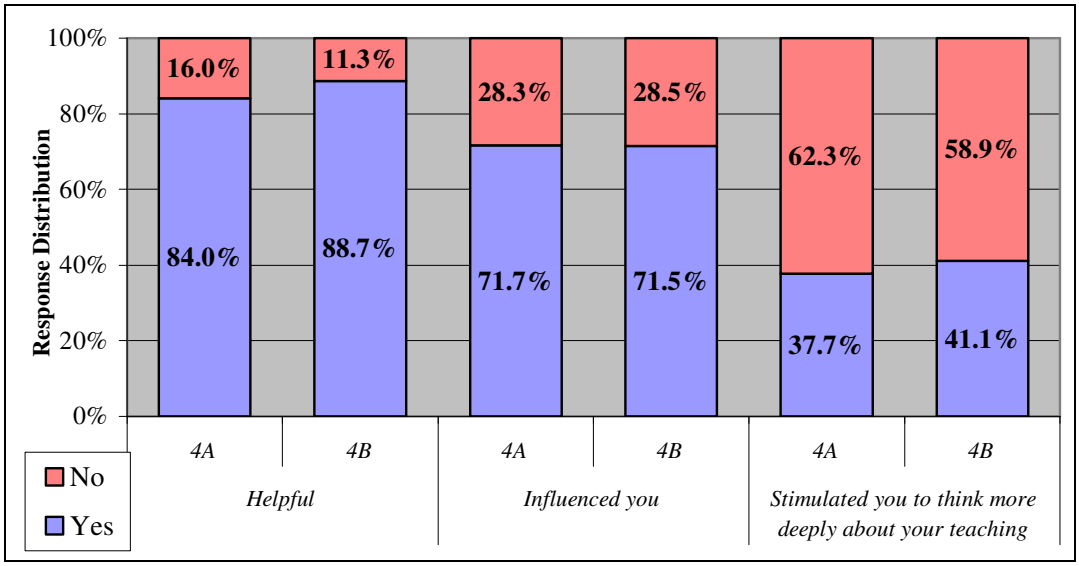
When questioned specifically about their co-operating teachers in Phase One, overall the respondents in Strand One overwhelmingly agreed that their own co-operating teachers were helpful to them during TP (93.2% from Cohort 2A (n=96) and 92.1% from Cohort 2B (n=139)). Similarly when asked if they felt that their co-operating teachers influenced them in anyway, approximately eighty per cent of both study groups signalled that their co-operating teachers influenced them (Cohort 2A = 80.6% (n=83) Cohort 2B = 80.1% (n=121)). 55.3% of Cohort 2A (n=57) and a lesser proportion (49.7%) of Cohort 2B (n=75) indicated that their co-operating teachers stimulated them to think more deeply about their teaching.

Figure XLI: Student teachers' opinions of their co-operating teachers – Year 2



At Year Four, the number of student teachers signalling that their co-operating teachers were helpful, influenced them or stimulated them to think more deeply had reduced. Nonetheless 84.0% of Cohort 4A (n=89) and 88.7% of Cohort 4B (n=134) indicated their own co-operating teachers were helpful to them during TP. Similarly 71.7% (n=76) of Cohort 4A and 71.5% of Cohort 4B (n=108) indicated that they believed their co-operating teachers influenced them. 37.7% of Cohort 4A (n=39) and 41.1% of Cohort 4B (n=62) indicated that their co-operating teachers stimulated them to think more deeply about their own teaching.

Figure XLII: Student teachers' opinions of their co-operating teachers – Year 4



Descriptions and perceptions of co-operating teachers

Student teachers referred to their co-operating teachers very frequently in their personal responses of Phase One[23] and similarly within Phase Two, co-operating teachers received a great deal of attention in the discussions that took place.

Running throughout all of the personal comments made about co-operating teachers was the perception that co-operating teachers were generous in giving advice and ideas to student teachers regarding many aspects of their teaching. Some respondents commented on how much they appreciated this advice, which they felt was worthwhile, benefited their teaching, and they learned a lot from.

> *My co-operating teacher and the other teachers were excellent, didn't impose gave the hints that needed to be given, looked after my every need and acted as a friend to talk to when problems arose (respondent 2A: 85)*
>
> *He has been teaching 17 years and I would say takes it for granted. He is a very good teacher and gave me loads of really helpful advice which I really benefited from (respondent 4A: 28)*
>
> *They were extremely helpful and I learned a lot from them over TP (respondent 2A: 4)*

[23] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = two-hundred and forty-two, Cohort 2B = one-hundred and ninety-four, Cohort 4A = two-hundred and eighteen, Cohort 4B = one-hundred and eighty.

Students perceptions of their co-operating teachers will be addressed under three key headings;

- helpfulness of co-operating teachers
- influence of co-operating teachers on the student teachers
- co-operating teachers effect on the student teachers' thinking about teaching.

Helpfulness of co-operating teachers

Like the comments made about the general teaching staff, the predominant word used by Phase One respondents to describe their co-operating teachers was "helpful". At both Year Two and Four, approximately fifty respondents in each cohort[24] referred to their co-operating teachers as helpful. Within the discussion groups too, co-operating teachers were quite frequently described as helpful, and participants in the main painted the co-operating teachers they had encountered in an extremely positive light.

> *Very helpful, gave up a lot of his free time (respondent 2A: 60)*
>
> *All of my co-operating teachers were excellent – supportive, helpful, everything you could hope for (respondent 4B: 57)*
>
> *My co-operating teachers were brilliant. Anything I needed they did, they helped me out no problem (GDG member: 3)*

In Phase One, a proportion of these respondents made reference to the fact that they felt their co-operating teachers were helpful because they were, as the student teachers described, "with it" and were in touch with the reality of teaching and TP. Year Two respondents in particular related this to the age group of the co-operating teachers, with the general observation expressed that younger teachers were most helpful.

> *Very helpful he was "with it" understood I had a dual purpose of (1) pleasing the tutor to get a good grade (2) had to improve and experience teaching in a school (respondent 2A: 62)*
>
> *They were very realistic and were in touch with the needs of the pupils they were teaching. They gave me helpful points to improve my teaching (respondent 4B: 55)*
>
> *My co-operating teacher was young and not long out of UL and knew the story. He helped me get settled in and supplied me with anything I needed with regards materials, tools, info [sic] etc (respondent 2A: 99)*

[24] Cohort 2A = fifty-two, Cohort 2B = forty-three, Cohort 4A = forty-one and Cohort 4B = forty-eight.

Within the discussion groups, the participants did not conclusively equate the age of the teacher to how helpful they were, but were more clear-cut in their analysis and connected the level of help and support received with individual teacher personality.

Absolutely everything depends on the person you get (GDG member: 5)

Well from my experience, depends totally on the person that is out there. I think probably it would be the new teachers are probably more innovative and helpful (GDG member: 6)

Areas specified by respondents where teachers were seen as helpful

Because of the volume and level of detail in the personal comments made in Phase One, it was possible to identify consistency in the areas where the student teachers indicated their co-operating teachers were helpful. Six areas in particular were highlighted by respondents where their co-operating teachers had been most helpful.

At both times of testing, the area where teachers were perceived to be most helpful was with regards to equipment and resources, with the largest numbers of respondents specifying they were very helpful at advising on appropriate resources as well as with finding and even giving the student teachers their own resources. The second most frequently mentioned area that respondents found their co-operating teachers helpful was with the organising of laboratory sessions / workshops. Mentioned third most frequently at Year Two was issues relating to subject knowledge. Teaching methods and strategies was the third most frequently mentioned area in relation to helpfulness of co-operating teachers at Year Four. Discipline emerged as the fourth area where co-operating teachers were seen as helpful at both times of testing. Finally planning for lessons was the fifth area highlighted by respondents at both times of testing.

She was like a safety-net, not intrusive but always willing to help, during labs, getting equipment, ways around missing equipment, new syllabus knowledge (respondent 2B: 71)

He tried to help me in every way possible. When I wanted help finding resources he was always there to tell me where they were (respondent 2A: 84)

Any amount of help was given, talked to me about methods of teaching and the issues in the school i.e. legality (respondent 4B: 30)

Any time I needed advice on how to deal with certain pupils or if I was unsure about the subject matter, I received help (respondent 2B: 9)

Very helpful in my planning for the six weeks lessons and also any discipline problems I had (respondent 2B: 47)

It is noteworthy that the language used by respondents often referred to the practical nature of the help received and that they saw their co-operating teachers as helpful because they offered "tips" etc. that were considered to be practically useful.

One helped a fair bit at the beginning and just gave me hints now and then. The tips he was giving me where mostly to do with just the organisation of the classroom. He would have being concerned as well about the education…It wasn't rubbish it was practical help (GDG member: 6)

In keeping with the quantitative findings, only nine respondents from Cohort 2A and seven from each of the other three cohorts expressed the view that they had not received any help from their co-operating teachers during TP. No member of the guided discussion groups expressly described a co-operating teacher as unhelpful, but within three of the groups, members voiced the opinion that their co-operating teachers were difficult to work with.

Was no help at all. Class didn't respect him and he wouldn't help me when I asked (respondent 2B: 11)

No help what so ever. I was an inconvenience to her (respondent 4B: 124)

He was very pushy, very demanding kept changing the goal posts all the time. He would tell me to do one thing I would prepare stuff for it and then he would change it and I got kind of caught (GDG member: 5)

Co-operating teachers left student teachers to their own devices

Fifteen respondents from Strand One and twenty-one from Strand Two expressed the view that their co-operating teachers just left them to their own devices and didn't show any interest in being involved with them. This was further reiterated in each of the discussion groups. The only reason cited by respondents as to why they were left to their own devices was because their co-operating teachers never stayed in the class while they were teaching, or were not in the school to be of assistance.

Not really, I was pretty much left to my own devices (respondent 2A: 12)

Neither of mine were really in the picture much. I visited loads and they gave me the information that I needed and then they kind of just left and left me to it. I had to

prepare the Christmas exam and she had no contact with the class at all, she gave them the Christmas exam and I basically had them for the term (GDG member: 2)

No, I felt alone in my (subject) classes. He didn't even come into school when I was taking his classes (respondent 4A: 91)

When I got the classes one of my teachers he said how many morning classes of his did I get? So I don't know how many maybe 3 and then goes [sic] that's grand so. He wasn't in till about half 11 some mornings (GDG member: 18)

Influence of co-operating teachers on the student teachers

Another issue focused on by student teachers within Phase One was the influence their co-operating teachers had on them. Eighteen participants from Cohort 2A, twenty-five from Cohort 2B, fourteen in Cohort 4A and twenty-one in Cohort 4B spoke of their co-operating teachers as being an influencing factor on their teaching. Within the discussion groups, participants in the main were dismissive of the notion that their co-operating teachers had influenced them. In this forum, participants differentiated between being helpful and being influential and were clear that although they may have seen their co-operating teacher as helpful, they didn't believe this meant they were an influencing factor on their teaching. Interestingly, the only students who specifically stated that their co-operating teachers influenced them were students who were involved in the Lucent Mentoring programme.

They influenced greatly my techniques in teaching and showed me ways of teaching that were very effective (respondent 2A: 86)

My co-operating teachers greatly influenced my teaching style and attempted to assist me in any way they could (respondent 4A: 72)

I went to a lucent school, which meant that my (subject) cooperating teacher would come into UL and he knew what was going on and what my tutors wanted…he used to sit in on a lesson every week…He was just fantastic, absolutely fantastic. I can't praise him enough he was amazing and he influenced my teaching so much. So my cooperating teacher is definitely one of my biggest impacts (GDG member: 23)

Areas where student teachers felt their co-operating teachers influenced them

Because of the multitude of comments obtained in Phase One, it was possible to investigate any consistency in the areas where the student teachers indicated their co-operating teachers had an influence. Student teachers highlighted six different areas of their teaching on which they felt their co-operating teachers had an influence.

Approximately eleven student teachers in each cohort[25] indicated that they were most influenced by their co-operating teachers in their choices of teaching methods and strategies. Although discipline was not a key area where teachers were seen as helpful, four times the number of student teachers at Year Two and double the number at Year Four classified discipline as an area that they felt their co-operating teachers had influenced them. Equal numbers of respondents at Year Two stated that it was with both the organising of laboratory procedures and with issues relating to the subject knowledge that they found their co-operating teachers influenced them. At Year Four, eight respondents from Cohort 4A and six from Cohort 4B stated that their co-operating teachers had influenced them in relation to subject knowledge. The penultimate area classed by student teachers at Year Two and Four, was in relation to planning and preparation for lessons. Only seven respondents from Strand One and six from Strand Two specified that their co-operating teachers had influenced this aspect of their teaching. This was comparable to the number who highlighted this as an area where they felt their co-operating teachers had been helpful.

> *My co-operating teachers were both very helpful and gave me great ideas which influenced my teaching strategies (respondent 4B: 79)*
>
> *Yes they did influence me, especially one, he gave me information about different students and how to approach the discipline in the school (respondent 2A: 10)*
>
> *Shared ideas – gave tips associated with labs etc. (respondent 2A: 2)*
>
> *They gave me new ideas and approaches to teaching topics and aided me in approaching discipline problems (respondent 4B: 55)*
> *Influenced me to plan effectively to meet the needs of the students (respondent 4B: 40)*

The final and least specified area where teachers were perceived to have an influence was with regard to resources for classroom teaching, with a total of four student teachers highlighting this as an area where they were influenced by their co-operating teachers. This is a complete inversion of findings regarding the helpfulness of co-operating teachers, as this was the area highlighted most frequently.

[25] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = twelve, Cohort 2B = eleven, Cohort 4A = twelve, Cohort 4B = ten.

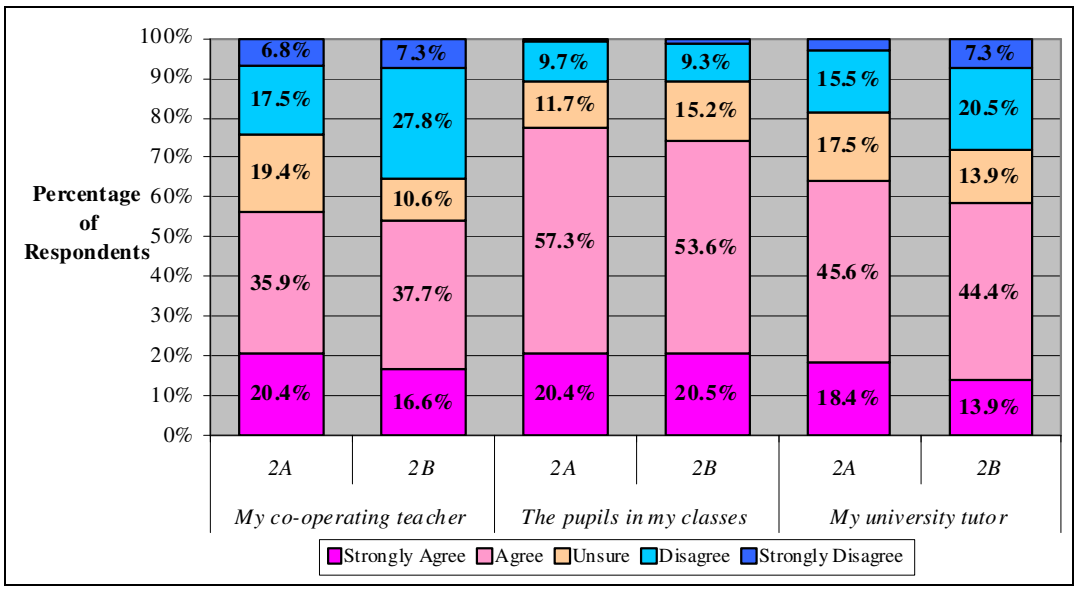
It is noteworthy that here also, the language used by respondents to describe the influence that their co-operating teachers had, often referred to the practical nature of how the co-operating teachers impacted on the student teachers teaching.

Influences on student teachers' teaching approaches

When we examine the students' responses to the statement "My co-operating teacher strongly influenced my teaching" in parallel with statements regarding how strongly both their tutor and the pupils in their classes influenced their teaching and choice of teaching approaches, it is evident that co-operating teachers were perceived to have the least influence overall. In fact at Year Two respondents designated the pupils in their classes as having the most influence on their teaching, as this statement had the highest percentage agreement at 77.7% (n=80) of Cohort 2A and 74.1% (n=112) of Cohort 2B. At Year Four the same pattern was evident as this statement had the highest percentage agreement at 72.4% (n=76) from Cohort 4A and 86.7% from Cohort 4B (n=130).

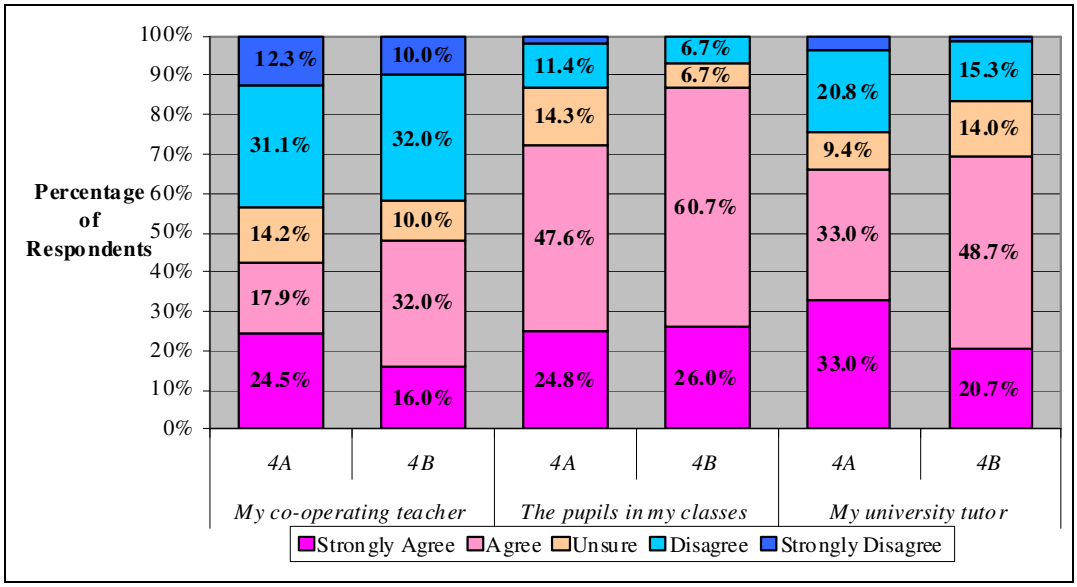
At Year Two, 56.3% of Cohort 2A (n=58) and 54.3% of Cohort 2B (n=82) agreed that their co-operating teacher influenced their teaching which was the lowest level of agreement of the three statements. Correspondingly at Year Four, this statement showed the lowest percentage agreement with 42.4% from Cohort 4A (n=45) and 48.0% from Cohort 4B (n=72) agreeing that their co-operating teachers influenced their teaching.

<u>Figure XLIII:</u> Influences on respondents' teaching approaches – Year Two



For both cohorts at Year Two, the university tutor was found to be the second strongest influence on their choice of teaching approaches with 64.1% of Cohort 2A (n=66) and 58.3% of Cohort 2B (n=88) agreeing that their tutor influenced their choice of teaching approaches. A parallel was evident at Year Four as the university tutor was found to be the second strongest influence with 66.0% of Cohort 4A and 69.4% of Cohort 4B (n=104) agreeing that their tutor influenced their choice of teaching approaches.

Figure XLIV: Influences on respondents' teaching approaches – Year Four



The comments made by the following students were seen to reflective of many of the student teachers who felt that;

> *The pupils influenced my teaching approaches as they were the ones I got the most feedback from. Tutors have their own ideas on teaching and I had to modify my styles for them (respondent 2B: 80)*

> *My teaching was influenced by my co-operating teachers, was adapted to suit pupils, it was changed to suit tutors who had a particular style during the tutor visit (respondent 4B: 110)*

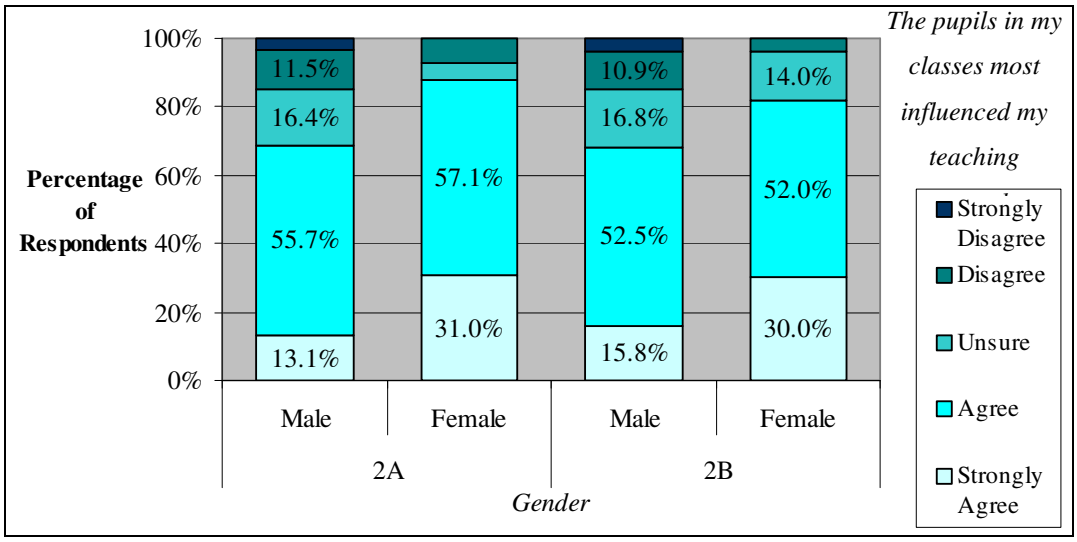
> *I was influenced by both my tutor and teacher. Students did influence my approach also as I had to develop a strategy suitable to their needs (respondent 2A: 2)*

Gender and influences on student teachers' teaching

Within Strand One analysis revealed an association between gender and the student teachers' opinions of who had most influenced their teaching. As can be seen in the Figure XLV overleaf, proportionately more females than males in both cohorts agreed

that their pupils were the strongest influence on the teaching approaches they employed. While 88.1% of females in Cohort 2A (n=37) and 82% in Cohort 2B (n=41) in total agreed that pupils were the strongest influence on their teaching, the levels of agreement among males were lower at 68.8% in Cohort 2A (n=42) and 68.3% in Cohort 2B (n=69). Correspondingly a higher than anticipated number of males disagreed and only males strongly disagreed that their pupils had influenced them. This association was modest in strength in both cohorts (*V*=.292 for Cohort 2A, *V*=.189 for Cohort 2B, p<.05).

Figure XLV: Gender and perceptions of influences on teaching – Strand One

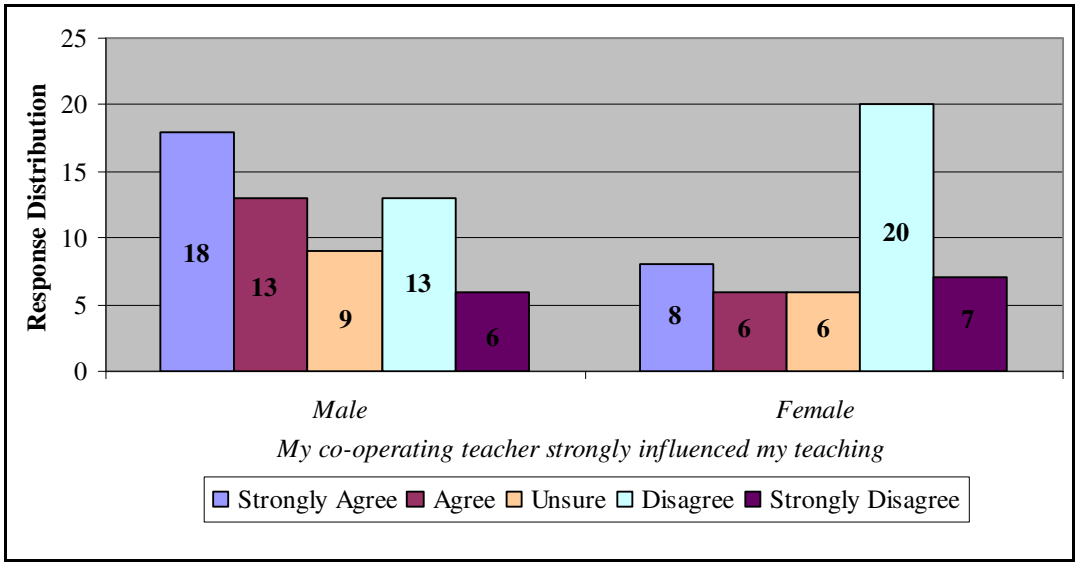


A moderate association between respondent gender and beliefs about the influence of co-operating teachers emerged in both Strand Two study groups. Within Cohort 4A this relationship showed that male students placed greater emphasis on the role their co-operating teacher played in influencing their teaching, as 52.5% of males (n=32) agreed that their co-operating teacher had an influence on them. Females on the other hand were much more dismissive of the impact their co-operating teacher had, as the frequency of females who disagreed that their co-operating teacher had an influence on their teaching was considerably higher than assumed at 57.5% (n=27) (*V*=.263, p=.011). This finding was mirrored within Cohort 4B, as proportionately more males were found to believe that their co-operating teacher had an influence on them than their female counterparts. Here the association was weaker (*V*= 163, p=.045).

Table XV: Gender and opinion of co-operating teachers' influence – Cohort 4B

Gender	*Do you feel that your co-operating teacher influenced you in any way?*		Total
	Yes	No	
Male	74	22	96
Female	34	21	55

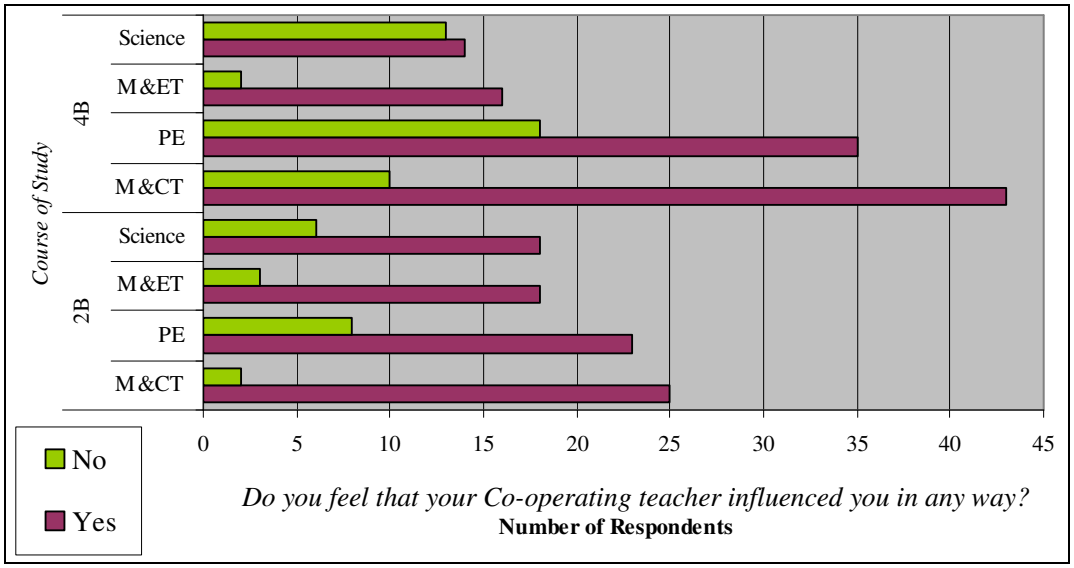
Figure XLVI: Gender and opinion of co-operating teachers' influence – Cohort 4A



Course of study and influences on student teachers' teaching

Within Cohort B at both Year Two and Four, a relationship between course of study and students opinions of the influence their co-operating teacher had was observed. Within these study groups, both M&CT and M&ET students were found to be more positive about their co-operating teachers' influence than students from the other ITE programmes. While eighty-five to ninety-five per cent of M&ET and M&CT students at Year Two indicated that they felt their co-operating teacher did influence them, less than three quarters of PE and Science students echoed this belief. More pointedly at Year Four, over eighty per cent of M&ET and M&CT students saw their co-operating teachers as having influenced them, but twenty per cent less of PE and Science students were of this mindset. At both times of testing the relationship was moderate in strength (V=.226 for Cohort 2B, V=.270 for Cohort 4B, $p<.012$).

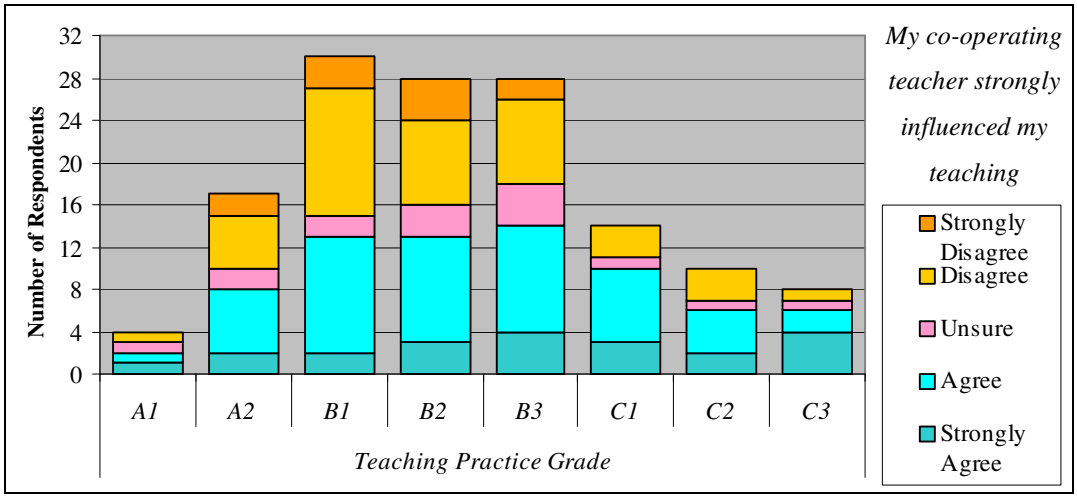
Figure XLVII: Course of study and co-operating teachers' influence – Cohort B



TP grade and influences on student teachers' teaching

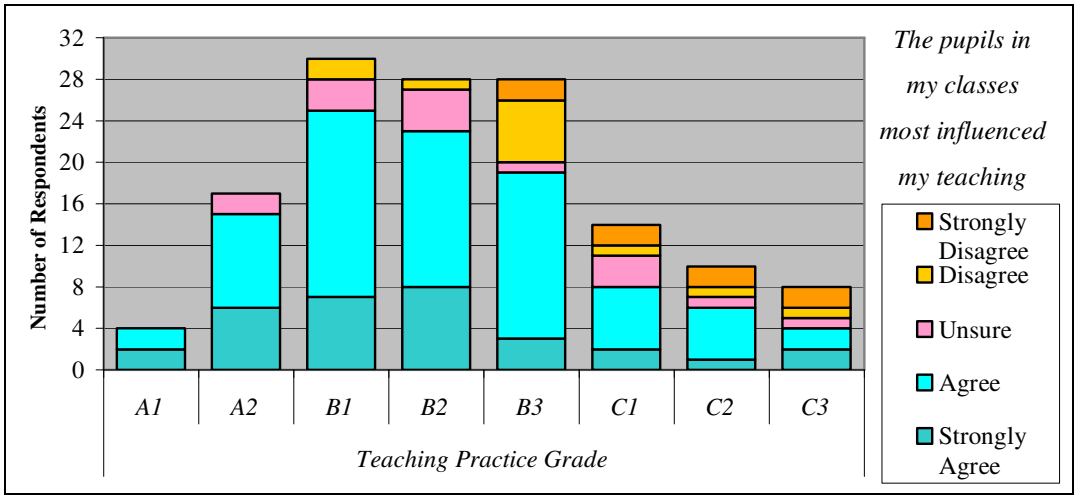
Two associations with TP grade were observed in Cohort 2B regarding the influence that both co-operating teachers and pupils had on student teachers' teaching. In relation to the influence of co-operating teachers, from the findings it was evident that proportionately more respondents in the lower grade range agreed that their co-operating had an influence on their teaching. Those respondents in the C grade range showed the highest levels of agreement with between 60% and 75% of these groups agreeing their co-operating teachers strongly influenced their teaching. This relationship was weak (r_s=.195) and although noted in the other data sets, the strength was <.18 and was therefore deemed to weak for consideration (p=.046).

Figure XLVIII: TP grade and co-operating teachers' influence – Cohort 2B



An inversion of this finding emerged when the respondent's opinions about their pupils influence was examined. In this case it was seen that those in the higher grade range were most agreeable that their pupils were the strongest influence on their teaching. Those in the A_1 to B_2 range showed between 100% and 80% agreement and this level of agreement then decreased in the C grades to between 50% and 60%. The strength of this association was greater as r_s=.263 (p=.004).

Figure XLIX: TP grade and pupils' influence – Cohort 2B



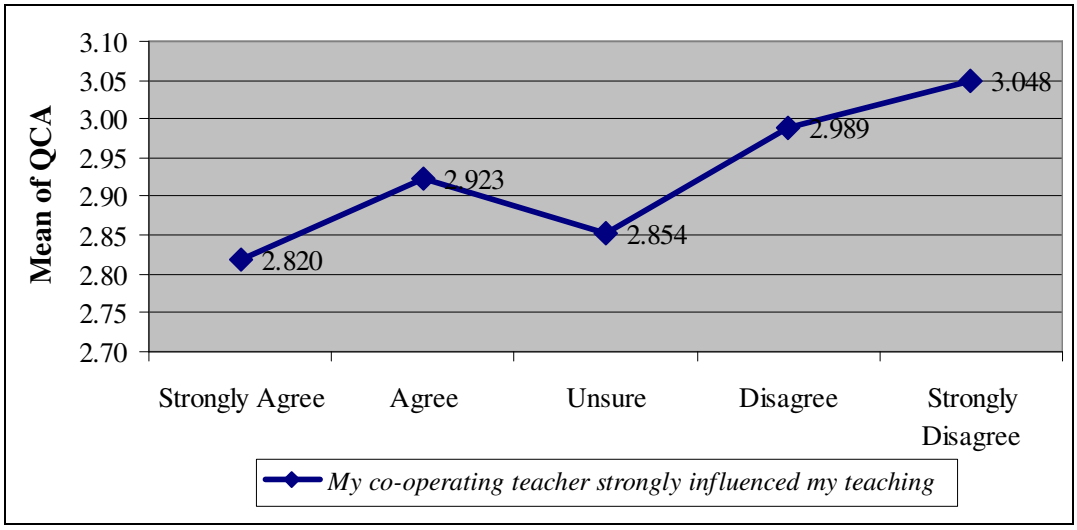
QCA and influences on student teachers' teaching

A difference in the mean QCA of respondents in relation to their opinions of the influence of their co-operating teachers was observed within Cohort 2B. The mean QCA of respondents who strongly agreed that their co-operating teachers influenced their teaching was 2.82 but the mean QCA of those who strongly disagreed was higher at 3.05. This demonstrates that students with higher QCAs saw their co-operating teachers as having less influence than those with lower mean QCAs. The strength of this relationship was substantial as r_s=.716 (p=.014). A similar trend was noted within Cohort 2A, as those with the highest QCAs were found to be the most dismissive of the idea that their co-operating teachers influenced them.

Co-operating teachers' effect on the student teachers' thinking about teaching

Within Phase One, fifteen respondents from each cohort at Year Two articulated that they felt their co-operating teachers had stimulated them to think more deeply about some aspect/s of their teaching. At Year Four lesser numbers of ten respondents from Cohort 4A and eleven from Cohort 4B expressed the same belief.

Figure L: QCA and co-operating teachers' influence – Cohort 2B



Well he did tell me what my good and bad points were and ways of improving them – this got me to think more about it (respondent 2A: 10)

Questioned why I chose certain things and made me think about it more (respondent 4B: 80)

Nine respondents from each Year Two cohort did comment however that their co-operating teachers never encouraged them to think about their teaching. In Strand Two, four Cohort 4A participants and ten from Cohort 4B also made personal responses of this nature. This was not addressed as an individual issue within the focus groups, but rather was considered as part of the discussions about supporting teachers' opinions of reflection and will therefore be addressed within that context later in this chapter.

My co-operating teacher was very much sticking to old methods and did not encourage me on these lines (respondent 2A: 14)

No influence in my thinking about teaching (respondent 4B: 40)

Areas that respondents felt co-operating teachers had made them think more deeply about

When the student teacher's ripostes from Phase One were further analysed, respondents highlighted five different specifically where they felt their co-operating teachers had stimulated them to think more deeply.

At Year Two, planning and preparation for lessons, was highlighted by the largest number of respondents as an area where their co-operating teachers stimulated them to

think more deeply. At both times of testing, teaching methods, strategies and techniques was the second most frequently cited area that teachers were seen to motivate students to think more deeply about. An area not previously mentioned was reflecting on and thinking about lessons. Although ranked third at Year Two, at Year Four the largest number of respondents signalled that their co-operating teachers stimulated them to think more deeply about this. Finally discipline and subject knowledge were specified by equal numbers of respondents at both times of testing as areas that co-operating teachers stimulated students to think more deeply about.

Especially in my planning. They stimulated me to think harder about how I would manage and hold a class (respondent 2B: 72)

Made me think more about my strategies (respondent 4B: 144)

He taught me to think about teaching methods and catering for pupils needs (respondent 4A: 12)

My teachers made me think more about my lessons and if I was really teaching the pupils or was there just problem solving going on (respondent 2A: 86)

All teachers and their teaching methods can help you to notice effective or sometimes ineffective ways of dealing with situations, of portraying info [sic], or even settling a class into the room (respondent 2A: 99)

He made me think about the material I set for the pupils (respondent 2B: 19)

The influence of observation

Within Phase One, many of the comments revealed that observation of co-operating teachers teaching in the classroom was a considerable influencing factor on student teachers. Students also highlighted that having their co-operating teachers observing them as they taught and providing feedback was a strong dynamic in stimulating them to think more deeply about their teaching. A number of respondents specified that it was the discussions they had after lessons their co-operating teachers had observed and the feedback received, that made them think more deeply about their teaching.

I sat in on their classes and them in mine. Helped and gave feedback which made me think more about my actual teaching (respondent 4B: 61)

She would observe classes and give me feedback and from that feedback I could change my approach to teaching the class (respondent 2B: 29)

Teachers did offer feedback on lessons they sat in on and gave advice on how they felt it was best to deal with certain situations. You can pick up 10 years of experience trial and error by talking to the teachers around you (respondent 4A: 37)

Observing other classes taught by my co-operating teachers and discussing with them, I adopted different approaches to teaching that I had seen them implement and use successfully (respondent 2A: 7)

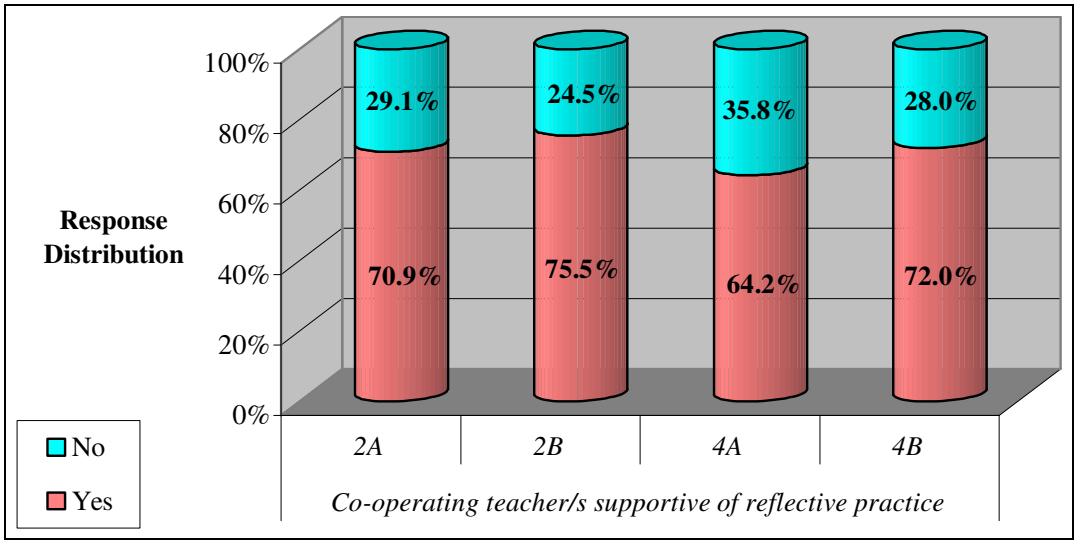
What emerged most strongly within the discussion groups, was that students were of the opinion that being influential was a two way process. From their experiences they spoke of how, just as they might learn from their co-operating teachers, the opposite was also possible, as students had new methods and different teaching approaches which the teachers may be unfamiliar with and might like to incorporate into their own teaching.

I think it can be a 2-way thing because…my cooperating teacher was interested in some of the experiments that I was bringing in and some of the new stuff we would have done…You do have new ideas where they have this sort of classroom presence, classroom management side of things. I think we can be a little bit innovative, a little bit new, a little bit enthusiastic. Maybe the glean is gone off their enthusiasm (GDG member: 9)

Practising teachers' opinions of reflection

When asked if their co-operating teachers had stimulated them to think more deeply about their teaching, 40 to 50 per cent of respondents in each cohort agreed they had.

Figure LI: Staff support for student teachers' reflective practice



However, when asked if they felt the teachers in their school were supportive of their reflective practices, at Year Two 70.9% of the first cohort (n=73) and 75.5% of the

second study cohort indicated that they believed the teachers were supportive of their reflective practice (n=114). In Strand Two, 64.2% (n=68) from Cohort 4A and 72.0% of Cohort 4B (n=108) judged that the teachers were supportive of their reflective practices.

Co-operating teachers' reaction to reflective practice

In Strand One, thirty-three additional student comments were made in Cohort 2A and twenty-three in Cohort 2B regarding co-operating teachers' opinions of reflection. At Year Four, thirty-four students from Cohort 4A and thirty-three from Cohort 4B also made comments regarding their co-operating teachers' opinion of reflection.

Eight respondents at Year Two and eleven at Year Four wrote that they considered their co-operating teachers were supportive of their reflective practice and encouraged the new teachers to reflect, discussed their reflection with them or aided them in the reflective process. Within the focus groups, even though the participants were specifically asked about the role their co-operating teachers played in their reflection, the students showed little interest in discussing this and only a small number indicated that the teachers actively supported them in their reflective work.

> *I found that I reflected on my teaching with my co-operating teacher. I discussed how the majority of my lessons went with this teacher and I felt this was the most constructive way that I evaluated my teaching (respondent 4A: 24)*

> *(The) teacher carried out a checklist in one of my lessons in order to help me with my reflective practice (respondent 2A: 3)*

> *I was very open with my cooperating teacher. If I thought something went wrong I might say it to her and she would say maybe this is the way to go, maybe this happened because of that…and I got her to look at a few of my classes to see where I could improve. So we kinda [sic] reflected together. This was helpful sometimes especially when you're trying to find an answer to a problem (GDG member: 3)*

The remaining comments received[26] highlighted that in general teachers held reflection in a negative light and expressed this view to the student teachers. This belief that the teachers really didn't have that much time for or interest in reflection was also a feature of the focus group discussions.

> *They didn't think much of the whole idea of it (reflection) (respondent 2B: 93)*

[26] Cohort 2A = Twenty-five, Cohort 2B = nineteen, Cohort 4A = twenty-six from, Cohort 4B = twenty-three.

Some thought it was worthwhile, a lot however, laughed at the sight of me writing these in the staffroom, indicating contempt from their perspective (respondent 4A: 25)

Majority of the teachers just had it in their heads to survive till Friday. So when you are thinking like that, I don't think there is any reflection. They really didn't think much of reflection at all because [sic] was not a priority (GDG member: 4)

Within both strands of Phase One, the student teachers' personal responses highlighted that supporting teachers' predominant feeling about reflection was that it was a waste of time and that student teachers would never do this when they were full-time teachers working in the "real world" of teaching. A proportion of respondents in both phases remarked on how the teachers sympathised with them regarding their reflective written work, which they considered to be pointless. The focus groups members also spoke of teachers dismissing reflection as useless and that it was something done in a compartmentalised way as part of teacher education. Some final year students in both phases of the research revealed that their co-operating teachers had openly laughed and made jokes about the student teachers' reflective practices.

They felt all the paper work was a waste of time and energy and that they in no way [sic] carried on this practice when they qualified. They felt experience was the best tool for learning (respondent 2B: 134)

They slated my reflective practice. They couldn't see the point and used to laugh at my ones (respondent 4B: 129)

The teachers expressed sympathy at what they called "the pointless slog" teaching practice students were subjected to (respondent 2A: 103)

The majority of teachers had pity more than anything – their reassurance was that you will never do PLAs or lesson plans in the "real world" (respondent 4B: 77)

The role of co-operating teachers

In Phase Two the group members showed a keen interest in discussing what they felt a co-operating teacher should be like and what they perceived the role of a co-operating teacher was. Within all groups the students agreed that a co-operating teacher should be there as a source of information and advice for the student teacher.

But I think it would be even better if they basically came to you first and said, took the initiative and said "I would like to give you a few tips and a few things if you don't mind me sitting in the classroom or whatever" and he did that for a couple of classes because if they don't do that you're in there on your own. You have your tutor feedback but you don't have (the teacher's) feedback. If you get in trouble you

can go to them and that will improve you to some extent but if they give that little bit more, even if they give so much and you only take half of it, it will improve you that much more. But after this year you won't really get that chance to do it again, so I think for those ten weeks it would more worthwhile (GDG member: 6)

Some also said that they felt a co-operating teacher should be a mentor who supported and guided the student through the experience of TP. The main reason cited for this belief, was that they felt teachers had the most up to date knowledge and were therefore the best-equipped people to give them advice and help in relation to their teaching.

I definitely had the idea that your cooperating teacher, maybe it was from 2nd year because I had a really great guy and he gave me everything that I needed. I thought that the cooperating teacher was suppose to be a mentor and I think if I was teaching in a school and a kid came into me that was teaching, I would be giving them everything I had and be taking them under my wing saying this is what you do and doing it yourself and they (teachers) don't (GDG member: 25)

Well given your co-operating teacher has the most up to date practical experience of being in a classroom, usually more so than your tutors do and also has the know how of the particular classes that you would be teaching, he would know if something in particular is not working because of behaviour of particular students or backgrounds. They are going to give you the most beneficial sort of advice to change things for the better (GDG member: 1)

Based on their experiences of co-operating teachers and their expressed beliefs about how they felt the co-operating teachers should support the students during TP, some of these participants questioned whether participating teachers were given adequate information about what they should be doing and what their role actually is prior to getting TP students. Consequently some recommended that the co-operating teachers' role should be spelled out more clearly.

I think that is the fault of UL…they are getting the teachers on board. You cant expect the co-operating teachers to act as co-operating teachers when they don't even know the rules and some of these teachers haven't gone to UL and some of them are coming from England. The guy I was with did (subject) in England so I dunno [sic], maybe if he was here he would have being better. But you have to get the teachers on board as well and make them feel like you can give them something to feel like they are getting some back (GDG member: 251)

Probably would be useful to say to them, I think everybody that is going out would appreciate if you would give them some time and assistance and offer them advice, some guidance. I don't think it would be any harm unless you don't get on with your co-operating teacher at all, that would be the end of it. If you do it would be good to have them there to offer at least (GDG member: 8)

From the student discussions it also became clear that participants felt the possible role that co-operating teachers could play in the assessment of students during TP was underestimated. They were quite clear in their belief that the teachers they worked with on a day-to-day basis should have a greater influence on the grade they received and that their opinions of how well a student was progressing should be considered.

> *I think with the whole tutor thing that it's massive and it's terrible. My co-operating teacher made the point that I know there are loads for's and againsts [sic] for this, but they should be the ones assessing you. They should be the ones having a big impact because they see…they saw me teach every single day and they were like [sic] well I could give you a grade right now because I see you every day, but I don't see the one set up lesson you have for that tutor coming (GDG member: 10)*

Although they acknowledged that it would not be appropriate for co-operating teachers to be given exclusive responsibility for grading students, the knowledge co-operating teachers had of the student's skills and capabilities and their opinions of the student' teaching should be considered by the university tutors before they reach a final grade.

> *Yeah and even if our subject teachers, because we all know our subject teachers are in the staff room having a cup of coffee going [sic] "yes I have a free class now because my TP student is in". So like [sic] they could come into the class, they could watch you and I know it is unreal then because you have your teacher down the back of the class the kids are obviously going to behave and stuff, but I think it would be better. It would be better than a tutor coming in and even if they did come in the co-operating teacher should definitely have an impact (GDG member: 16)*

> *I know at one stage when my co-operating teacher had met my tutor and they would be trying to do their best for you. They would be saying, well mine was saying "oh she is trying different things" and at least they are there… and even they wouldn't mind sitting in and I know in 2nd year, my co-operating teacher filled out tutor forms for me. It was very helpful and at least if that went towards your grade it's more realistic as well and that they are not biased to you (GDG member: 11)*

Some of the group members also expressed unhappiness at what they saw as a complete move away from co-operating teacher involvement in student assessment. In two of the groups students articulated that the conclusion of the Lucent mentoring programme, which was the only initiative in which the co-operating teachers opinions and experiences of the student teacher were considered in the grading process, signalled a clear retreat from teacher involvement in student assessment.

> *The opposite is happening because they are after stopping the Lucent teaching programme which is for the (subject) teachers and that is ridiculous, because my*

secondary school wasn't Lucent and my co-operating teachers were often in the staff room drinking tea. They think it's a holiday (GDG member: 7)

Summary of findings

At both times of testing, student teachers overwhelmingly agreed that they felt accepted in their TP school communities. Those who indicated that they did not feel part of the school community were generally in the lower TP and educational studies grade range.

The qualitative findings highlight that both the dynamics of the school environment and the existing relationships within schools influenced the extent to which students felt involved and integrated. In addition students' own involvement in aspects of school life aside from their teaching positively affected their feeling of belonging. Of those who did feel isolated and alone (10%-17%), this was more from an academic rather than social perspective and qualitative data demonstrate an awareness and acknowledgement on the part of student teachers that being accepted in a school is a process.

Within the parameters of being accepted, students felt they had scope to be independent but were cognisant of the need for a specific support structure for student teachers where the role of the co-operating teacher could be enhanced to become that of a mentor and a school-based TP co-ordinator might be appointed. This was further validated by the fact that at Year Four 60% of student teachers still felt left to their own devices, which was symptomatic of the type and level of academic support offered by co-operating teachers.

The school environment itself presented student teachers with challenges. The physical and social environments of staffrooms were not always conductive to the reflection, quiet planning and preparation work that student teachers were required to complete**.**

At Year Two half of the students identified most with teachers, however by Year Four while over one third of all students still identified most with teachers, approximately half of each cohort now stated that they could identify with both pupils and teachers.

Staff in general were welcoming, helpful, supportive of student teachers and offered them advice. Specifically students appreciated the practical helpfulness of their co-operating teachers who provided them with resources, advice and strategies that they

considered to be “practically” useful. Students highlighted that they were influenced in their teaching and approaches to discipline and planning by their co-operating teachers. Overall while students agreed their co-operating teachers influenced them to some degree, they identified their pupils as having the greatest influence on their teaching approaches. This was followed by the influence of their university tutors. Interestingly Lucent school attendees were most fulsome in their affirmation of the influence that their co-operating teacher had.

When the data were further analysed it became evident that a greater proportion of male students, those on materials programmes, those in the lower TP grade range and those with lower QCAs all prioritised the influence of their co-operating teacher on their teaching. In contrast, more females and those in the higher TP grade range identified their pupils as having the strongest influence on their teaching. It is also evident that the higher the student’s QCA the less emphasis they placed on the influence of their co-operating teacher. While a majority of respondents stated that their co-operating teachers were supportive of reflection in general, respondents’ comments indicated that few teachers actively supported their reflective practice.

“Dual observation”, both being observed by teachers and observing teachers as they taught was clearly highlighted as an important influencing factor on student teachers’ development and one which made them think and reflect more deeply on their teaching.

It is clear however that irrespective of who was of most influence on student teachers’ teaching approaches or how supported and included they felt in the school community, all student teachers felt validated in their teaching persona by the fact that both pupils and teachers treated them like “real teachers”.

Student teachers' experience of their teacher education programme

Introduction

Responding to the objective to examine student teachers' ability to engage with, value and utilise the educational knowledge presented as part of their programme, in Phase One participants were asked to appraise various aspects of the educational component of their pre-service programme. In particular questions focused on their educational studies and their perceptions of, and ability to, apply the knowledge gleaned from these studies.

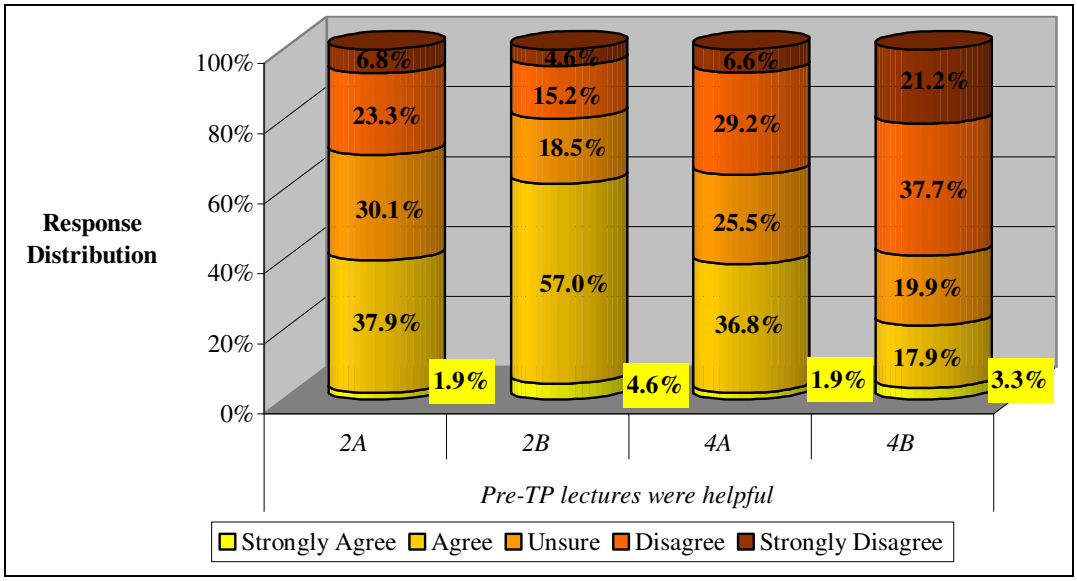
While the focus of the questionnaire was initially broad to ease students' transition into this topic, the focus narrowed and subsequent questions were more specifically focused on the educational component of the programme. It was noted that students' personal responses didn't always differentiate between the educational studies component of the programme as separate from their experiences of the broader aspects of the programme. This chapter encompasses three discrete but overlapping sections which accommodate the way students responded, but also distils students' experiences moving from their engagement with general programmatic aspects to their perceptions of educational studies and finally to their ability to apply those studies during TP.

Student teachers were also invited to discuss their teacher education programme and specifically their educational studies in Phase Two. This forum provided greater opportunity for students to discuss their perceptions of their ability to engage with, value, and utilise educational knowledge. The findings from both phases of the research will be collectively presented.

Opinions of their pre-service programme

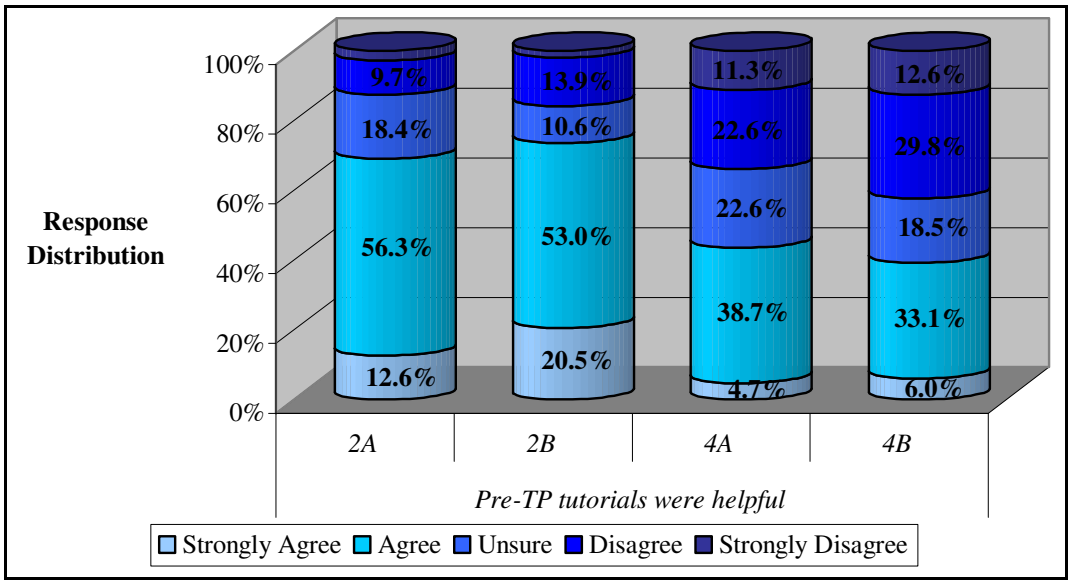
At Year Two 39.8% (n=41) of Cohort 2A and 61.6% (n=93) of Cohort 2B agreed that they found pre-TP lectures helpful; however a section of each cohort categorised themselves as unsure (30.1% of Cohort 2A (n=31), 18.5% of Cohort 2B (n=28)) or disagreed that they found these lectures helpful (30.1% (n=31) of Cohort 2A, 19.8% (n=30) of cohort 2B). The data illustrate that by Year Four fewer students were unsure in their responses and more viewed pre-TP lectures negatively; as 35.8% from Cohort 4A (n=38) and 58.9% (n=89) from Cohort 4B disagreed that they found pre-TP lectures helpful.

Figure LII: Opinions of the helpfulness of pre-TP lectures – All Cohorts



When asked about pre-TP tutorials a different picture emerged as at both times of testing students placed greater value on the helpfulness of tutorials. At Year Two only 12.6% of Cohort 2A (n=13) and 15.9% of Cohort 2B disagreed that tutorials prior to TP were helpful. At Year Four however, while lower percentages of both cohorts agreed that they found pre-TP tutorials helpful; 33.9% from Cohort 4A (n=36) and 42.4% from Cohort 4B (n=64) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they found pre-TP tutorials helpful. The percentage that classified themselves as unsure had also risen at Year Four.

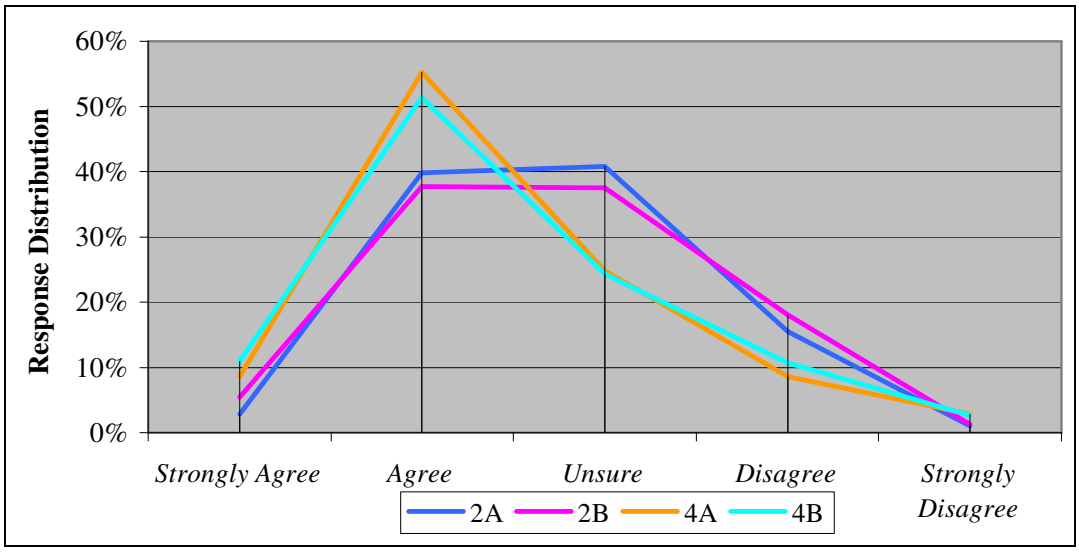
Figure LIII: Perceptions of how helpful pre-TP tutorials were – All Cohorts



When asked if they felt their university programme in general had helped them to better understand their TP experience, within Strand One 42.7% from Cohort 2A (n=44) and 43.1% from Cohort 2B (n=65) agreed that they believed it had. 40.8% (n=42) of respondents from the first study cohort and 37.5% (n=57) from the second, indicated that they were unsure if their pre-service programme had helped them at any level to understand their teaching experience more holistically.

At Year Four, the proportion of respondents in total who agreed that their programme had helped them to understand their TP experience better had risen by approximately twenty per cent in each cohort (Cohort 4A=63.8%, Cohort 4B=62.3%). Concomitantly lower percentages of each study group at 24.8% of Cohort 4A (n=26) and 24.3% of Cohort 4B (n=37) indicated that they were unsure if their pre-service programme had helped them to better understand their teaching experience.

<u>Figure LIV:</u> Did the university programme help them to understand their TP experience better: Student teachers' assessment – All Cohorts

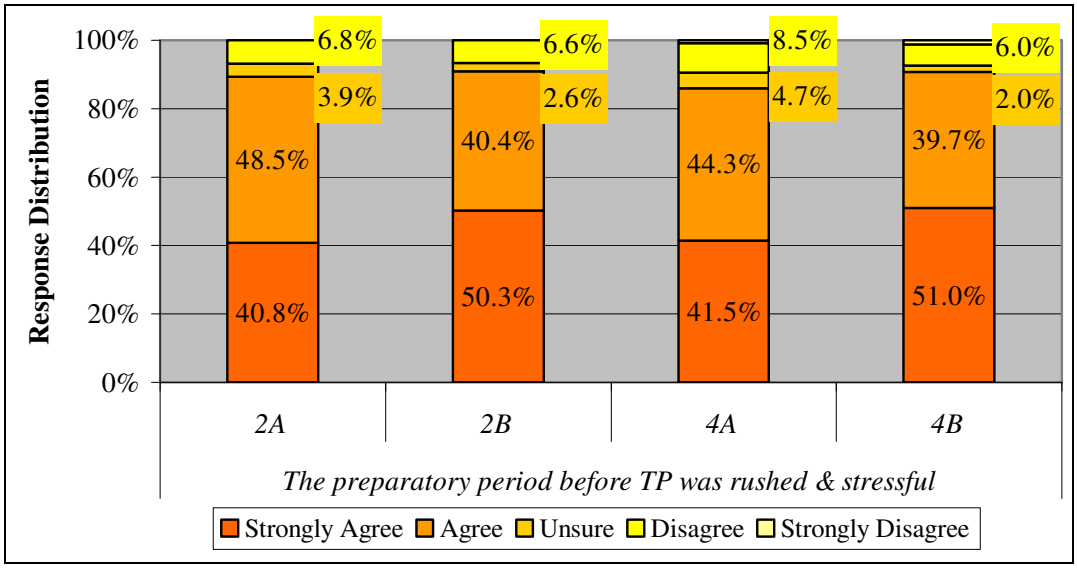


Their perceptions of the preparatory period before teaching practice

There is evidence to suggest that how well prepared intending teachers feel for teaching practice has an impact on their subsequent development as a teacher (Adams, 1982; Mifsud, 1996). When asked about their preparatory period in the university prior to TP, at both times of testing, sizeable numbers of respondents indicated that not only did they feel their preparatory period was rushed and stressful, but also that given the choice, they would have preferred a longer preparatory period.

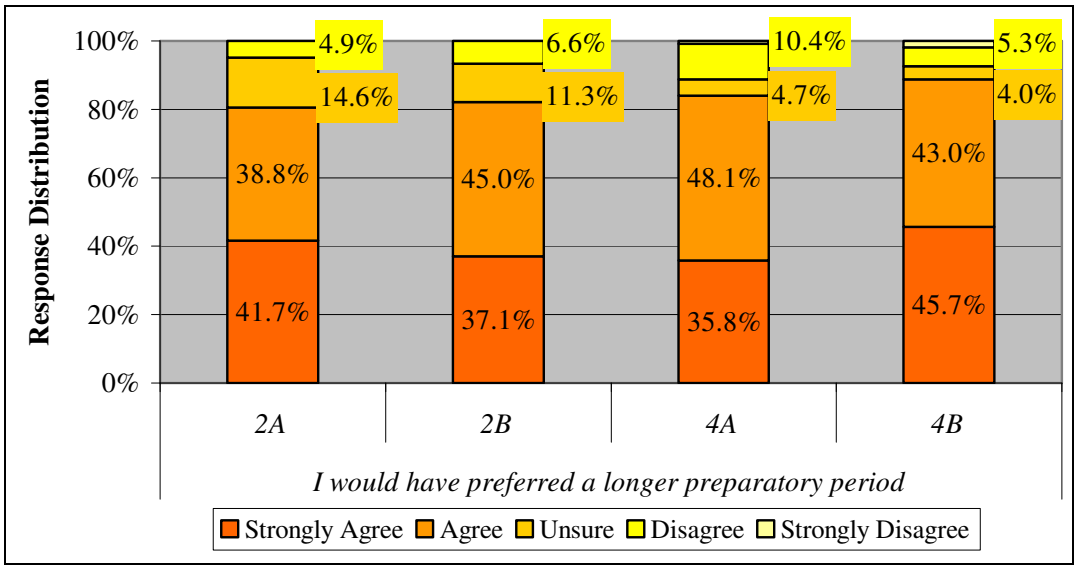
Within Strand One 89.3% of Cohort 2A (n=92) and 90.7% of Cohort 2B (n=137) in total agreed that the preparatory period before TP had been rushed and stressful. Within Strand Two analogous findings emerged, as totals of 85.8% from Cohort 4A (n=91) and 90.7% from Cohort 4B (n=137) agreed that their preparation was rushed and stressful.

Figure LV: Perceptions of the preparatory period before TP – All Cohorts



When asked if they would have preferred a longer preparatory period before TP it can be seen from the figure below that over eighty per cent of each Year Two cohort signalled agreement (80.5% of Cohort 2A (n=83), 82.1% of Cohort 2B).

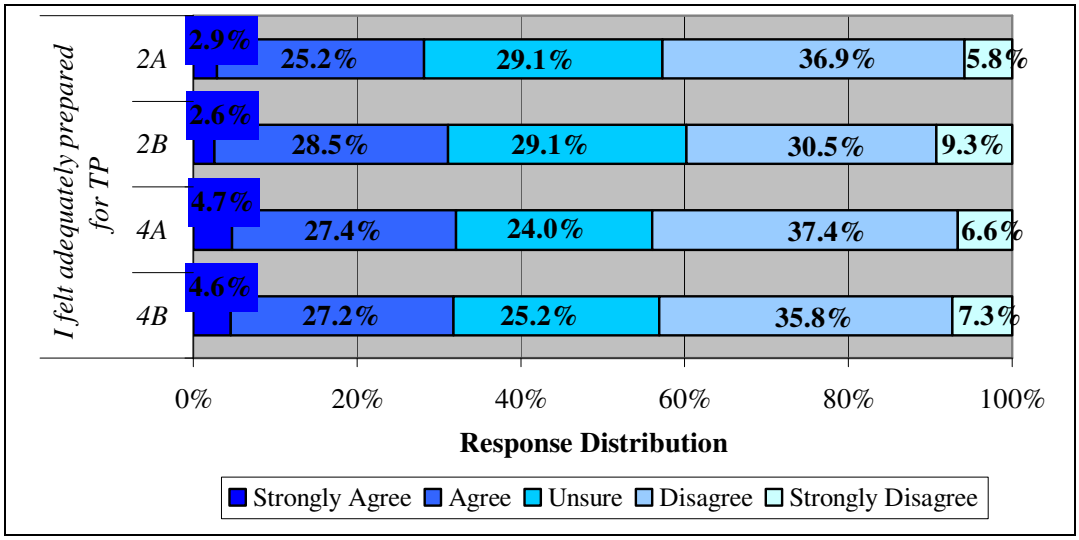
Figure LVI: Perceptions of the length of the preparatory period – All Cohorts



Year Four participants' feelings on the length of their preparatory period mirrored those at Year Two, as again over eighty per cent of each cohort either agreed or strongly agreed that they would have preferred a longer period of preparation before TP (Cohort 4A=83.9%, n=89, Cohort 4B=88.7%, n=137). While 11%-15% of Year Two respondents indicated they were unsure if a longer preparatory period would have been preferable, this figure had reduced to less than 5% at Year Four[27].

Respondents were also asked if they felt adequately prepared for TP and 42.7% in Cohort 2A (n=44) and 39.8% in Cohort 2B (n=60) in total disagreed. While 28.1% of Cohort 2A (n=29) and 31.1% of Cohort 2B (n=47) agreed that they felt adequately prepared, in both cohorts 29.1% indicated that they were unsure. At Year Four, 44.0% of Cohort 4A (n=47) and 43.1% in Cohort 4B (n=65) in total disagreed that they felt adequately prepared. When we examine those who agreed they felt adequately prepared, Cohort 4A showed 32.1% agreement (n=34) and Cohort 4B 31.8% agreement (n=48). A quarter of each cohort (Cohort 4A, 24.0% (n=25) and Cohort 4B, 25.2% (n=38)) specified that they were unsure if they were adequately prepared for teaching practice.

Figure LVII: How adequately prepared respondents felt for TP – All Cohorts



QCA and perceptions of the preparatory period before TP

Two relationships were observed between student teachers' QCA and their perceptions of the preparatory period before TP. Students who agreed that their preparation was rushed and stressful had lower mean QCAs overall when compared to those who

[27] While students at Year Two had a four-week preparatory period prior to commencing their Teaching Practice, at Year Four students only have one week on campus before they begin their Teaching Practice.

disagreed that the preparatory period was rushed and stressful. The mean QCA of respondents who strongly agreed that the preparatory period was rushed and stressful was 2.720 in Cohort 4A and 2.999 in Cohort 4B, but those who strongly disagreed exhibited mean QCAs of 3.102 in Cohort 4A and 3.187 in Cohort 4B. This moderate relationship was observed at both times of testing (Cohort 2A, r_s=.248, Cohort 4A, r_s =.246, Cohort 4B, r_s =.169, p<.04).

Figure LVIII: QCA and perceptions of the preparatory period before TP

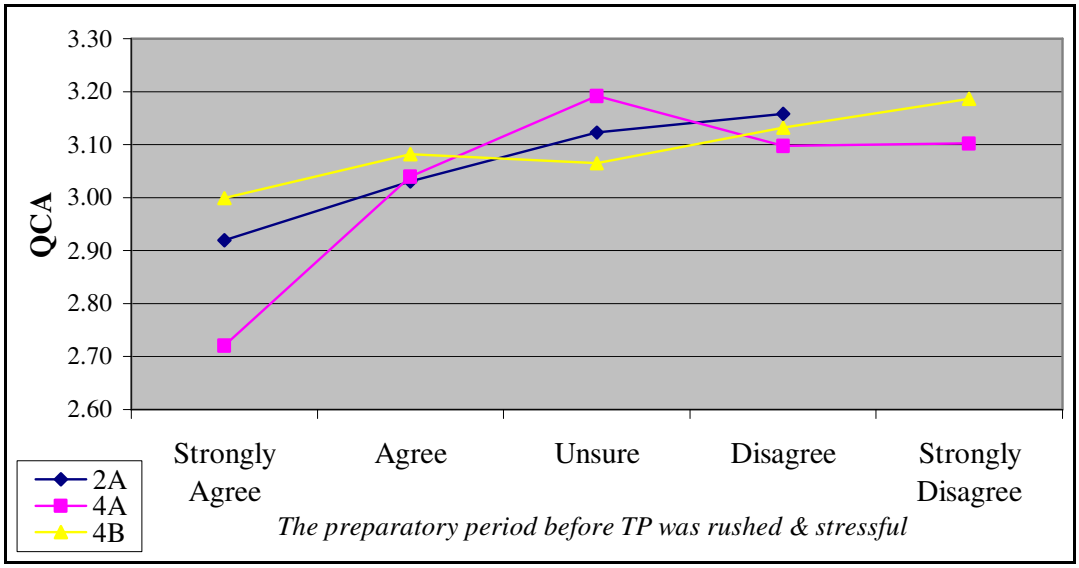
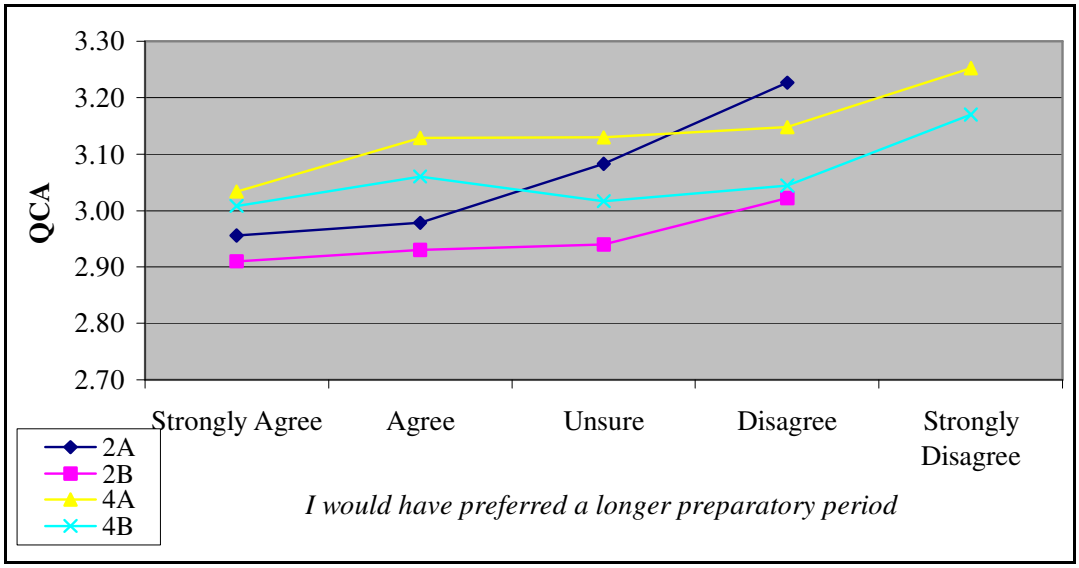


Figure LIX: QCA and opinion of the length of the preparatory period before TP



As displayed in Figure LIX above, the second association highlighted that student teachers at both Year Two and Four who signalled that they would have preferred a

longer preparatory period before TP had the lowest mean QCA. This relationship was observed in all four cohorts and ranged in strength from moderate to strong (Cohort 2A, r_s=.273, Cohort 2B, r_s =.791, Cohort 4A, r_s =.835, Cohort 4B, r_s =.149, p<.05).

Student teachers' thoughts on their pre-service teacher education programme

At all stages of Phase One, respondents volunteered comments in relation to their pre-service programme[28]. The depth of data emerging from the two phases varies however; as within the focus groups the participants had greater time and opportunity to explore their opinions allowing for a deeper consideration of these themes. The programmatic aspects addressed in the discussion groups will be presented in parallel to those from Phase One and are presented as four specific themes;

- student teachers' views of the preparatory period before TP
- student teachers' perception of their teacher education programme
- students' prioritisation of the practical elements of their programme
- TP – the link between college and classroom.

Student teachers' views of their preparatory period before TP

Parallel with the quantitative findings, the predominant opinion expressed by students was that they hadn't felt sufficiently prepared to commence TP. Within Phase One, students attribute this primarily to the fact that they hadn't been afforded enough preparation time prior to TP to do everything they needed to feel suitably equipped. In discussions, students spoke of how they did not know which classes and topics they would be teaching early enough and that they felt the time afforded to prepare the written work required by their tutors prior to TP was inadequate. This point was emphasised in all groups and was cited as the primary reason for feeling unprepared to start TP. Participants showed limited ability to extend their thoughts beyond this when assessing how prepared they felt for TP.

> *I was terrified before beginning TP. I felt completely unprepared and that I was been [sic] thrown into the deep end. Preparation before TP was far too rushed which did not help my anxiety in any way and there was very little acknowledgement that the anxiety I was having was justified (respondent 2B: 98)*

[28] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = forty-three, Cohort 2B = thirty-three, Cohort 4A = twenty-seven, Cohort 4B = twenty-four.

A lot of people got messed around because they might have gotten their (subject) class but they wouldn't know if they had 1st years or 2nd years for (subject) so then they would only find that out maybe on the Thursday and then they would have to do their scheme of work for ten weeks in a night (GDG member: 2)

There was general agreement within Phase One that the length of the preparatory period should be extended and the focus on preparing for TP should begin much earlier in the programme. In discussions many final year student teachers also advocated extending the five-day preparatory period ahead of Year Four TP. Participants asserted this would afford them greater time to visit their allocated school, find out what classes they would be teaching, and would alleviate much of the pressure associated with TP preparation.

More time should be spent on preparation for TP as it would increase the quality of experience during the six weeks (respondent 2A: 2)

You should definitely have to visit your school before you meet any tutor and the first time you meet your tutor you should know I have (subject), I have all this stuff and then you do your schemes. I think it is so silly that you have to prepare hypothetical schemes that are a waste of time because you can't even use them (GDG member: 2)

In 2nd year we had the first semester…and then you have 4 weeks leading up to it. But this year we were just back from the summer and straight into it and you still didn't have it in your head what you were doing (GDG member: 21)

Student teachers' perceptions of their teacher education programme

In Phase One, few students spoke about the impact of their programme and its affect on their development as teachers. Similarly in discussions, students did not exhibit high levels of awareness of the affect of their teacher education programme. It was evident however, that students recognised to some extent how their development had been influenced by their ITE.

Teacher education has had a big impact on me; it has helped me to develop as a person as well as a teacher. There is a lot of hard work involved, but I enjoy the interaction and rewards that it offers. I am also learning a lot from my experiences (respondent 2A: 9)

I think that it's there, you mightn't realise it falling into place but even just looking at 2nd year (TP) compared to 4th year (TP) and the difference in your confidence. I think that there are small things in lectures and tutorials that do kind of click in on the subconscious - that you are aware of (GDG member: 5)

When I was going through school I never saw a lot of these strategies so your perception coming here in 1st year is you're going to be teaching like that fella you

had… but now I feel like I'm a bit more expansive in teaching I can use more strategies, that is the result of being here (GDG member: 14)

A number of respondents in each cohort reported that they felt their pre-service programme had not been practical enough and some areas studied were highlighted as irrelevant. This was also a common thread running through the discussions in the focus groups, where certain modules were dismissed as irrelevant if they did not provide the practical knowledge that students believed they required.

I think that the teacher education modules are ok, but they don't give practical advice that would be useful in the classroom (respondent 2A: 39)

A lot of what is studied in college is completely irrelevant, not practical enough (respondent 4A: 48)

Dealing with (main subject) there is obviously a huge practical element to that and it is not covered enough. Like we did a pedagogy module alright last year in 3rd year and we got to cover a certain number of (practical applications) ourselves…but there was very little done to prepare you for practical work (GDG member: 24)

With specific reference to the education component of the programme, a notable proportion of students at Year Two and Four qualified that these studies didn't give any insight into actual classroom practices because the knowledge espoused was not perceived to be grounded in reality. The term "reality" was mentioned in a number of students' responses; primarily they referred to the need for their studies to be more grounded in reality, but also they referred to their ability to link that knowledge to the reality of their classroom teaching. Within the focus groups only one reason emerged as to why participants considered their educational studies to be impractical; because they couldn't see how the theories espoused married with their experiences of real-life classrooms and therefore questioned their relevance. Student teachers in both phases also stressed that their ITE and in particular the education component of the programme had been too theoretical.

In college there is a huge emphasis on theories of education etc. which I personally found no use on TP. Competence of subject matter and discipline in class was more important. Incorporating the kids with learning difficulties and special needs kids was very challenging and something I found I was very very unprepared for. We did a lot of theoretical stuff on these kids with problems but college failed to prepare us for really encountering these pupils (respondent 4B: 138)

I do think that many of the education modules we experienced before teaching practice are irrelevant and not helpful at all. I don't know what psychology has to do with actually going into a classroom and teaching (respondent 2A: 32)
Honestly, teacher education is too theoretical and does not give enough advice on the practical situation out there in the classroom (respondent 4A: 102)

We are suppose to read these papers and these books on education theory and then write essays on them, but you literally write the essay with the title and then fit in whatever quotes you can find from the book that will actually go into that specific location. Just theory over load, I don't see the point (GDG member: 16)

The education department was perceived to promote a vision of teaching, which was removed from the reality of teaching and had not clearly explained the purpose of each module within the overall structure of the programme. Students did not think that subject departments taught appropriate subject knowledge for teachers or related content to the specifics of classrooms.

Just before TP we had a module with a (subject) teacher (who) gave us such a land [sic]. Told us straight out how it was going to be and up to that point we were all under the impression from the Education Department that everything was rosy.. (respondent 2A: 21)

I was teaching stuff I never saw before in my life…I didn't understand it myself sometimes trying to teach it then was a different story…stuff that we had never covered in college ...I remember saying that to a lecturer last year - when are we going to cover the rest of the stuff? And his exact words were "Well it's our policy that we don't cover everything with ye" so that was a bit unfair (GDG member: 12)

Whole education theory package suffers from lack of explanation – set induction. Introduction as to relevance of each module etc. should build better structure (respondent 4A: 101)

The most frequent recommendation made in Phase Two was that the programme content should draw more from the reality of classroom situations and that students should be able to directly apply their learning to their own classroom experiences. A number of participants voiced the opinion that in order to achieve this, practicing teachers with up-to-date knowledge and experience should be brought in to share their expertise and that it should be a prerequisite for education lecturers to have some grounding in the subject areas students would be teaching.

Even if we had education lectures with a lecturer who was experienced in the background of whatever course you were doing, who could say this is the theory and this is where it is useful in the classroom. You can apply it directly, specifically,

straight away in the lecture to any experience you might have in the future because…if you can't directly relate it to your subject matter you switch off (GDG member: 5)

I think if they worked with teachers a lot more like brought in teachers from schools to actually talk to us in tutorials or else ones who are retired, because they can really give us great ideas and they talk about stuff that's actually really happening and they are just such a fountain of knowledge. That is not being used and it is much more helpful than having lecturers who maybe have never taught before in a school telling us stuff (GDG member: 21)

Students' prioritisation of the practical elements of their programme

Within Phase One "practical" was the word of choice used by respondents to describe the elements of their programme that they deemed valuable. Within the focus groups the student teachers also prioritised the elements of their ITE that they considered had actually prepared them in a practical sense for teaching.

The stuff we learned about what we would actually encounter in a classroom was beneficial. Stuff about theorists like Erickson was a waste of time. It had no impact on my teaching. It's only when you're in a classroom can you benefit from what you learn (respondent 2A: 97)

Practical parts of course were more beneficial than theoretical (respondent 4B: 81)

We learned all the different theories and you read about the different strategies you use, but it wasn't until the subject pedagogy last year that we put it into practice, that's when you concentrate on them. You don't actually care about the theory behind it you just want to know how it works in practice and then you build on that yourself (GDG member: 14)

Teaching practice was accorded special mention, with thirty-eight students at Year Two and twenty-five at Year Four specifying that they felt they had learned more on TP than during all of their university-based studies. The TP period was also highlighted as the most valuable part of the programme overall in Phase Two.

I feel I learned more on 4 weeks of TP than I had in 2 years of college. I think we should have more opportunity to teach and apply theoretical knowledge on a continuous basis (respondent 2A: 103)

I feel it has let me put the theory into practice and try out different things. Learned as much in 10 weeks TP as in college (respondent 4A: 48)

It is only through the TP that we start learning how to teach (GDG member: 3)
I learned more in my first week on my 4th year teaching practice that stood to me for the ten weeks and that's what I used (GDG member: 7)

TP – the link between college and classroom

On first appearance, the student comments about TP in Phase One would lead one to believe that students saw TP alone as providing them with the skills and knowledge they required to teach. However, a number of respondents articulated that the lectures they experienced within the university setting were now more relevant or they could now see their significance as they could better relate their educational studies to their own personalised experiences and hence could see the benefit of these studies.

> *It [TP] has given me the chance to put into operation the education theory that we have studied, which re-affirms the need for such studies (respondent 4A: 10)*

> *I can relate more to the notes we were given. Beforehand they were just words on paper that made no sense. Teaching is a complex profession, which is extremely tough to tell someone to do. You just have to experience it (respondent 2A: 97)*

Within the focus groups it became apparent that these student teachers saw TP as beneficial in its own right, but also that TP was the linchpin in bringing all of their learning together. In essence they seem to accredit TP as the vehicle, which enabled them to relate to their studies in the university.

> *I feel about 50 times more prepared now after teaching practice. In those 10 weeks I learnt more than the whole 3 years beforehand or else it just all came together or something, but teaching practice just makes a huge difference in how you feel professionally (GDG member: 23)*

> *You definitely need the education modules that we do even, teaching practice brings them all together or lets you take what you need from the modules when you go out, you couldn't do science and then go on teaching practice (GDG member: 15)*

Areas of the education component of their ITE that respondents felt were useful during TP

For this section of the questionnaire students were presented with various elements[29] of different areas of the educational component of their programme such as learning styles, theory of motivation and classroom management and they were asked to indicate which ones they felt were useful or relevant to them on TP. Of the varying elements provided, less than a third received a ranking of useful from half or more of the study cohorts.

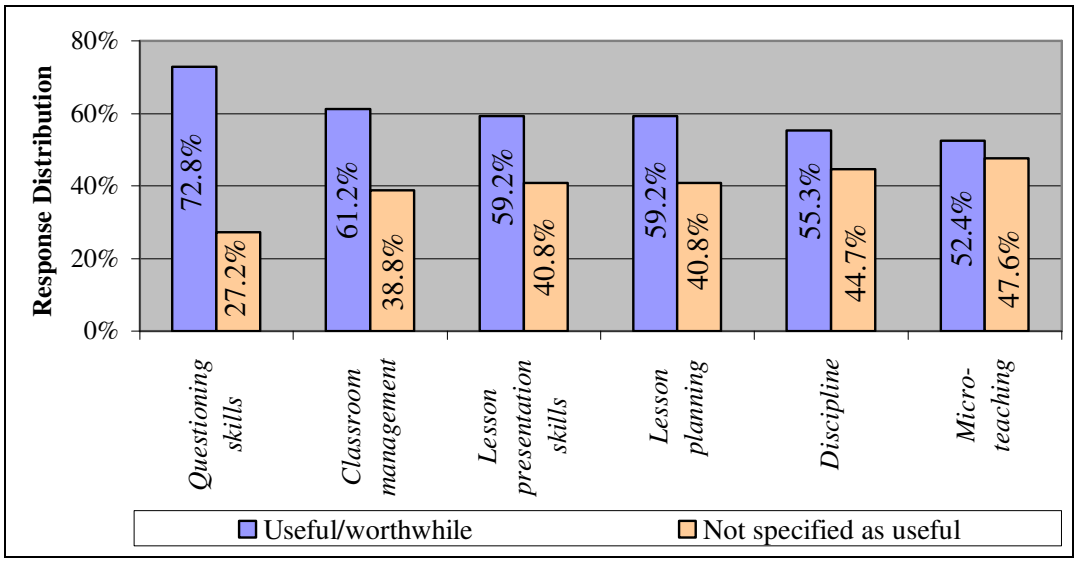
[29]At Year Two students were presented with twenty different areas studied as part of the education component of their ITE and asked to indicate which they found useful/worthwhile to them during TP. At Year Four, an additional two areas studied as part of the educational component of their programme were added to the list from which students had to highlight the areas that they believed had been useful to them in their teaching.

Year Two:

Of the twenty varying elements provided in Strand One, only six areas were ranked as useful during TP by more than half of each cohort. Within Cohort 2A respondents categorised the following areas as useful or worthwhile; questioning skills 72.8% (n=75), classroom management 61.2% (n=63), lesson presentation skills 59.2% (n=61), lesson planning 59.2% (n=61), discipline 55.3% (n=57), micro-teaching 52.4 % (n=54). Within Cohort 2B the exact same six areas were categorised as useful by student teachers during TP. In this case however the priority order had slightly changed with; questioning skills 80.1% (n=121), classroom management 74.8% (n=113), discipline 65.6% (n=99), lesson planning 58.3% (n=88), micro-teaching 53.6% (n=81), lesson presentation skills 51.0% (n=77). The corresponding graph for Cohort 2B can be found in Appendix U Figure I.

Of the twenty elements identified, fourteen were not classified as useful or worthwhile during their first TP placement by over half of Cohort 2A. Areas that were perceived to be useful by the lowest percentage of respondents were: using computers / video 6.8% (n=7), pastoral care 10.7% (n=11), problem analysis 12.6% (n=13), child development 15.5% (n=16). Similarly within Cohort 2B, these same four areas were highlighted as less useful by student teachers on their first TP placement (see Appendix U Table I&II for a complete breakdown of results for both Year Two cohorts).

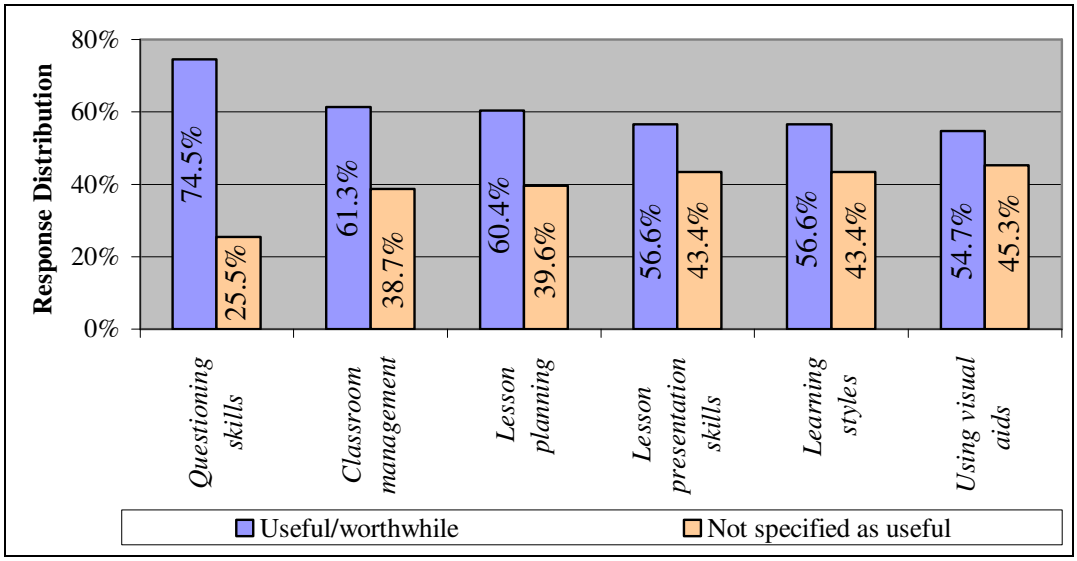
Figure LX: Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP – Cohort 2A



Year Four:

Of the twenty-two elements provided in Strand Two, only six areas were ranked as useful during TP by more than half of Cohort 4A. The graph below illustrates the areas categorised as most useful or worthwhile; questioning skills 74.5% (n=79), classroom management 61.3% (n=65), lesson planning 60.4% (n=64), lesson presentation skills 56.6% (n=60), learning styles 56.5% (n=60), using visual aids 54.7% (n=58). Within Cohort 4B a total of seven areas were categorised as useful or worthwhile by the student teachers during TP, five of which mirrored those prioritised by Cohort 4A. As with Cohort 4A, questioning skills and classroom management were perceived to be the two most useful areas. Resource preparation was the additional area also categorised as useful by 63.6% of respondents in Cohort 4B (n=96). The remaining four areas highlighted as useful were; discipline 55.0% (n=83), using visual aids 55.0% (n=83), lesson planning 53.0% (n=80), and learning styles 53.0% (n=80). The corresponding graph for Cohort 4B can be found in Appendix U Figure II.

Figure LXI: Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP – Cohort 4A



Areas that were perceived to be useful by the lowest percentage of respondents were; curriculum evaluation 4.7% (n=5), child development 9.4% (n=10), knowledge of change in education 9.4% (n=10), pastoral care 10.4% (n=11), using computers/video 13.2% (n=14). Similarly in Cohort 4B, these same five areas were highlighted as useful by the lowest percentage of respondents; curriculum evaluation 0.7% (n=1), knowledge of change in education 4.6% (n=7), pastoral care 13.9% (n=21), using computer/video

19.2% (n=29), child development 21.9% (n=33) (see Appendix U Table III&IV for a complete breakdown of results for both Year Four cohorts).

Course of study and perceptions of the education components of ITE

In relation to the different elements of the educational component of their pre-service programme, analysis highlighted a number of relationships with students' course of study. In total three separate elements were highlighted as useful by certain course groups at both times of testing. When compared with their peers, a greater percentage of Science students at both Year Two and Four perceived that the assessment of student learning aspect of their studies was useful. Over forty-five per cent of this class highlighted assessment of student learning as a useful aspect of their studies, but much lower percentages of the other class groups shared this opinion. This association was observed to be moderate in all cohorts (Cohort 2A, *V*=.321, Cohort 2B, *V*=.233, Cohort 4A, *V*=.271, p<.050).

Table XVI: Course of study and students' rating of assessment of student learning

Percentage that specified assessment of student learning was useful:				
	M&CT	**PE**	**M&ET**	**SCIENCE**
Cohort 2A	**15%**	**23%**	**28%**	**54%**
Cohort 2B	**24%**	**32%**	**14%**	**48%**
Cohort 4A	**26.1%**	**10.3%**	**22.7%**	**45%**

With regards to micro-teaching, M&CT students were found to prioritise the usefulness of this much more than the other class groups. Three quarters of M&CT student teachers specified that they had found this aspect of their studies useful during TP. Only one third of PE and M&ET students echoed this belief. At both Year Two and Four this association was relatively strong (Cohort 2A, *V*=.407, Cohort 4A, *V*=.389, p=.001).

Table XVII: Course of study and students' rating of micro-teaching

Percentage that specified micro-teaching was useful:				
	M&CT	**PE**	**M&ET**	**SCIENCE**
Cohort 2A	**78%**	**32%**	**33%**	**64%**
Cohort 4A	**74%**	**26%**	**36%**	**59%**

As the table below details, greater percentage of both M&ET and M&CT students than their peers in PE and Science specified that they found the visual aids aspect of their studies valuable during their TP. While fifty to sixty per cent of materials students pointed out this aspect of their studies as useful, approximately half that percentage in the other class groups held the same opinion. At both times of testing this relationship was moderate in strength (Cohort 2A, *V*=.292, Cohort 4A, *V*=.287, p<.033).

Table XVIII: Course of study and students' rating of using visual aids

Percentage that specified using visual aids was useful:				
	M&CT	**PE**	**M&ET**	**SCIENCE**
Cohort 2A	**56%**	**26%**	**62%**	**38%**
Cohort 4A	**52%**	**28%**	**59%**	**36%**

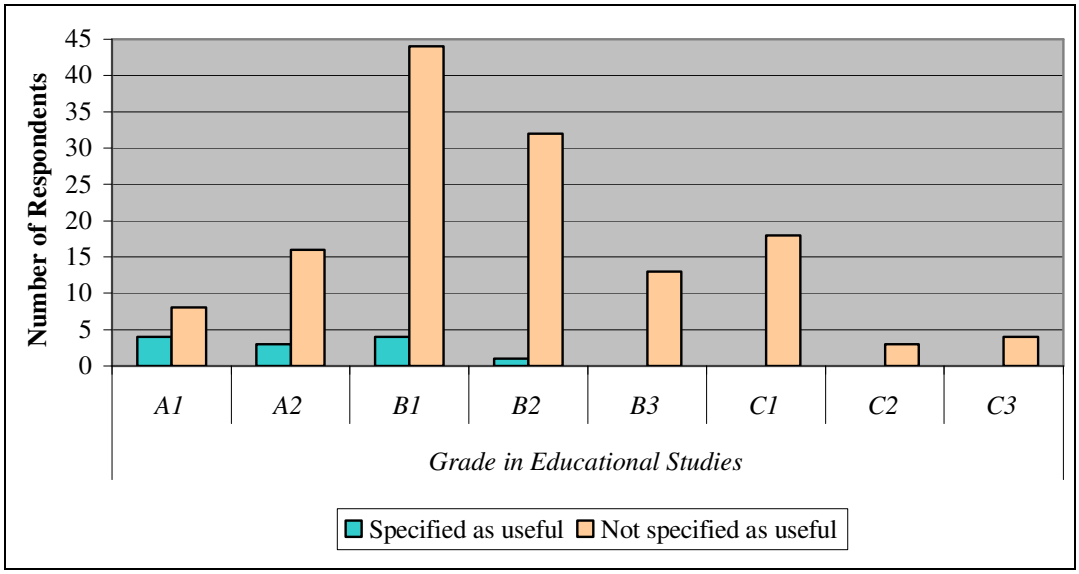
TP Grade and perceptions of the education components of ITE

Only students in the A and B grade ranges highlighted pastoral care as useful to them during their TP and no student who received a C grade specified that they found this area of their studies of value. This relationship was relatively strong at Year Two and moderate at Year Four (Cohort 2A, *V*=.457, Cohort 4B, *V*=.205, p<.014). The corresponding graph can be found in Appendix U Figure III.

Grade in educational studies and perceptions of the education component of ITE

On analysis a relationship was observed between the grades respondents were awarded for their educational studies and their opinions of the usefulness of the pastoral care element of their studies. This association highlighted that students in the higher grade range (A_1-B_2) indicated more frequently that they had found the pastoral care element of their studies of value than students in the lower grade range. 12% of those awarded an A_1-B_2 at Year Two and 17% of those awarded an A_1-B_2 at Year Four highlighted this as a useful area of their studies during TP, but no student that received a grade B_3 or lower specified that their studies of pastoral care were relevant during TP. At both times of testing this relationship was moderate (Cohort 2B, *V*=.331, Cohort 4A, *V*=.370, p<.043). (Please see Appendix U Figure IV for the corresponding graph for Cohort 4A).

Figure LXII: Educational studies grade and perceived usefulness of pastoral care studies – Cohort 2B



QCA and perceptions of the education components of ITE

At Year Four, a very strong association was noted between respondent QCA and the curriculum evaluation element of educational studies. Student teachers who specified this was a worthwhile element of their studies exhibited notably higher QCAs (Cohort 4A=3.11, Cohort 4B=3.52) than those who did not highlight this aspect of their studies as useful (Cohort 4A=2.80, Cohort 4B=3.04), (Cohort 4A, *V*=.946, Cohort 4B, *V*=1, p<.006).

Table XIX: QCA and perception of the usefulness of curriculum evaluation studies

	Curriculum Evaluation	
	Useful during TP	**Not useful during TP**
QCA Cohort 4A	**3.1099**	**2.8040**
QCA Cohort 4B	**3.5200**	**3.0411**

Another association was noted at both Year Two and Four which highlighted that the students who placed the most value on the pastoral care element of their educational studies, exhibited the highest QCA overall. Within Cohort 2B the mean QCA of students who specified this was a valuable areas of their studies was 2.99, but 2.92 was the mean QCA of those who did not pinpoint this as a worthwhile area of their studies. The same trend was evident in cohort 4B as detailed below. This was a strong association in both data sets (Cohort 2B, *V*=.808, Cohort 4B, *V*=.713, p<.025).

Table XX: QCA and perception of the usefulness of pastoral care studies

	Pastoral Care	
	Useful during TP	**Not useful during TP**
QCA Cohort 2B	**2.9983**	**2.9223**
QCA Cohort 4B	**3.1548**	**3.0265**

On analysis of the student comments and dialogue in the focus groups regarding both the education and subject components of the ITE three homologous themes emerged:

- areas of their educational studies that students prioritised as useful
- student teachers' feelings about their subject modules
- student teachers' perceptions of areas that require greater attention.

Areas of their educational studies that students prioritised as useful

The quantitative findings already presented indicate that the student teachers valued the more practical elements of their educational studies and this was reiterated in their personal comments. Four areas; classroom management, questioning skills, resources preparation and micro-teaching were most frequently cited by respondents at both times of testing as areas that were practically useful. In the discussions, subject pedagogies was highlighted most frequently as a useful component of the programme. Teaching strategies and mixed ability teaching methods were also specifically mentioned.

> *Planning, Resources, Questioning and Classroom Management were very worthwhile (respondent 2B: 90)*
>
> *Microteaching was the most effective. Nearly everything I learnt about teaching came from microteaching (respondent 2A: 19)*
>
> *Our (subject) pedagogy was done by a teacher and was absolutely brilliant. (Teacher's) points were brilliant, the stuff (teacher) would come in with, (lists specific teaching strategies) that would take 2 minutes but it was so useful on teaching practice (GDG member: 23)*
>
> *The only one that did us any good was the mixed ability. It was the only one I found any bit useful. It was easier and you can break it down to their level, just explain to them in their different kind of abilities (GDG member: 13)*
>
> *I think it was one of the modules we had last year, we were encouraged to use different types of teaching strategies and it was like another version of micro teaching. So even though it was only ten minutes here there was such a broader array of different teaching strategies that I felt more confident using them in the classroom (GDG member: 6)*

Student teachers' feelings about their subject modules

In both phases of the research, student teachers voiced the opinion that their knowledge of the second-level syllabus, for both their elective and primary subjects was insufficient and that the subject component of their studies was not given enough attention during their programme. While students from all four subject areas made these comments, in Phase One it was evident that students studying Materials were most vocal about this. In Phase Two, no variation in the intensity of discontentment was identified across the four programmes, but rather students were observed to be equally vocal about their perceived lack of subject knowledge.

> *In terms of (subject) I feel we were not at all prepared to actually teach it in terms of knowing the syllabus. Also teachers wanted certain material covered which meant that we were not free to choose topics of our choice, that we knew*
> *(respondent 2A: 11)*

> *More time to teach us the subject's curriculum not just general education (respondent 4B: 14)*

> *I found a bit of pressure because its not covered enough for us in college like topics and that, you are learning it yourself before you are teaching (GDG member: 20)*

The discussions on subject modules centred on the level at which the student teachers' subject knowledge was pitched and many participants questioned why their subject modules were not more aligned with the type and level of knowledge they would need for teaching at second-level.

> *I just don't understand why, like who decided what teachers need? Like people who are going into industry are learning stuff that is relevant, yet the teachers here are being taught completely off the wall irrelevant kind of stuff. I don't see where they are trying to justify making a link between some of our modules and the classroom (GDG member: 1)*

> *We seem to do a lot of stuff that has no relevance at all, because we are just thrown in with other people…We are doing stuff for industry we are not industry people. We should be able to do what is relevant to us and none of this wishy washy crap (GDG member: 12)*

Student teachers' perceptions of areas that require greater attention

From the comments made by Year Two respondents five specific areas were identified which students felt should be given more attention during ITE. The areas specified were; discipline, questioning skills, dealing with mixed ability and students with specific learning disabilities learning, subject pedagogies, and curricular issues. At the

second time of testing respondents highlighted four specific areas as meriting greater attention. Within both cohorts, subject knowledge was specified most frequently as requiring an increased focus. Other areas specified in order of frequency were; discipline, using resources, and dealing with disadvantaged students and students with specific learning disabilities learning.

> *Not enough done on discipline, (names module) never felt relevant to what we were teaching as it is continuous factual notes & not made more accessible to us (respondent 4B: 78)*
>
> *I think maybe questioning skills should have been worked on closer to TP and not at the beginning of first year (respondent 2B: 47)*
>
> *The university needs to put more emphasis on teaching and the material i.e. junior cert/leaving cert [sic]. I found myself in trouble when teaching a subject which the college didn't cover properly (respondent 4A: 66)*
>
> *Mixed ability should be an issue that is given more consideration on the programme (respondent 2A: 5)*
>
> *I feel we need more information on working with disadvantaged [sic] and students with learning difficulties (respondent 4A: 59)*
>
> *I felt that 4 weeks subject pedagogy isn't enough for your (subject). What we learned in four weeks was helpful but you'd feel more prepared if you had the module for a semester (respondent 2A: 90)*
>
> *I think we are very unprepared for using resources and visual aids, as we are not given any help with this (respondent 4A: 67)*

In discussions students demonstrated that they felt the programme was in need of revision and four specific recommendations emerged regarding how the programme could be modified to better meet the needs of student teachers.

> *If you were to change the face of our courses… the fact that you are coming in to get a degree to qualify you to teach in your subject areas [defiantly] there is a whole load of restructuring needed. There are a lot of filler modules that need not be there and a lot of other subjects that are badly needed to be put in (GDG member: 5)*

The most widely cited recommendation was that the programme should be re-orientated to ensure that greater emphasis is placed on learning how to teach subjects and not just learning subject matter. Participants also recommended that their subject content ought to command a greater proportion of their overall studies, and that content should mirror more closely the type and level of knowledge they would require for teaching. Elective

subjects were more frequently mentioned as receiving less attention during their studies and being disconnected from second-level pedagogy and syllabi.

> *Most of the semesters that I have been here I have done two modules of (subject) and I just think that it would be much better if we did one module of (subject) and one module of teaching (subject). Like, we are going to be teachers. I assumed when I first came that we would be doing something actually related to teaching our subjects (GDG member: 2)*

> *The focus that there is on education, like education is the centre one nearly every semester. That much focus should be on woodwork and technical graphics or on PE and on geography. There should be at least that much focus on them because that's what you're actually teaching (GDG member: 8)*

Focus group members also felt that they should be better equipped to deal with aspects of the job outside of the classroom. Discussion groups were held during students' final semester before beginning teaching and the timing may have influenced this shift in students' priorities from TP to the wider aspects of their profession. Students also felt that issues around accommodating mixed ability and dealing with special needs pupils should be a more significant component of their programme.

> *You don't learn about the administration stuff that teachers might have to do, like filling out forms or taking groups on trips, stuff like that. And the things you are responsible for because I wouldn't have a clue of because you can be accountable for stuff and not even have a clue (GDG member: 3)*

> *I think we should be given a module on how to actually communicate within a school, ethics as regards talking to a principal, dealing with your cooperating teacher, as regards how you get paid how much tax you should be paying, dealings with the department. I just think that is so important and we never do it or anything, we don't know anything about the ASTI or other associations (GDG member: 15)*

> *I do remember some module that mentioned something about special needs roughly in a sort of a big bubble. And that was lovely and it was nice to hear the words ADHD mentioned but absolutely no specifics and absolutely sod all use to you. So great that I now know what all these terms are about we can have a little discussion about it, but talk to me as a new teacher about what I can do practically with a child in the classroom (GDG member: 9)*

Students' perceptions of the applicability of their educational studies

Student teachers were given five different statements[30] about their educational studies and were asked to designate their opinions of the applicability of these studies. An identical pattern of agreement with the statements was evident at both Year Two and Four and highlights that students felt most strongly that "*The educational studies that I did in college before TP were useful to me sometimes and I did use them, but they didn't always give me the answers to the problems I encountered everyday in my classroom"* (Cohort 2A=74.5% (n=76), Cohort 2B=77.3% (n=116), Cohort 4A=74.8% (n=77), Cohort 4B=74.0% (n=111)).

Two thirds of each cohort believed that their educational studies helped them to understanding their planning and their classroom experience (Cohort 2A=62.1% (n=64), Cohort 2B=64.2% (n=95), Cohort 4A=69.3% (n=70), Cohort 4B=58.3% (n=88)) with approximately fifty per cent indicating that "*The things I had studied in college, about education and teaching prior to TP helped me to think through issues encountered during TP"* (Cohort 2A=47.1% (n=48), Cohort 2B=62.2% (n=92), Cohort 4A=57.4% (n=58) Cohort 4B=49.7% (n=75)). The corresponding graphs can be found in Appendix U Figures V to VIII.

The two remaining statements, were both negative and showed the lowest levels of agreement overall at both times of testing and consequently the highest levels of disagreement. Students in all cohorts were most disagreeable was statement 1 *"Even before TP, I found educational studies of little relevance to me as a student teacher"* (total disagreement; Cohort 2A=38.9%, Cohort 2B=41.3%, Cohort 4A=44.7% and Cohort 4B=33.1%). The corresponding graphs for both strands can be found in Appendix U Figures IX and X.

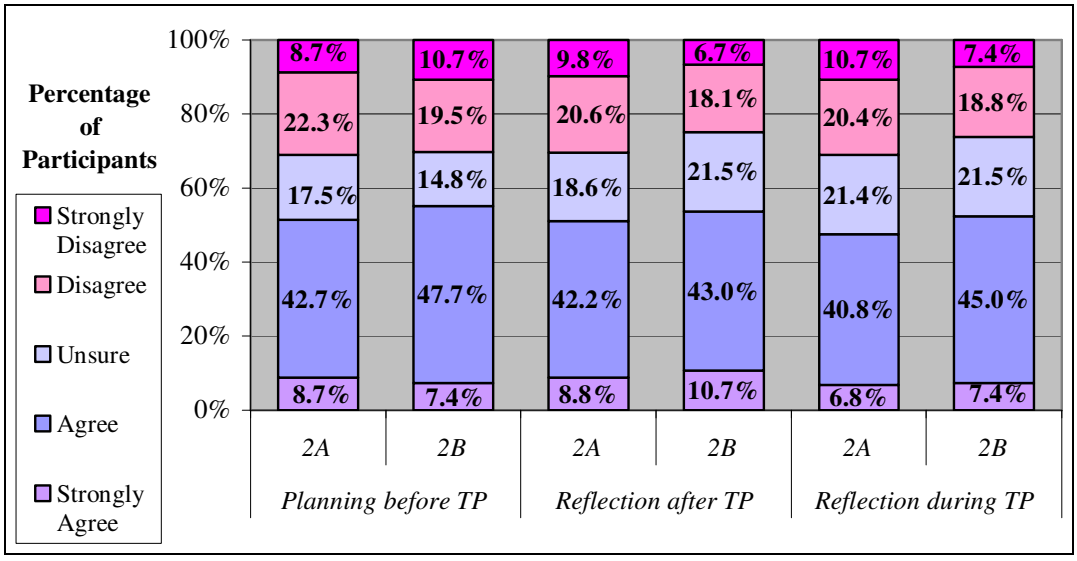
[30] Statement 1 – Even before TP, I found educational studies of little relevance to me as a student teacher.
Statement 2 – I tried to make use of the educational studies we did in college, but on the whole I found it was irrelevant to me on Teaching Practice.
Statement 3 – The educational studies that I did in college before TP were useful to me sometimes and I did use them, but they didn't always give me the answers to the problems I encountered everyday in my classroom.
Statement 4 – The things I had studied in college, about education and teaching prior to TP helped me to think through issues encountered during TP.
Statement 5 – My education studies helped me to understand my planning and my classroom experience.

The impact of educational studies on key aspects of student teachers' role

Respondents at both Year Two and Four were asked to categorise how useful they believed the knowledge gleaned from educational studies had been when planning before TP, reflecting during TP and reflecting after TP.

The findings for Strand One revealed that the largest percentages of student teachers at Year Two felt their educational knowledge was useful in their planning before TP with 51.4% (n=53) from Cohort 2A and 55.1% (n=82) from Cohort 2B overall agreeing. Ranked second was reflection after TP, as 51.0% (n=52) of Cohort 2A and 53.7% (n=80) of Cohort 2B signalled agreement that their educational knowledge was useful for this aspect of their teaching. Reflection during TP was the area where the student teachers felt least confident that their educational knowledge was useful, although the overall agreement in this instance was still high (47.6% (n=49) in Cohort 2A and 52.4% (n=78) in Cohort 2B). "Reflection during TP" also received the highest percentage of unsure responses with twenty-one per cent of each cohort indicating that they were unsure if they found their own educational knowledge useful for reflecting during TP.

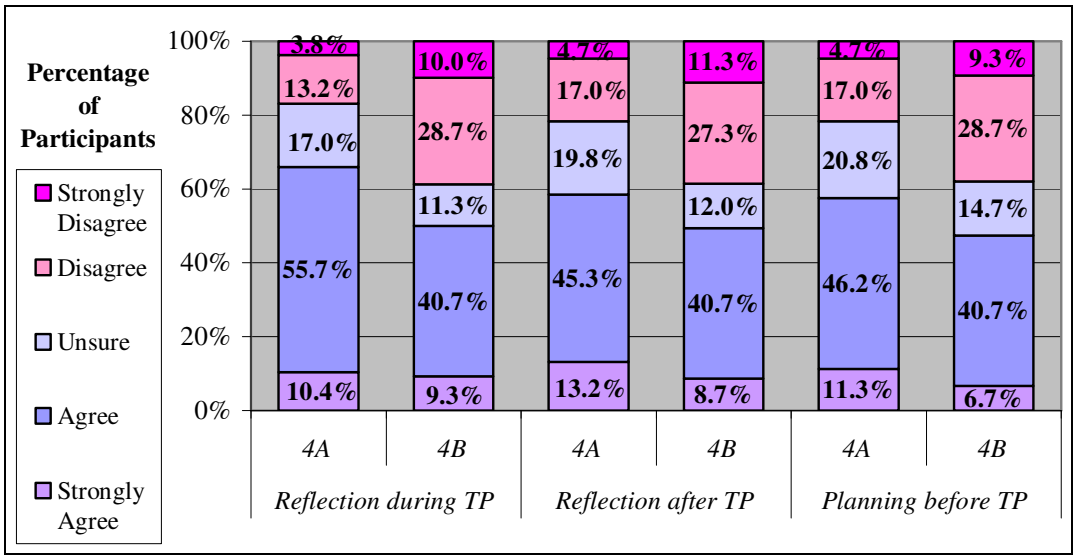
Figure LXIII: Perceived usefulness of educational studies – Strand One



The findings for Strand Two illuminated a divergence in respondent's perceptions, as at this time of testing, 66.1% (n=70) of Cohort 4A and 50.0% (n=75) of Cohort 4B agreed that their educational studies had been most useful for "Reflection during TP". This was followed by "Reflection after TP" as 58.5% (n=62) of Cohort 4A and 49.4% (n=74) of Cohort 4B agreed that their educational knowledge was useful for this. The lowest

percentage of student teachers rated their educational knowledge as useful in their "Planning before TP" (57.5% (n=61) in Cohort 4A and 47.4% (n=71) in Cohort 4B). This also received the highest percentage of unsure response with twenty-two respondents in each cohort indicating that they were unsure if their educational knowledge was useful for their planning.

Figure LXIV: Perceived usefulness of educational studies – Strand Two



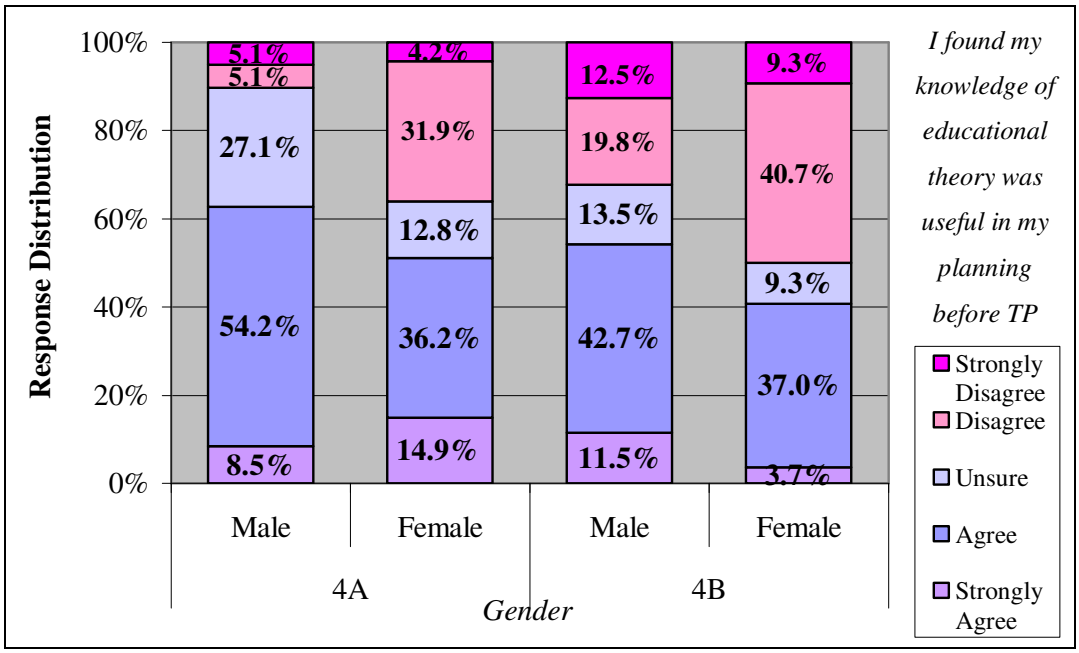
Respondents were also presented with reverse order value statements to test the reliability of their responses in relation to the usefulness of their educational knowledge. The data reinforced the findings above, clearly indicating a shift in students' ability to utilise their educational knowledge from planning to reflection by Year Four. Please see Appendix U Figures XI and XII for the graphical representation of these findings.

Gender and the impact of educational studies

In both cohorts at Year Four a relationship was noted between gender and student teachers' perceptions of when they found their educational studies of value. This association highlighted more males than females believed their educational knowledge was useful in their planning before TP. In Cohort 4A, 62.7% of males (n=37) compared with 51.1% of females (n=24) and in Cohort 4B, 54.2% of males (n=52) compared with 40.7% (n=22) of females agreed that they found their educational knowledge useful for their planning before TP. While more males were unsure overall, females showed the highest levels of disagreement in both cohorts. This relationship was moderate in strength in both data sets (Cohort 4A, V=.395, Cohort 4B, V=.246 $p<.050$). It is

interesting that planning before TP was where educational knowledge was seen as least useful overall at Year Four, yet males placed a higher emphasis on the usefulness of their educational knowledge for their planning at this point in their development.

Figure LXV: Gender and usefulness of educational studies – Year Four



Lucent school attendance and the impact of educational studies

In both cohorts at Year Two a relationship was observed between attendance at a Lucent school and student teachers perceptions of the adequacy of their educational studies for reflection during TP. This association highlighted that Lucent students were more positive overall about the usefulness of their educational knowledge for their reflection during TP. Only 12.5% (n=8) of Lucent students in both cohorts agreed that their theoretical knowledge was inadequate for their reflection during TP, compared with 33.7% (n=32) of non Lucent students in Cohort 2A and 35.7% in Cohort 2B (n=50). This association was moderate in both cohorts (Cohort 2A, *V*=.338, Cohort 2B, *V*=.228, p=.019). See Appendix U Figure XIII for the graphical representation of these findings.

Student teachers' opinions of their educational studies as distinct from their teacher education programme did not receive much attention in the personal responses of Phase One. The nature of the guided discussion groups however afforded students a greater opportunity to express and discuss their opinions of educational studies and their own

educational knowledge and therefore a more detailed consideration of this aspect is possible. On analysis of the discussions two inter-related themes were identified;

- general perceptions of educational studies
- the connection between theory and practice.

General perceptions of educational studies

In the guided discussion groups the students were invited to respond to the terms "educational studies" and "educational theory". The students immediate responses centred on particular theorists that they remembered studying, the way material was presented and in general, a dismissal of this aspect of their studies as boring and irrelevant.

> *Something we covered in lectures that we won't use again, that we had to get examined on, had to read it for the 2 days before the exam and then just not use it again (GDG member: 14)*
>
> *Piaget just comes to mind for some reason (GDG member: 21)*
>
> *Yeah it's a book of words that's it to be honest. I have read a couple of papers and stuff like that, I have done an essay on them but after that it really doesn't make much sense or use (GDG member: 16)*

Most specifically respondents in all groups demonstrated poor recollection of the areas they had covered as part of the education component of their ITE and found it difficult to name or even discuss what they had learned as part of these studies. It was also evident that in the students' minds, there was wide variation and little linkage between the areas covered in different semesters and they could not easily make connections between the different modules studied.

> *Apart from the history of education, I can't remember what we covered in education in any semester. I could guess and chop and change what lecturer we had. I will remember where it was, but I cannot remember a single thing that was said to me that I was supposed to learn from them. I could remember tutorials better, but lectures I don't know what was talked about in them or what they were for. Ya [sic] I know there was psychology and reflective teaching…but what was in each of them I'm lost, I dunno [sic] (GDG member: 6)*
>
> *The way they do it you have one semester about this theory is his bible and next thing you go onto the next one and that's his bible and you are meant to follow that. By the time you have the 2nd one read you have forgotten what the first one said. It's*

that way all the way through college…I forget the names of all theories because it's only the latest one you remember because it's what he says goes for that semester (GDG member: 14)

It was grand while you were doing them and you got the readings and that afterwards it's hard to see where you could apply it. It's not very realistic or you don't be thinking [sic] about that when you are out there trying to get a class to work or whatever (GDG member: 11)

The connection between theory and practice

The researcher recognised the difficulty in getting an accurate picture of how useful and applicable the knowledge that students had gained from their educational studies really was to them. To try to overcome this, the student teachers who took part in the guided discussion groups were specifically asked what kind of a connection they felt they could make between the educational discourse that was happening in the college and their practice in the classroom. On first inspection the observations of the final year student teachers pointed to the fact that the connection between their educational studies in the university, their subject and their classroom teaching was limited.

No it is only loose for me (GDG member: 2)

I think you need to be taught the link between your subject and the education theory that you have been taught over the last 3 years, how to link them in the classroom. At the end of the day the main part of our degree is to be teachers and yet we can't facilitate that (GDG member: 7)

The link between your subject and the theory you were taught is missing (GDG member: 5)

This lack of connection between these elements was ascribed to the way students learned and were taught, as many felt that there was no common ground, no meeting place where the two facets of their learning, that in the university and that in the school came together. Some participants described their learning as taking place in a vacuum.

There is no link between those kind of theories that we look at and how we should apply them to our own teaching… Well for me its being a sense of learning in a vacuum and I wonder if we were to employ the same, they have an opportunity to role model for us good behaviour and good technique and skills and I think those are the things missing (GDG member: 9)

It was also evident, that whether consciously or unconsciously, the student teachers at some level demonstrated recognition of the link between theory and practice.

It's not like you plan your lessons or your schemes thinking oh Ericsson said this. It's more like you would kinda [sic] would notice things. Like an irregular pattern. You would be like oh that's…but very fleetingly it wouldn't be happening all the time. You would be like oh I remember when (lecturer Y) said that. It's not every single day it just might be every couple weeks for me anyway (GDG member: 2)

We don't learn to teach as such. Everything we do it's kind of developing our knowledge base of education and teaching but it's not enhancing how we teach if that makes sense – do you know what I mean? (GDG member: 3)

Much of the dialogue illustrated that it wasn't that students didn't see the point of educational studies or educational theory, but rather in their eyes, the correct balance had not been struck between the theoretical and practical elements of their programme. Also noted was that far from dismissing educational studies, the participants were able to conceptualise at what point in their development particular aspects of educational studies would be most beneficial. These students were able to advise as to the sequence of modules that would confer greatest benefit. Based on this students saw a need for restructuring of the programme and for the placement of modules to be revised.

I think part of college is the that it is higher education and it is about expanding our minds, but its to get that balance between that sort of academic intellectual educational side and then the practicals – the reality side. I think it is that balance that is missing (GDG member: 19)

The one - about professionalism and if we are professionals. I could really have done with that before teaching practice. I was just sitting in the tutorial going ooh I never really thought about it before. I thought it would have helped in the staff room, so maybe bring that one in and replace the history one (GDG member: 10)

The conversations between students like the one detailed overleaf, also demonstrated that these final year students were clearly able to distinguish which aspects of their educational studies should be included in their ITE and which would be better placed within a framework for in-career development.

I was thinking when we had that module. I thought it was very good. From a perspective of say 5 years into teaching and you're there in the school and we know how we got here, if we ever go back and campaign for something, dunno [sic] lets just say you're part of the ASTI or something and you're campaigning. Then you can say well thirty years ago we didn't have a, b, or c. I thought it was a good module. Think it was the only module I really liked in education (GDG member: 7)

But do you think it is essential to have that as part of your teacher education? (GDG member: 9)

Think everyone needs to know where they come from though (GDG member: 7)

If you were going to be going out and campaigning for the ASTI surely like anything else you are going to do that if it hasn't being covered in college you could go and find out that information. So if there are things that are being left out of our teacher education and that's being included is the balance right? (GDG member: 9)

Another prominent point made in discussions was the students saw a clear contradiction between how their education lecturers taught them and how their lecturers encouraged them to teach at second-level. This contributed to a perception of lecturers as detached from the reality of classroom teaching.

It's like our lecturers are too far removed that they don't know what's going on in the school (GDG member: 24)

Yeah I think it would be a good idea for the lecturers here to get back into the classroom…I think after a while in the college they do get a little out of touch (GDG member: 6)

In all but one of the groups, the participants voiced the belief that their lecturers needed to re-consider how they structured their own lectures to include the theories and models of good practice they advocated and thereby demonstrate effectively how these could be incorporated into everyday teaching situations.

I think one of the things for me is that the role modelling from the majority of our lecturers is pretty poor, the areas they could role model for us in relation to education even in relation to things like giving feedback on assignments - non existent (GDG member: 9)

We were in a tutorial last week, our tutor was telling us about (Lecturer Y), she was saying when (lecturer) was here in the college every two or three weeks (lecturer) went back to a school and went in and taught for a day to keep in touch with what was going on in the classroom and to bring that back to the students. Then you have lecturers at the moment who just sit at their desk and reading their own papers and writing their own papers (GDG member: 7)

Within the focus group sessions the researcher was afforded the time and opportunity to further explore the issues of interest around educational studies and students perceptions of their educational knowledge. From this two further themes emerged;

- students' levels of awareness of using educational theory in their classroom
- students' perceptions of themselves as theory makers.

Students' levels of awareness of using educational theory in their classroom

At the basic level the students were frank about their use of educational theories in their classroom and a small number stated that really in the immediacy of the classroom press, they did not think about educational theories.

> *Like you go off and you learn about Piaget and you learn about this and you go into a classroom and you don't think about it, you honestly don't. You're more concerned with getting those 24 pupils in front of you to do this experiment right or get their grades higher or to be more involved. You're not thinking about what some fella said back in the early 1900's in fairness (GDG member: 17)*

However, in all of the groups the student dialogue showed that they were aware of using knowledge gleaned form their educational studies in their everyday teaching or were aware of relating their experiences to that knowledge.

> *In 2nd year I definitely saw Piaget, some of Piaget's and Kohlberg's things in action. Like I would say "Oh he is at that stage". But at the moment now I would have to go back over what they were saying to actually see are they (students) at this stage, because you forget it unless you want to keep learning (GDG member: 3)*

> *I would say that multiple intelligence stuff…I hadn't know anything about that before and I would never have taken into consideration some pupils learned differently…But then after doing things like that, I kind of even a tiny bit got that idea of well, everybody can't learn the same, everybody has different things and even though I don't understand those theorists hugely, I still recognise that there are those kids there that are different and I would say that is one thing I will take from this college is that they are different, you can't do the same stuff you have to be aware of things like that (GDG member: 25)*

Students' perceptions of themselves as theory makers

The participants were also asked if they felt they generated their own theories during their time working in schools. Student teachers were quick to dismiss the idea that they had generated theories themselves but rather saw themselves as developing practical teaching strategies.

> *I don't think I generated it, that I made a theory for myself. But after seeing a class for a week I would say right I will do it this way because this approach may help them better (GDG member: 20)*

> *I dunno [sic] if I ever thought about it as theories, but you do develop your own, especially 4th year because you are out that bit longer as well and you kind of develop your own strategies (GDG member: 5)*

Their comments also pointed towards the fact that they believed their workload on teaching practice actually curtailed their ability to theorise. These student teachers however did appear to be gaining a greater level of clarity about what educational theories really are, which perhaps demonstrates where they are in their development as teachers.

It's not something we thought too much about and then we probably end up doing it. I think if we didn't have as much, if there wasn't as much emphasis put on the folder we would have had hours upon hours more time to think about it (GDG member: 6)

I think definitely when I do start teaching I would think that I will be able to come up with my own theories just from practice. A lot of education theories are based on practice anyway (GDG member: 15)

I think that all the theories we learn in education are just there to give you an idea and to see where it all originated from. But then we go out and get to know a class and every class is different, you will have your theories on what will work with these and how to get the best out of those but as different groups. I don't think you can have this is my general education theory and this is the way I teach full stop. It's completely different for each group (GDG member: 2)

How professionally prepared students' feel

Students were also asked to consider how professionally prepared they felt to take up positions as teachers. The discussions highlighted that student teachers felt it would take them a year or two to feel prepared and competent and that they would not feel fully confident until they had a significant period of hands-on teaching experience.

I don't think you feel ready until after the first year or two of teaching, I think the first year or two will be the hardest and then after that I suppose you will have an idea of what stuff worked and how the school works, that type of thing (GDG member: 21)

I feel much better than I did coming out of 2nd year teaching practice but still very, very, very unprepared for actually teaching, there is nothing that beats experience (GDG member: 5)

I feel sorry for the first classes I'm going to get anyway…I want to go teaching next September but I'm nervous about the results that I'm going to get in that first year because I have gone through 9 weeks of teaching practice, but as I said next year I'm going to go out and try and teach in different ways. I feel I will be better but I'm still going to be starting from scratch again. I have a lot done but there still there is more to do in the first year (GDG member: 14)

While the students expressed anxiety about this next phase of their development as the conversation below demonstrates, they were quite philosophical and realistic that their teaching would develop over time.

We will be out on our own and we won't have any cooperating teachers to fall back on whatever we do is on our head so that's another thing (GDG member: 1)

I think it will be a bit of a challenge, I think we're fairly prepared am really looking forward to getting out (GDG member: 4)

We will cope (GDG member: 3)

Yeah we will (GDG member: 1)

Only one key reason was highlighted by these student teachers as stopping them from feeling fully prepared to embark on this next stage of their journey as teachers - the extent or lack thereof of their subject knowledge.

I think that for [sic] after teaching practice and stuff, I do feel in some ways a lot more prepared for it, but I am no way near prepared to teach (GDG member: 8)

We know how to teach but not how to teach (names subject) and how to teach (names other subject) that is seriously lacking (GDG member: 4)

*But I'm just amazed that we have had 4 years in college and we're just given such s**t as modules. And we are not actually, I know they don't want to teach us for one curriculum but once we are qualified we are going to get in-service for anything new that comes in. And I just can't see why they won't bring us through everything, even if it is in baby steps, everything that we are going to teach. I can't understand why they won't do it as part of some module (GDG member: 15)*

Summary of findings

At Year Four, students did not see pre-TP lectures as helpful as they had at Year Two. While respondents placed greater value on the helpfulness of pre-TP tutorials overall, again the level of contentment decreased at Year Four. Two thirds of students at Year Four however indicated that their university programme in general had helped them to better understand their TP experience.

90% of all respondents felt their preparatory period before TP was rushed and stressful, the majority of whom advocated lengthening the preparatory period preceding TP. Those who did not find the preparatory period rushed and stressful and were happiest with the length had higher QCAs. A third of students felt adequately prepared for TP.

Students were critical not only of the length of time afforded to them to prepare but also the type of guidance they received and the timing and quality of information regarding their school placement, which they perceived impacted negatively on their planning. Students perceived the lack of opportunity to communicate with their schools and co-operating teachers in advance of their preparation period as indicative of a broader communication issue with schools.

Student teachers were able to see that their programme had an impact at some level but perceived the programme was not practical enough, not grounded in reality and experienced difficulty in marrying this with the reality of their own classroom teaching. Educational studies in particular students asserted did not deal with the practicalities of classroom management and organisation.

Qualitative data highlighted that students were critical that subject departments did not differentiate the programme specifically for teacher education students and did not feel prepared to teach the second-level curriculum. They were also critical of the education department, as the focus of each module within the overall structure of the programme was not explained.

Respondents' highlighted elements of their programme that were "practically" useful and felt educational studies and theories were most valuable when presented in relation to classroom experiences. Teaching practice was seen as very valuable, not just because it offered practical experience but also because it provided the opportunity to apply theory and therefore made this more relevant. Recommendations called for programme content to draw more from the reality of the classroom.

Those elements of modules which looked at bigger questions and broader issues outside of the classroom were seen as least useful during TP, but students who valued these elements during TP were found to be higher achievers overall. For example only those with higher QCAs identified curriculum studies, child development and pastoral care as valuable during TP. Concomitantly, only higher achievers in relation to TP and educational studies grade identified the pastoral care element of their programme as being valuable.

Differentiation was noted in students' choices of the elements of their programme that they found most useful. Materials students prioritised micro-teaching and visual aids at both times of testing, while their peers in science prioritised assessment of student learning.

At Year Two students valued their educational knowledge most for planning before TP but at Year Four identified this as of most value for reflection during TP, an indicator of their level of development as teachers. Male students had not progressed as much as female's vis-à-vis the applicability of education studies, as at Year Four they continued to prioritise these as useful for planning, while female students clearly saw the benefit of this knowledge for reflection. In advance of their peers, students involved in the Lucent mentoring programme indicated that they found their knowledge from educational studies of most benefit for reflection during TP at Year Two.

Student teachers at Year Four demonstrated recognition of the link between theory and practice but described their learning as taking place in a vacuum and so found it difficult to merge these aspects of their learning. They did not dismiss their educational studies but felt their programme should be restructured and were able to designate the aspects of their educational studies that should be included in ITE and those which would be better placed within a framework for in-career development. Student teachers were quick to dismiss the idea that they had generated theories themselves but rather saw themselves as developing practical teaching strategies, an indication of how they conceptualise educational theory. The workload of TP was cited as the main factor, which curtailed students' ability to theorise.

Student teachers' feelings about TP and teaching

Introduction

In order to get a clear sense of what the TP experience was like for student teachers and how they felt about their time within the school, Phase One participants were presented with a series of questions relating to their TP experience. These questions focused on how they felt they had managed during TP, made them consider how equipped they were to deal with certain aspects of their role and also aimed to elucidate their views on the placement and timing of TP within their ITE. Student teachers were also invited to discuss this in Phase Two. This forum provided greater opportunity for students to discuss the timing, context and format of TP both as distinct elements of their programme and also as part of their wider learning experience. The findings from both phases will be collectively presented.

Feelings about teaching practice

At Year Two, 62.1% from Cohort 2A (n=64) and 64.4% from Cohort 2B (n=96) overall disagreed that they felt unprepared for the reality of the classroom. While 22.3% of Cohort 2A (n=23) and 15.4% of Cohort 2B indicated that they were unsure (n=23), approximately a fifth of student teachers agreed overall that they felt unprepared for the reality of teaching (Cohort 2A=15.6% (n=16), Cohort 2B=20.2% (n=30)).

At Year Four, almost twenty per cent more of each cohort (Cohort 4A=81.7% (n=85) and Cohort 4B=82.0% (n=123)) disagreed that they felt unprepared for the reality of the classroom. Correspondingly, only nine per cent of students agreed that they felt ill equipped for real-life teaching and the same percentage categorised themselves as unsure (Cohort 4A=9.6%, n=10, Cohort 4B=9.3%, n=14). These results highlight that at both times of testing, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they felt prepared is notably higher than those who signalled that they didn't feel prepared.

When asked if they felt need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming a somewhat similar picture emerged, but overall a greater number of student teachers indicated that they needed more focused support and guidance. At Year Two, 43.7% in Cohort 2A (n=45) and 57.0% in Cohort 2B (n=85) disagreed that they needed greater guidance and support. The numbers of respondents who were unsure was noteworthy however, at 29.1% (n=30) in Cohort 2A and 20.1% in Cohort 2B (n=30). At Year Four

the percentage of respondents who disagreed was higher than at Year Two, with overall totals of 54.8% in Cohort 4A (n=57) and 64.6% in Cohort 4B (n=97). In Cohort 4A, 22.8% (n=24) and in Cohort 4B, 17.3% (n=26) agreed that they felt a need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming. Concomitantly 22.5% (n=24) in Cohort 4A and 18.0% in Cohort 4B (n=27) indicated they felt unsure if they needed more guidance and support. These findings indicate that students in general felt more prepared and less in need of support and guidance at Year Four that at Year Two.

Figure LXVI: Student teachers' feelings about the reality of classroom teaching

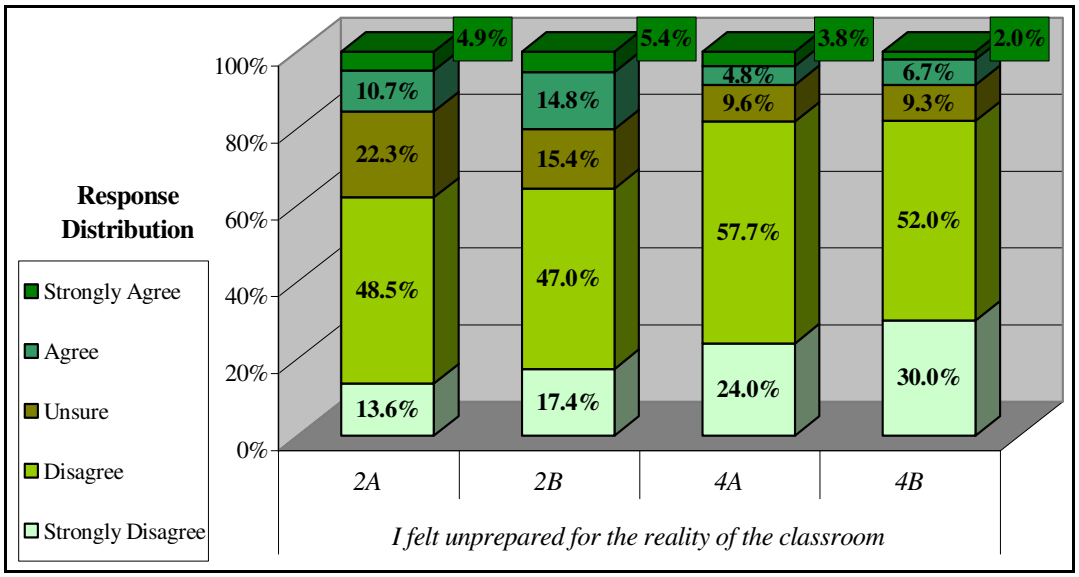
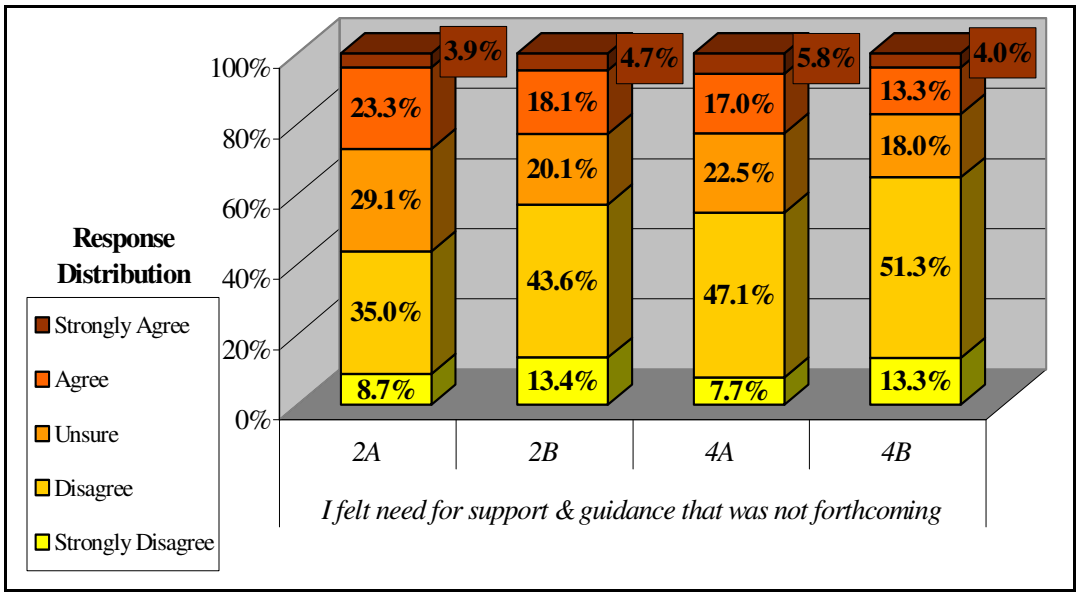
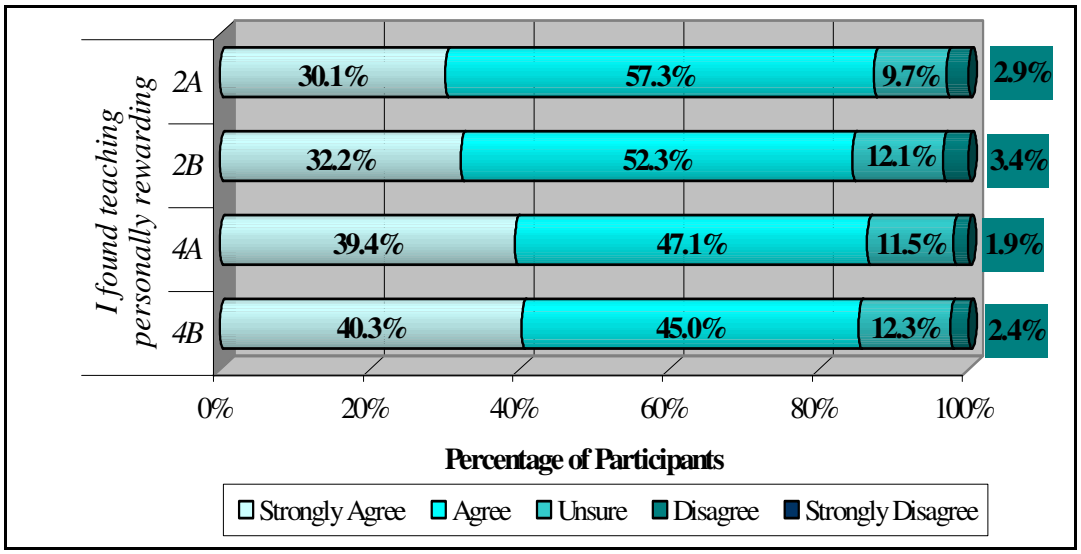


Figure LXVII: Students' perception of their need for support and guidance



A large percentage of student teachers in Phase One indicated that for them, teaching was a personally rewarding experience. At Year Two, totals of 87.4% in Cohort 2A (n=90) and 84.5% in Cohort 2B (n=126) agreed that they found teaching personally rewarding. Although 9.7% of the first study cohort (n=10) and 12.1% of the second study group (n=18) signalled that they were unsure, no respondent from either cohort strongly disagreed and only 3% of each cohort disagreed that the TP experience was personally rewarding (Cohort 2A=2.9% (n=3), Cohort 2B=3.4% (n=5)). At Year Four within Cohort 4A a combined total of ninety respondents (86.5%) agreed that they found their TP personally rewarding. 11.5% of the cohort signalled that they were unsure if for them, teaching was personally rewarding and only two respondents (1.9%) disagreed. Comparable results was observed for Cohort 4B. No respondent in either Year Four cohort strongly disagreed that the TP experience was personally rewarding.

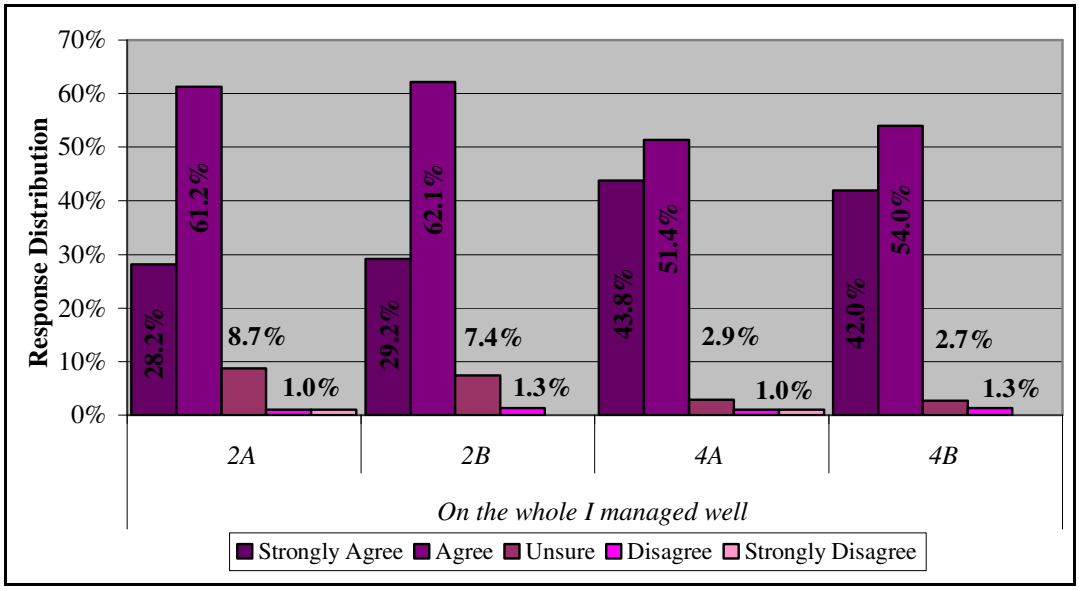
Figure LXVIII: How personally rewarding respondents perceived teaching to be



How students managed during TP

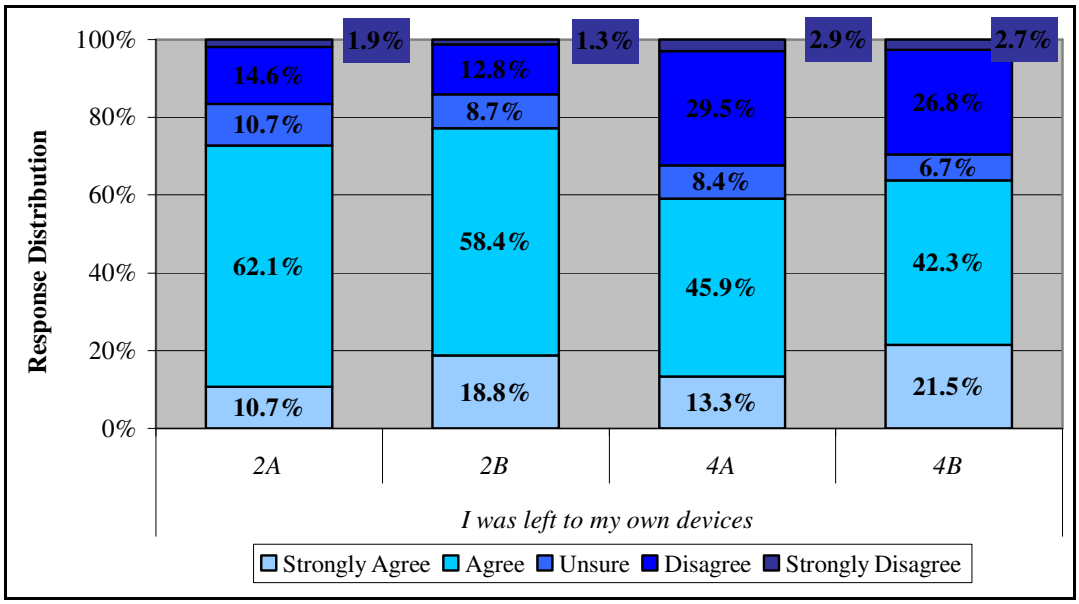
Student teachers in both strands overwhelmingly agreed that they had managed well on TP (Cohort 2A=89.4% (n=92), Cohort 2B=91.3% (n=138), Cohort 4A 95.2% (n=100), Cohort 4B 96.0% (n=144)). Only two participants in each cohort signalled that they didn't feel they had managed well. At Year Two 8.7% from Cohort 2A (n=9) and 7.4% from Cohort 2B (n=11) indicated that they were unsure, but this had reduced to 2.9% in Cohort 4A (n=3) and 2.7% in Cohort 4B (n=4).

Figure LXIX: How respondents felt they managed during TP



Students were subsequently asked if they felt they had been left to their own devices during TP. Within Strand One, 72.8% from Cohort 2A (n=75) and 77.2% from Cohort 2B (n=115) indicated that they felt left to their own devices. Approximately ten per cent of each cohort classified themselves as unsure (Cohort 2A, 10.7% (n=11), Cohort 2B, 8.7% (n=13)) with 16.5% from Cohort 2A (n=17) and 14.1% from Cohort 2B (n=21) stating that they didn't feel they were left to their own devices during TP.

Figure LXX: Students' perceptions of whether or not they were left to their own devices during TP

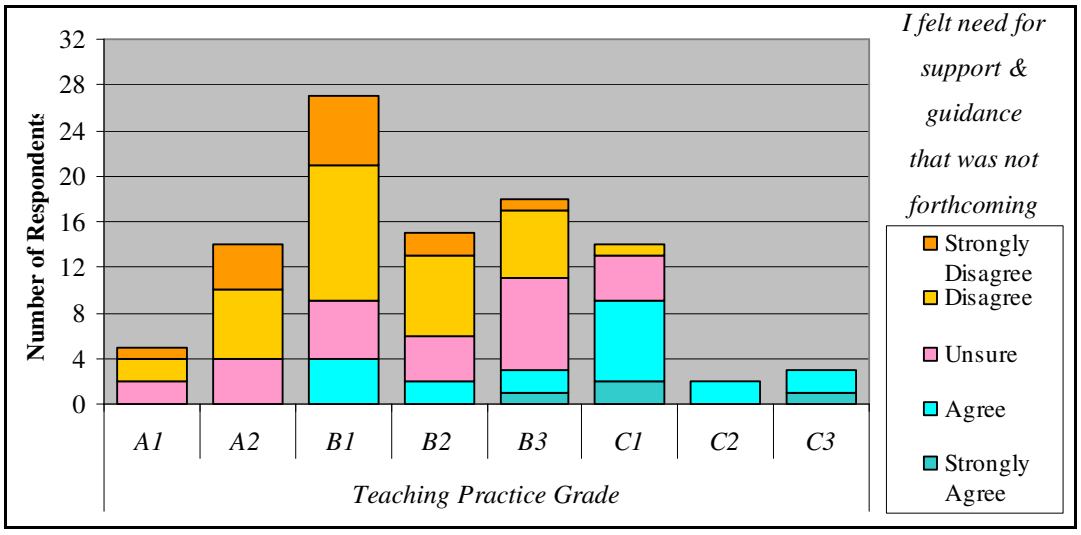


At Year Four decreased percentages from Year Two (Cohort 4A 59.2% (n=63), Cohort 4B 63.8% (n=96)) agreed they had been left to their own devices during TP and classified themselves as unsure (8.4% (n=9) from Cohort 4A and 6.7% from Cohort 4B (n=10)). Increased percentages of 32.4% (n=34) form Cohort 4A and 29.5% (n=44) from Cohort 4B stated that they didn't feel left to their own devices during TP, double the percentage observed at Year Two.

TP Grade and feelings about TP

In both Year Two cohorts a number of relationships emerged between respondents' TP grade and their feelings about TP. For the first of these it was observed that as grade level decreased, the frequency of student teachers that indicated that they needed more support and guidance on TP increased. No student who had received an A grade for TP agreed that they felt a need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming but all students who received a C_1 or C_2 stated that they needed greater support. A similar pattern was observed in Cohort 2B, the graphical representation of which can be found in Appendix V Figure I. This association was low to moderate in both cohorts (Cohort 2A, r_s=-.322, Cohort 2B, r_s=-.166, p<.043).

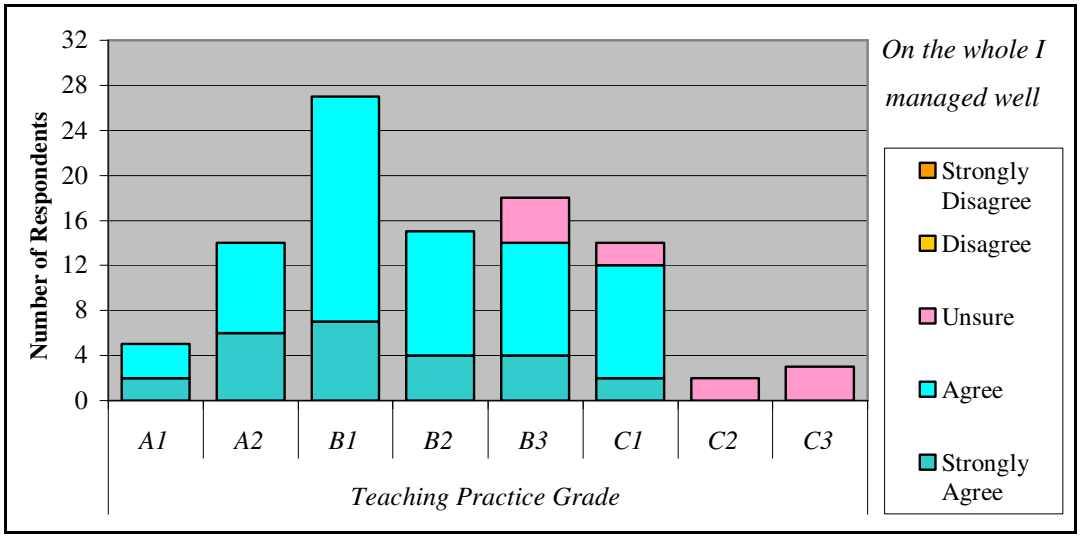
Figure LXXI: TP Grade and students need for support and guidance – Cohort 2A



An identical association also emerged in relation to how Year Two respondents felt they managed on TP, as student teachers with higher TP grades were seen to be more positive overall about this. While all students in the grade range A_1 to B_2 agreed that they had managed well, a number of students with grades lower than a B_3 were unsure about how they had managed. All students that were awarded a grade C_2 or C_3 indicated

they were unsure about how they had managed during their TP. A similar pattern was again observed in Cohort 2B, the graphical representation of which can be found in Appendix V Figure II. This strength of association was low in both cohorts (Cohort 2A, r_s=.251, Cohort 2B, r_s=.203, p<.013).

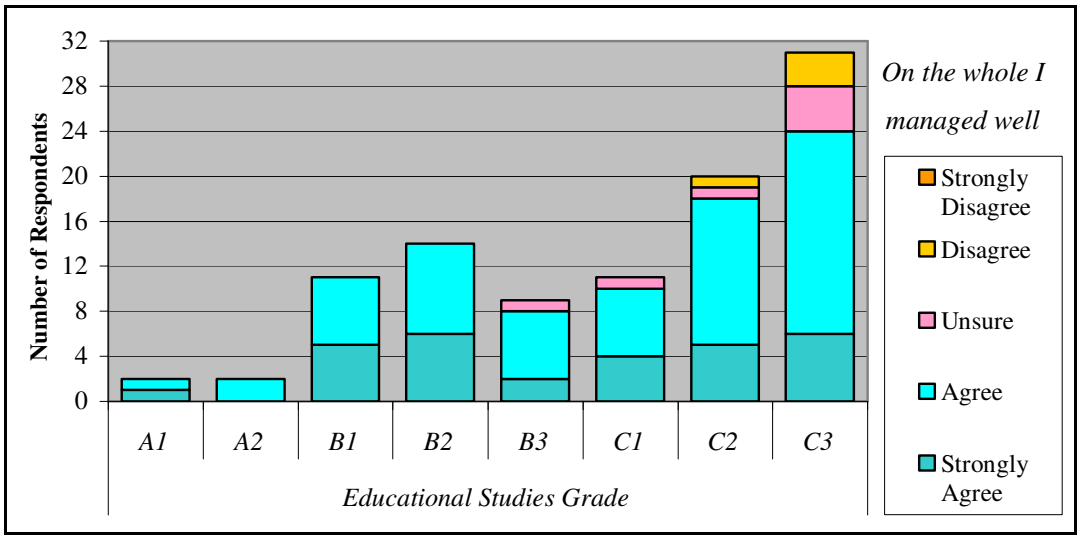
Figure LXXII: TP Grade and how respondents managed during TP – Cohort 2A



Grade in educational studies and feelings about TP

At Year Two, a relationship was observed between the grade respondents received for their educational studies and their perceptions of how they managed on TP.

Figure LXXIII: Educational studies grade and how respondents managed during TP – Cohort 2A



Specifically, it was found that while all students in the A_1 to B_2 grade range agreed that they managed well on TP, as grade level decreased into the C range, the frequency of respondents who indicated that they were uncertain or disagreed that they had managed on TP increased. This association was moderate in strength (Cohort 2A, r_s=.345, p=.028).

QCA and feelings about TP

At Year Two analysis showed a mean difference in the QCA of respondents who agreed that they needed support and guidance and those who didn't. While students who strongly agreed that they felt a need for support and guidance during TP exhibited a mean QCA of 2.90, the mean QCA of those who strongly disagreed was 3.10. The corresponding graph for this minor relationship can be found in Appendix V Figure III (Cohort 2A, r_s=.207, p=.036).

Student teachers' feelings about teaching practice

Comments made by student teachers about their TP experience predominated all of the personal responses received with many respondents in each cohort making several references to their feelings about teaching practice throughout their questionnaire.

> *Teaching practice was like losing your virginity. If it's a bad experience you become scared about your next experience, but if it's a good experience you feel like with improvement you could do it over and over. Now all that I have been doing since first semester of last year makes sense (respondent 2A: 17)*

> *In my opinion all I learned before TP was of no relevance I think someone is made to be a teacher. All this information is irrelevant. Most of the time you teach according to what you feel is right (respondent 2B: 58)*

> *When you speak to qualified teachers as a student teacher the first comment is that TP is nothing actually like full time teaching and if you can survive TP you're flying. If TP is nothing like actual teaching, what is the point? (respondent 4A: 72)*

> *It is a very difficult task to take on board but it is very rewarding. It has made me a lot more mature, before I saw myself as a child and I now believe I am an adult (respondent 4B: 130)*

Although the focus of the dialogue within Phase Two mirrored that of Phase One in many aspects, points of discussion distinctive to this phase were noted and will be represented in this chapter. As the comments received were so varied and covered a broad range of aspects of TP, the comments will be presented under three key headings:

- TP as a learning experience
- the impact of TP on students' confidence
- the management of teaching practice.

TP as a learning experience

The majority of comments submitted by respondents in both Phases of the research illustrated that TP had been a great experience.

> *TP was a great experience and one which I will look forward to doing in 4th year (respondent 2B: 128)*
>
> *It was a great experience. I have made friends for life on the staff and really enjoyed myself. Overall great experience (respondent 4A: 54)*
>
> *4th year teaching practice it was great. It sets you up to kinda [sic] gear you up for yeah I do want to do this yeah. It's great to work with kids and to get something back and enjoy it and to get on with (GDG member: 8)*

Thirty-three individual students from Cohort 2A and nineteen from Cohort 2B, together with twenty-seven Cohort 4A respondents and twenty-eight from Cohort 4B expressed the view that they had thoroughly enjoyed or loved their TP. Within Phase Two, in many instances, students began their conversations about TP by saying how much they had enjoyed their TP experiences.

> *I really enjoyed the experience and I feel it will be motivational for my own studies (respondent 2A: 14)*
>
> *TP has changed me a lot, my attitude to teaching and my ability as a teacher. I really enjoyed the whole experience (respondent 4B: 53)*
>
> *I thought it was fun. Enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would (GDG member: 3)*

A number of respondents in both Strand One and Two articulated that they had found the experience rewarding or that they could see how teaching could be rewarding on a personal level. Although not as prevalent, members in two of the focus groups also spoke generally about how rewarding the experience had been. Some of these students in both phases also expressed awareness that although the job could be rewarding, it was also a lot of hard work and could be tiring and stressful.

I enjoyed the experience and found it more rewarding than I thought possible (respondent 4A: 32)

It can be very rewarding but also stressful, have to deal with different emotions (respondent 2A: 16)

Teaching practice was really enjoyable, but the amount of written work that goes with it just takes from the enjoyment…you were working 9-4 everyday, you get home 5-12 at night doing paperwork and writing up lessons and its just, it takes from the enjoyment. And by the end of it you are so tired and you're not getting paid expenses you're getting nothing for it, it's not fair and it takes from the whole experience (GDG member: 25)

Similarly thirteen respondents from Cohort 2A and nine from Cohort 2B referred to the fact that they had found teaching to be more difficult and arduous than they had anticipated. Some respondents further articulated that there were a lot more demands on the teacher than they had imagined. This was again highlighted at Year Four, with twenty-one respondents from Cohort 4A and eighteen from Cohort 4B together with participants in three of the focus groups commenting that they now realised teaching was a lot more demanding than they had previously envisaged.

I just think we all look back on it with rose tinted glasses but we forget that we had to stay up till whatever time writing lesson plans.... You just remember the good stuff and I think that is why we would say it was the most enjoyable (GDG member: 15)

Teaching is much more difficult and draining than I had anticipated (respondent 2B: 54)

It was much harder than expected and it needs the right kind of person to be a teacher (respondent 4A: 65)

With regard to the demands of teaching, twenty-three respondents at Year Two specifically mentioned the workload involved in TP as an area they had not expected to be as difficult and time consuming. Comments received accentuated that respondents found the written work particularly demanding of their time and energy. Thirty respondents at Year Four also mentioned this. In the discussion groups, the time and effort involved in the upkeep of the TP folder was cited as overly demanding and as restricting students from focusing their energies on other important aspects of TP. Based on this, it was suggested that the level of detail required should be relaxed.

Too much paperwork on TP takes away from the teaching experience and lessens the time to integrate with the school (respondent 4A: 22)

I did feel we had too much written work to do both during and especially after – 3 projects, 2 overlapped with each other and it was the same with our PLAs and lesson plans (respondent 2B: 137)

I think the folder should be there…I think it should be there but not in the same detail because every evening was consumed by having to get these lesson plans done…I would have loved to build up a huge amount of resources for teaching whereas all I could build up was all that I had time for that evening because I was so confined with the up keep of the folder (GDG member: 8)

Although a large proportion of students voluntarily spoke about TP as being a great experience which they found enjoyable and rewarding, less than twenty respondents in each Year Two cohort and ten in each Year Four cohort specified that they had learned a lot on TP or that it was a good learning experience. Similarly Phase Two participants did not afford much time considering TP from this perspective.

I have become more confident in myself and in my feelings. I have learned so much in every aspect of teaching (respondent 2B: 72)

I learnt a lot on my TP. It was of great benefit (respondent 4B: 148)

Of those who did discuss this, the majority articulated that they believed they learned a lot on TP because it was practical in nature and they had the opportunity to experience the reality of teaching rather than just listening to lectures about it. This was the total focus of discussions about why TP had been such a good learning experience. Within this forum, participants spoke of learning from and enjoying TP because of its practical nature, because they were self-reliant and working hands-on with students.

I learned a lot more from the experience of being in front of a class instead of listening in lectures (respondent 2A: 74)

I feel more prepared and professional about teaching. I learned a lot in the course but what I learned on TP could not have been covered. Hands-on experience is so much more valuable (respondent 4B: 79)

It's more involving from a personal perspective…you obviously get more hands on because if you don't do the work in college you will suffer yourself, but if you don't do the work on teaching practice the kids will suffer as well. I didn't enjoy my 2nd year teaching practice at all, I got very stressed about it. But I learned so much at the same time (GDG member: 6)

A common thread evident in many of the comments was that having another student teacher in the same school on TP, whether from the same subject area or a different

subject background, was very helpful and beneficial. A number of respondents spoke of being supported by having another student with them in the school and articulated the belief that it would be a good idea to place pairs of student teachers together in schools, as this would contribute to peer support and assistance. As this was such a frequent point of address in Phase One, Phase Two participants were specifically asked what they felt about the idea of students being placed in pairs in TP schools. Participants in each of the discussion groups wholly supported this idea.

> *There were 8 student teachers in the school, which was great as we all supported each other. Think all students should have a partner so they have this support (respondent 4A: 68)*

> *It's a good idea being in pairs on TP as you have someone to talk to (respondent 2B: 125)*

> *I was in a school with a girl from (names subject) and like both of us said it, it was such a good support from the point of view of… if you had a bad class and you're like oh god they really annoyed me and other teachers wouldn't really understand that. But because there was two of us there was such a support. You know the way if you get a bad class it will be in your head and you want to give out to somebody and you would leave the school and it's grand now cos [sic] we had a big chat about it, it's grand. Both of us said that it was such a huge support that we couldn't imagine having done it without someone else being there (GDG member: 21)*

The impact of TP on students' confidence

In Phase One, a prominent theme referred to by forty-two respondents in Cohort 2A and thirty-seven in Cohort 2B, was that TP had made them feel more confident in their own abilities and capabilities as teachers. Similarly at Year Four, thirty-five respondents within Cohort 4A and twenty-three within Cohort 4B also commented that after their TP they felt much more confident and self-assured.

> *I feel a lot more confident now with experience under me (respondent 2A: 36)*

> *Now I'm a lot more confident about my teaching and am looking forward to going teaching (respondent 4A: 89)*

A number of respondents at Year Two wrote that following TP they were more confident because they could now see that they could cope in a classroom environment. Interestingly over twenty respondents from each cohort at Year Four wrote of how they felt much more confident, or were better able to cope on TP than they had in Year Two,

which they ascribed to their previous experience of TP. Similarly, some focus group participants attributed their growth in confidence to their Year Two TP experience.

> *I feel much more confident now that I want to become a teacher. After 2nd year I was unsure, but I think this time I was much more prepared & overall I really enjoyed my experience (respondent 4B: 45)*
>
> *I felt TP was a daunting task before going out, but I loved the experience and have grown in confidence (respondent 2A: 10)*
>
> *Because in 2nd year you are just thrown in, you didn't know what you were doing. Whereas this time you were out you knew what you were doing and you could let things flow. You are able to handle yourself better (GDG member: 13)*
>
> *I wonder is a lot of the confidence that people feel at 4th year because they have had that experience in 2nd year (GDG member: 9)*

In discussions it was possible for students to be more detailed in their responses and they further ascribed this increase in confident to the fact that they were older, more mature and better able to handle the TP situation and for some, this growth in confidence emanated from having a greater knowledge of their subject areas.

> *Bit of maturity, you learn from your mistakes as well. If something is going to go wrong you have learned it from the last time on teaching practice and you know when you can rectify it sooner before things go wrong (GDG member: 5)*
>
> *Lot more confident, you knew a lot more about your subject areas, the fact that you are a bit older as well. When you do 2nd year TP you were 19, you're not much older than the oldest group (GDG member: 3)*

A quarter of students at both Year Two and Four, also made the point that their TP experience had confirmed that teaching was the job for them and that they now felt more confident in their choice of university programme and in their choice of future career. This was further reiterated in the focus groups.

> *I now feel that I made the right choice in my choice in my college course (respondent 2B: 79)*
>
> *TP compounded my beliefs and wishes to become a teacher (respondent 4A: 91)*
>
> *I think it is like the proof is in the pudding. You have spent particularly in 4th year, you have spent 4 years then you're saying this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. So you would hope that 4th years going out are really enjoying it and I,*

certainly from my own experience I had an absolute ball…I would be quite happy to be out there teaching at the moment (GDG member: 9)

Within Phase One, a very small number of students[31] expressed the view however, that having completed their TP they were still unsure if teaching was the job for them, or as a result of the experience were no longer confident in their choice of future career.

I think TP shattered all my thoughts of being a teacher and why I wanted to do it. The sad thing was that I found this very common in the staff room, which was shocking. There were some great experiences during TP and it certainly dropped me into another sense of reality, however it seemed that the bad lessons outweighed the good ones. Some days I felt like I wasn't being given any chance and felt like I had to force everything on the pupils, which I strongly do not believe in. Certainly it has prepared me for fourth year but has also put a doubt in my mind as teaching being a profession for me (respondent 2A: 12)

The management of teaching practice

Mentoring

A total of twenty-four student teachers from Cohorts 2A, 2B and 4A were placed in schools that had specifically prepared mentor teachers working with and supporting the student during their TP[32]. All participants involved with a mentor teacher agreed that having a mentor was a great help to them during their teaching practice.

The Lucent mentoring programme is excellent in my school and helped me immensely (respondent 4A: 57)

I was in a Lucent school and I found (teacher) very helpful when it came to observing classes and helping me set up experiments and giving me other ideas (respondent 2A: 32)

Respondents who had experience of the Lucent Mentoring Programme together with five Year Two participants and six Year Four participants who had no experience of mentoring, highlighted their belief that mentoring should be part of the TP experience and suggested that the programme should be re-structured to enable every student be involved with a personal mentor. Within Phase Two also participants were extremely positive about the impact that working with a specifically trained mentor teacher had on their teaching. The discourse in the groups also highlighted that students were cognisant

[31] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = eight, Cohort 2B =three, Cohort 4A = four, Cohort 4B = nine.
[32] No member of Cohort 4B had mentor support as the Lucent Mentoring Programme had ceased at the end of the previous academic year.

of the effect that a lack of formal preparation and guidance for co-operating teachers was having on teachers' ability to adequately support student teachers in their schools.

> *No student teacher should feel isolated on TP, we have enough to contend with and we should have a support structure or at least a supporting person. Mentoring is necessary! (respondent 2A: 103)*

> *I went to a Lucent school which meant that my cooperating teacher would come into UL and he knew what was going on…he was just fantastic, absolutely fantastic. I couldn't, I can't praise him enough. He was amazing and he influenced my teaching so much (GDG member: 23)*

> *I think there should be an in-service or some course for co-operating teachers so they are aware of their responsibilities, because all students need mentors (respondent 4B: 91)*

The TP tutor

Students' perception of their TP tutors in relation to planning for teaching has been teased out earlier in this chapter. Student's experiences of their TP tutors and the wider role of the TP tutor within the management of TP are addressed here.

A total of eleven respondents in Strand One and eight in Strand Two specifically referred to the fact that they found their tutor helpful, encouraging or supportive or that they had a positive relationship with their tutors. A number of these students wrote that they considered their tutors helpful because they gave advice which students found worthwhile during TP. Within the discussion groups also, a number of students spoke with genuine affection and admiration for their tutors, whom they saw as helpful, supportive and encouraging.

> *Teaching practice was a very positive experience for me thanks to the excellent support I got in the school and the help and encouragement of my TP tutor (respondent 2B: 128)*

> *They (tutors) were both sound [sic] supported my teaching views but offered help, advice and support whenever needed (respondent 4B: 138)*

> *One of my tutors…he was an ex teacher and my god the ideas he came up with…he would just come out with these things and you would be like where the hell did you get that from…He knew the drill and he knew the way it was and the things you could use and he even said it to me that he took that time as a chance to tell me all his ideas because he has built up 40 years of experience and ideas and going out at the start you just don't have that, that knowledge base (GDG member: 21)*

In Phase Two students were specifically asked why they had more positive relationships with some tutors and in general what they considered made a "good" tutor. Specific characteristics attributed to good tutors were voiced within this forum and students highlighted that they valued tutors who gave them good advice and ideas that could be applied to teaching. They also valued the approach taken by tutors in their role and communications with students. Finally they valued tutors who were open to student experimentation with different strategies and who supported students teaching in a way that suited their personal style.

> *I got on great with my tutors and they were very good for advice and stuff and they gave me a few ideas here and that and I took their ideas (GDG member: 8)*

> *What both my tutors did was after each visit they sat me down, they asked me what I thought went good and what I thought went bad and they would either agreed or disagreed and then they would add what else they thought, whether it was good or bad and what I should improve/shouldn't. So it's way better than sitting someone down and saying that's wrong, that's wrong, that's wrong (GDG member: 1)*

> *This year I had an external (who) was way more laid back and kinda [sic] left me to it and it helped me a lot, because I got on well in the school…I was kinda [sic] allowed to teach the way I wanted, grow from there, it really helped. So a lot of it is down to the tutors (GDG member: 23)*

Within Phase One, students more often referred to their tutors as being unhelpful, of having a bad experience with their tutor or of seeing their tutor in a negative light. This was mirrored in Phase Two where students also talked about having tutors they perceived were unhelpful, overly negative and critical.

> *No, I liked teaching before TP unsure about it now though. (Subject) tutor [was] very unhelpful – had to turn to others in [the] department (respondent2B: 29)*

> *It was the same in 2nd year…I had someone who would be regarded as a hard tutor and for my first visit apparently I did not do one thing right out of [sic] the whole class, I was just completely thrown then (GDG member: 2)*

At Year Two, three specific reasons were mentioned regarding why certain tutors were seen as unhelpful, these being; that they put too much pressure on the student teachers, that they only gave negative feedback and that they didn't encouraged or praised the student teachers. At Year Four, three reasons were also cited, these being; that tutors didn't help or support the student teachers, that they were overly critical and that they put too much pressure on the student teachers.

Always negative feedback from my university tutors as they focused on negative / bad methods etc. Little praise was given which may have helped boost my confidence and in turn help me become a better teacher (respondent 2B: 69)

I know I want to teach but I feel the tutors I had put pressure on me that [sic] knocked my confidence a little (respondent 2A: 11)

Only had 3 visits of which 2 of them were in the last few days. I was abandoned and was made a laugh of as I had no inspection, help, support or guidance and after 4 years of hard work I felt very let down (respondent 4B: 105)

In Phase Two participants were critical of four specific tutor behaviours. Mentioned most frequently was that tutors were too focused on the minute detail of the TP folder and were too fixed on wording in lesson plans etc., something students considered trivial in the overall context of learning to be a teacher. Tutors were also criticised for not supporting or encouraging student teachers to experiment with lesson format and teaching styles. Tutors were seen as overly critical and quick to find fault but slow to praise students and provide positive feedback.

Well one of my tutors, he would sit you down and say this, this, this, this is wrong. No praise at all. Like if you did something right in the class he wouldn't tell you. I wasn't allowed put across my opinion at all (GDG member: 1)

They would only pick me up on one or two little things like pronunciation here, pronunciation there…All they focus on is the folder at the end you would be talking to them, the class was grand but the folder blah, blah, blah (GDG member: 12)

Based on their experiences of TP tutors, participants in three of the focus groups also commented that they found some tutors were unconnected with the reality of the classroom. They attributed this primarily to the fact that these tutors did not have recent classroom experience and that their expectations and perceptions were not in tune with the student teachers' actual experiences in their classrooms.

One of my tutors on teaching practice hadn't being in a classroom in well over 30 years. There was misbehaviour in the classroom and after the lesson we were having our meeting, (tutor) was saying to me…if it was him in the classroom he would have given them a clip around the ear. And I was sitting there going you can't really be telling me I should have clobbered them…and even explaining to him that things were so different…He wasn't getting the picture at all because he just couldn't relate at all to the reality of the classroom (GDG member: 5)

I wasn't stuck in the mud. I did take their criticism and use their advice, but some of the stuff I was doing I thought it was the biggest waste of time ever. I know they weren't in touch with me at all (GDG member: 7)

They are out of school, they have been out of a teaching situation, for about ten or twenty years. And then you get them as your tutor and ok they have being doing it for years like, but it's just like they need to change with it (GDG member: 1)

The main theme that emerged from the personal responses in Phase One, although alluded to earlier in this chapter, was that student teachers saw individual tutors as having differing standards and expectations. A number of students in each cohort[33] expressed that they had difficulty satisfying the varying demands of their tutors or they felt it was unfair to have to adapt to suit different tutors. Similarly in all of the discussion groups students bemoaned what they saw as the lack of consistency between individual tutors and spoke at length about the wide variance in tutor expectations, both in terms of classroom practices and written work.

I feel it is very inconsistent – all tutors seem to want different things, with regard to workload and the actual teaching. It would be preferably to have consistency (respondent 4B: 58)

There is no common ground. Different tutors are looking for different things. What keeps some happy will not do for others (respondent 2A: 22)

It's the individual difference between tutors. I think everyone would say even if they got on well or badly that that's the main problem with teaching practice, because it is such an enjoyable experience but then when it comes down to it it's the tutors they have to be told what they should be looking at and they shouldn't be allowed deviate from that because they do (GDG member: 10)

Because of this perception, within Phase One and Phase Two, a number of students called for the assessment of TP to be examined and revised.

The assessment of our teaching is too based on individual tutors and this must change (respondent 2A: 30)

Apparently 300 words is asked but some tutors require more. E.g. mine was 1000 words for weekly appraisals. I did what was expected not what was asked. Please address this. Different tutors expect more (respondent 4B: 61)

As part of this a small proportion of Year Two student teachers signalled that they felt it was unfair for tutors to turn up unannounced, without giving prior notice as this made them anxious and affected their work. This was a prominent discussion point in Phase Two, where students were of the opinion that clear protocol for TP visits should be

[33] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = nineteen, Cohort 2B =twenty-five, Cohort 4A = eighteen, Cohort 4B = twenty-three.

established. The main issue cited was the lack of prior notice given by some tutors, whereas others informed their students exactly when they would be coming. It was also highlighted in this forum that there should be clear guidelines on the number of required visits, which all tutors should adhered to.

> *When tutors "just turn up" this destroys ones mind and concentration (respondent 2A: 67)*
>
> *Some tutors ring up a week in advance and say I'm going to be there Monday morning at 9 o' clock. I just don't think its fair because I know people who literally, the week before did their (subject) class…so the kids are primed and they stand there and they are as good as gold of course (GDG member: 10)*
>
> *I got 2 visits from my main tutor and I was supposed to get 3. I asked her was she coming again and she said she couldn't come she was too busy. I don't see how that is fair for her to judge me on 2 visits whereas some people get 3 (GDG member: 3)*
>
> *The tutor comes and you're like "oh my God" because I never found out exactly when my tutors were coming so I was up in a heap all the time (GDG member: 22)*

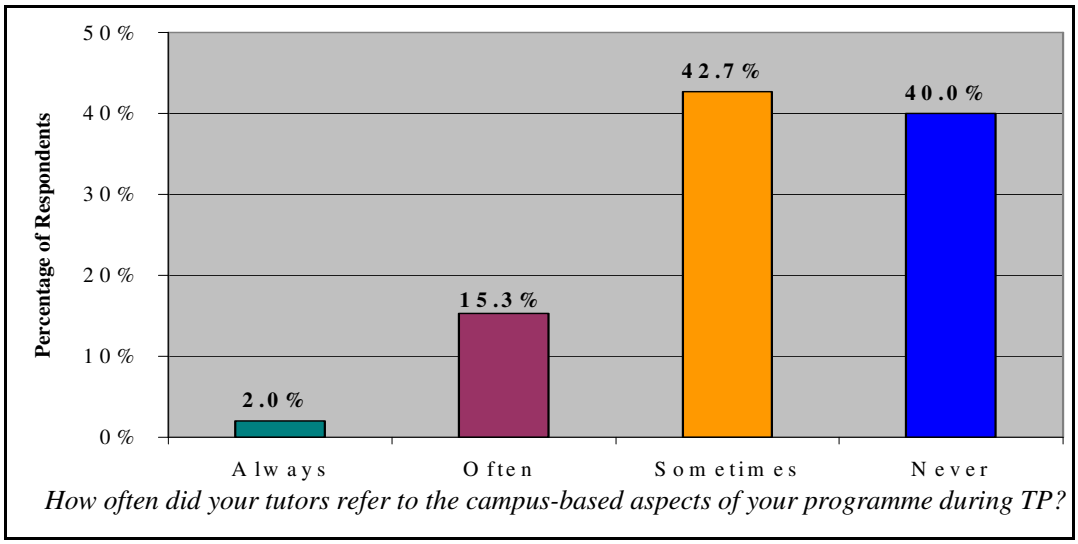
In both phase of the research a small number of final year student teachers also indicated that they felt more tutor visits were required as they believed an increase in the number of visits would be beneficial for their development during TP. Contributors also made reference to the fact that they believed the co-operating teacher should have a more prominent role in the assessment aspect of TP.

> *I felt it was adequate time [sic] but would like more visits. Maybe one a week to get a better look at the students (respondent 4A: 39)*
>
> *They should come out to you more, because even if you are the best teacher in the world like [sic] everyone in school had brilliant teachers, but every so often they mess up like and that mightn't reflect you at all (GDG member: 12)*
>
> *Co-operating teacher should give report on student teacher's performance (respondent 2A: 62)*
>
> *I wouldn't give a s**t if my tutor failed me, he is no better a teacher than me he's never had a class, think that's a farce. The real teachers should be the ones assessing us! (respondent 2B: 14)*

After consideration of the emerging issues, it became clear that student teachers' experiences of their TP tutors would form a sizable portion of the research findings. On reflection it was decided that certain aspects of the student teacher-tutor relationship merited further exploration. The students in Cohort 4B were subsequently asked to

consider how often their tutors referred to campus-based aspects of their programme during TP visits. 40.0% felt their tutors never alluded to their university studies (n=60), while 2.0% (n=3) stated that their tutors always referred to this during their visits. 15.3% believed this was a regular occurrence (n=23), with the remaining 42.7% (n=64) indicating that their tutor's only mentioned the campus-based studies sometimes.

Figure LXXIV: Tutors linkage with campus studies during TP – Cohort 4B



This aspect of the student tutor relationship was subsequently revisited in the discussion groups and only a small number signalled that they felt their tutors referred to their campus-based studies during their time with the students on TP.

> *I think the reason we put so much value on reflections and all that was that the tutors did as well. I think that is why I didn't mind my one as much because there was huge emphasis put on it (GDG member: 4)*

> *I think that reflecting was the number one priority for both my tutors. Like the first thing they would ask me would be what did you think? How did you reflect on that lesson? Which I thought was a really good way to approach it (GDG member: 2)*

What emerged most strongly from discussions however was that while some education personnel clearly focused on aspects of the students' learning in the college particularly reflective practice, during their post-visit discussions, subject tutors in the main did not place the same importance or emphasis on this. A number of students spoke of how subject tutors only mentioned this in relation to making sure that the student had considered this for their education tutor.

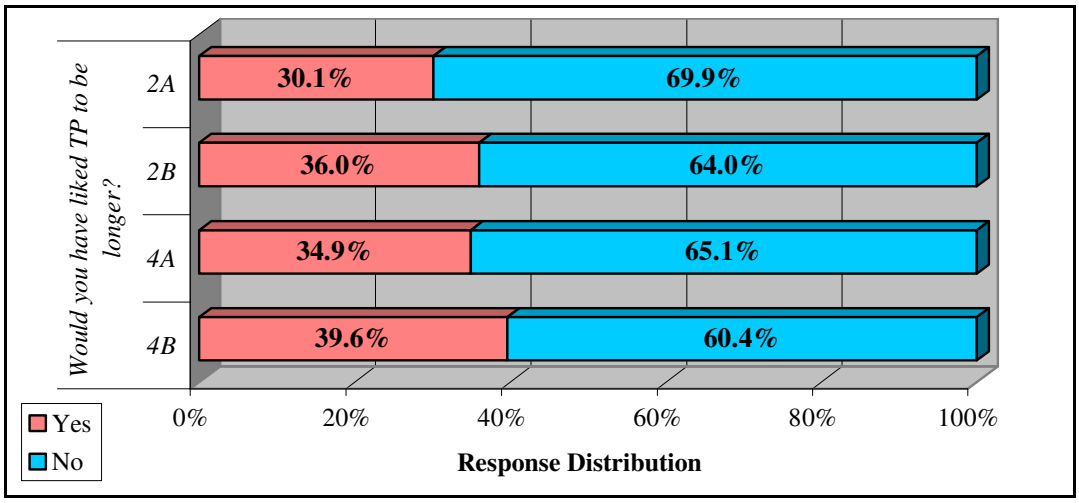
My (subject) fella was like well as long as the education fella is happy I don't care. But even with the lesson plans, he was like make sure you have that done for your tutor when he comes out to see you (GDG member: 1)

Well what I'm saying about the (subject tutor) he didn't care about the PLAs whether they were written down. But after the class he would sit me down and say what do you think? But he wouldn't have any emphasis on the written work (GDG member: 24)

The length of TP

When the students were questioned about their feelings on the length of their TP placement, 69.9% (n=72) of Cohort 2A and 64.0% (n=97) of Cohort 2B signalled that given the choice, they would not have liked their TP to have been longer. One third of both cohorts indicated that they would have been agreeable to a longer TP placement. Within Strand Two again approximately one third of the cohorts specified that they would have liked a longer period of TP. 65.1% (n=69) in Cohort 4A and 60.4% (n=90) in Cohort 4B indicated that they wouldn't have been agreeable to a longer TP.

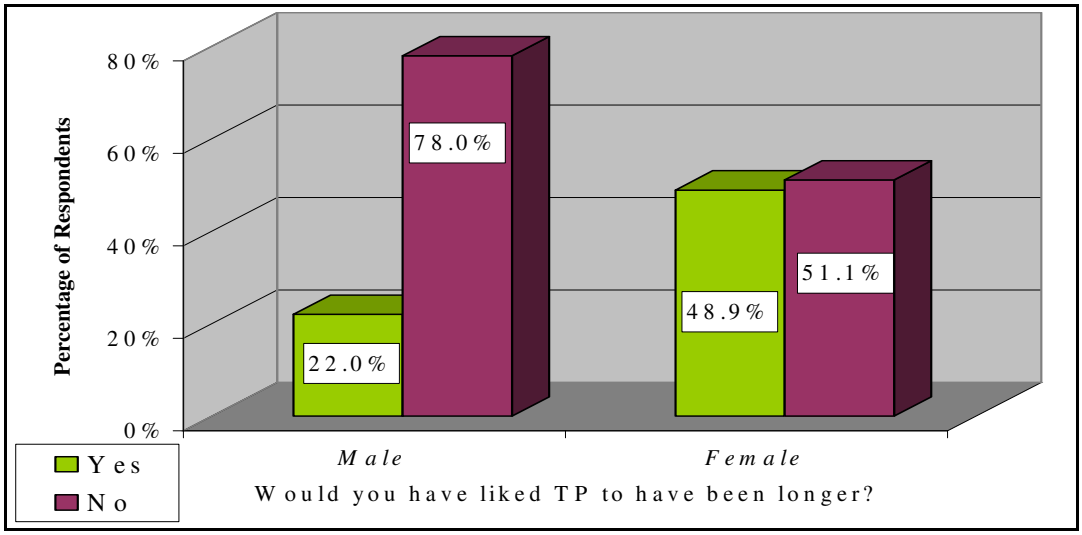
<u>Figure LXXV:</u> Respondents' perceptions of the length of their TP



Gender and respondents' perceptions of the length of TP

A relationship was noted at Year Four between respondent gender and student teachers' perceptions of the length of TP. When asked if they would have advocated a longer period of teaching, almost half of the females in the cohort (48.9%, n=23) indicated that they would have been agreeable with this, compared with less than a quarter of males (22.0%, n=13). This association was moderate in strength (Cohort 4A, *V*=.282, p=.004). See Figure LXXVI overleaf.

Figure LXXVI: Gender and opinion of the length of TP – Cohort 4A



Respondents' views on the length of teaching practice

Within both strands of Phase One the majority of respondents added personal comments, which addressed issues relating to the length of TP[34]. In Phase Two also this was a clear focus of discussion within the groups. The student responses divided directly into those which supported a longer period of TP, and those which did not advocated any increase in length and as such are presented under the following heading:

- reasons offered for not advocating the lengthening of TP
- reasons presented for the lengthening of TP.

Reasons offered for not advocating the lengthening of TP

Approximately two thirds of each cohort[35] made further comments regarding why they would not have liked their Year Two TP to have been longer. In total three main reasons for not advocating a longer TP emerged from the student responses; the workload involved in TP, the length of TP as reflective of student's level of development and the physical and emotional impact of TP. In Phase Two, none of the aforementioned reasons were discussed in any great detail, rather the conversations were focused more around suggesting how the structure, length and placement of TP should be revised which will be discussed later in this chapter.

[34] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = one-hundred and twelve, Cohort 2B = one-hundred and fifteen, Cohort 4A = one-hundred and seventeen, Cohort 4B = one-hundred and nine.
[35] Frequency of comment: Cohort 2A = sixty-six, Cohort 2B =fifty-five, Cohort 4A = sixty-nine, Cohort 4B = sixty-two.

Twenty-five students from Cohort 2A and twenty-one from Cohort 2B stated that they wouldn't have liked TP to have been any longer because of the workload they experienced, which they considered to be excessive. This was also the main reason cited at Year Four by twenty respondents from each cohort, with the level of written work that had to be completed on a daily basis referred to most often. Comments received highlighted students' enjoyment of the teaching period but concomitantly the difficulty experienced keeping on top of written work.

> *Ten weeks 16 lessons per week = 160 lesson plans, PLAs at approx. 1 hour and 15 minutes each, writing alone not to mention prep [sic] and actually teaching it and resources. One person's system cannot take this (respondent 4A: 72)*
>
> *I felt that there was always a lot of paperwork to get through and this took away from my enjoyment of the experience (respondent 2A: 98)*
>
> *Too much paper work involved. I feel if TP was longer this would have bogged me down (respondent 2B: 49)*

The second line of argument cited by twenty-two student teachers from Cohort 2A and fifteen from Cohort 2B was that for their first TP, six weeks was a satisfactory length. Fourteen respondents from Cohort 4A and twenty-two from Cohort 4B also specified that ten weeks was an adequate duration. Reasons given for their contentment with the current length were that it was enough time to; introduce them to the teaching profession; integrate into the school community; develop their teaching skills to a level which they deemed adequate in relation to their stage of development and enabled them to practice what they had already learned during their pre-service programme.

> *As a starting teacher, the six-week period was enough experience to an adequate level [sic] in terms of developing my teacher skills (respondent 2A: 87)*
>
> *10 weeks was enough time to change, adjust & improve my methods (respondent 4B: 83)*

Twenty respondents at Year Two and eleven at Year Four specified that they found the whole experience very tiring and both physically and mentally draining and because of this, they would not have liked a longer TP. Concomitantly a total of thirteen participants at Year Two and twenty-two at Year Four commented that they found the experience quite stressful and again cited this as a reason why they wouldn't advocate any increase in the length of TP.

I was completely exhausted and drained and sick constantly from strain of TP (respondent 2B: 103)

I felt that it was quite draining so ten weeks was long enough (respondent 4A: 75)

Very stressful as it was and there was always a lot of pressure to be up to date (respondent 4A: 63)

Although over sixty per cent of all respondents specified that they would not have liked TP to have been longer, a quarter of students stated that if the TP workload was lessened, particularly the written work they would have favoured staying in the school teaching for an extended period. This was further reiterated within the focus groups.

If you are doing 10 page lesson plans everyday then it is to long, that's what I'm saying that over the period of time we should be cutting the length of lesson plans all the time. So you might start off with a 10 page lesson plan but seriously that should be down to half a page by the end of it. It should be getting less and less and less (GDG member: 10)

I wouldn't have minded teaching for longer if we didn't have to do so many appraisals and plans (respondent 4B: 128)

I would have liked to teach more but not with the burden of university requirements and to use my own idea of planning (respondent 2B: 101)

Reasons presented for the lengthening of TP

In total, thirty-eight respondents from Cohort 2A and fifty-three from Cohort 2B signalled in their personal comments that they would have welcomed a longer period of teaching practice. On further analysis three reasons emerged; TP was not considered to be long enough, Easter break interrupted and shortened the teaching experience and students felt that they were just settled and had to leave.

Thirteen student teachers from Cohort 2A and twenty-eight from Cohort 2B specified that they felt the six week block was not long enough even for their first TP. A longer period was advocated to allow for more time to improve, to try out new teaching strategies etc. and to get topics/projects completed. The two-week Easter break, which fell during the Year Two TP, was specifically highlighted as a motivation for advocating a longer TP. This break students felt interrupted the flow of their experience and students expressed that they found it difficult to settle back properly into the school for just one week after the Easter holidays. Twelve respondents in each cohort explained that they would have liked a longer stint of TP because just when they felt they had

settled into the school, were finding their feet and getting comfortable in their role as a teacher, TP was over.

> *The planning of TP where it had a break during the Easter [sic] plays a disastrous role in the six week programme: One week after Easter is difficult to get the students back interested in the topics – They want new stuff! (respondent 2A: 102)*

> *Over 6 weeks only getting to know individuals and classes, strengths and weaknesses with teaching needed time to improve (respondent 2B: 25)*

> *I would like it to be longer, because I only just got into it and we were finished (respondent 2A: 8)*

At Year Four thirty-nine participants from Cohort 4A and thirty-five from Cohort 4B commented that they would have been agreeable to a longer TP. The reasons cited were closely aligned to those mentioned at Year Two as students felt; they needed more time to develop their teaching skills, they were just getting settled and had to leave and they would have liked additional time at the end of TP without tutor visits.

Twenty respondents in Cohort 4A and twenty-one in Cohort 4B signalled their final TP period was too short because they felt they needed more time to improve and develop as a teacher and to work on their classroom routines before entering full time teaching. In the discussion groups, the key rational put forth, was that student teachers' felt they were just making progress with their pupils and then they had to leave. The disruptive affect that this had on their students was also highlighted.

> *I felt I was improving every week in the school and would like a chance to improve more before next year (full time job) (respondent 4A: 28)*

> *I was just getting somewhere with the difficult kids, gaining their respect you really have to earn your respect in this school and then to be pulled out of it all of a sudden when there is only a week left. The cooperating teacher can't do much with them before exams, it leaves them very much up in the air (GDG member: 5)*

Although not as frequent as at Year Two, seventeen participants at Year Four clarified that they would have appreciated a longer stint of TP, as their TP seemed to end just when they were settling into their role. This sense of just feeling established and then having to leave was discussed also during the focus group sessions.

> *You just get settled and accepted and then you have to leave (respondent 4B: 52)*

Towards the end you were really getting to know your class and you were really feeling like you were their teacher. Any shorter and I think you would lose that. But I know in 2nd year when I was out there, you just felt like you're there and gone again and you didn't even get time to get used to the school (GDG member: 21)

It is noteworthy that many of the comments received at Year Four highlighted that student teachers had a preference for a longer teaching period so they would have additional time at the end without tutor visits, to enable them to experience teaching as any other teacher would and not as an accredited aspect of ITE.

The tutors shouldn't be allowed or you should have your visits done before the end. My 2 tutors came on 2nd last and last day, but I know there was people who had a week or maybe a week and a half at the end where a tutor hadn't come and they were able to like we were saying earlier practice their own theories…they were able to or had the ability to experiment with all these group work and stuff and it took the pressure off (GDG member: 11)

It is nice to get back to college but I enjoyed TP and it would have been nice to keep going, maybe without the pressure of TP visits (respondent 4A: 58)

Student teachers' suggestions on how teaching practice could be revised

As part of the individual comments in Phase One and the discussions in Phase Two, a number of students suggested how they believed the length, frequency and placement of TP during their programme could be revised to better suit their needs at the various stages of their development. It is noteworthy that although the suggestions vary regarding preferred length, many of the comments received focus specifically on the fact that TP experiences should be more frequent throughout the four years of ITE. Student's comments are broken down into two distinct sections;

- the need for continuity of experience
- the timing of TP.

The need for continuity of experience

Within both phases of the research the suggestion most often made was that each individual teaching practice should have been shorter. Students however quantified this by asking for additional blocks of TP in years one, two and three of their programme so they would experience teaching in schools on a more regular basis throughout their ITE.

Six weeks was a little bit long I felt. Better to have 3 weeks in first year and 3 weeks in second year (respondent 2A: 25)

10 weeks is far too long for 4th year students. It should be reduced and we should also have a TP in 3rd year (respondent 4B: 130)

I think there should really be a teaching practice in 3rd year for a few weeks as well (GDG member: 22)

Year Four students reason for suggesting that their final year TP should have been shorter and supplemented with a period of TP in Year Three was not established in Phase One, but this was addressed in Phase Two. The only reason cited was the dual workload students experienced as a result of having to complete their Final Year Project (FYP) in parallel with their TP. Many students spoke of how difficult they found this double burden and of the affect it had on their TP experience.

I think it is way to hard expecting people to be doing an FYP and TP at the same time. To do them well you have your FYP in 3rd year or you have it in 4th year and the TP is somewhere else. It is way too much to try and do both (GDG member: 3)

If you want to have as good an experience as possible on teaching practice I think it should be completely separate, be on its own so that you're not wrecked, so it's just all you're doing is thinking about teaching, thinking about teaching practice. Like when I was doing my FYP it was awful, whereas if you have nothing to worry about except teaching practice I think it's much better (GDG member: 12)

Irrespective of the length suggested, all students expressed the need for greater frequency of exposure to the classroom and for continuity of teaching experience throughout the four years of their pre-service programme. At Year Two particularly, a number of participants also emphasised their belief that student teachers should have less actual contact time to begin with, as they felt it would be more appropriate to increase the length of each subsequent TP as students became more experienced.

We do not have enough experience of teaching. It is quite possible after four years in college I will realise when I begin teaching that I cannot be the kind of teacher I'd like to be. Teaching practice should constitute more of the four years (respondent 2A: 103)

I think teaching practice should be carried out every year for shorter [sic] length of time, rather than so concentrated in 2 years (respondent 4B: 45)

I think students are thrown in at the deep-end to a certain extent. 6 weeks of practice in a school is a daunting prospect for any 20 year old. I think we need more hands-on experience without so much responsibility early on. Simply observing experienced teachers in the classroom or helping them in the running of practicals is I think, a policy that should be adopted to the degree programme. A regular visit

to the classroom right through the four years, would give students more experience to draw from and ease the transition from student to qualified teacher. In addition to the theory side of teaching, this approach would give students a more accurate picture on which to decide if teaching was the career for them (respondent 2A: 94)

The timing of TP

Respondents also agreed that the teaching practice period in Year Two and Four should run until the end of the second-level school term. Students at Year Two felt this was desirable to avoid the confusion and disruption caused to pupils by changing teachers before the end of term, to make up for the interruption cause by the Easter break and to get the experience of setting and correcting in-house exams. At Year Four, the rationale put forth for this was that students would be able to finish work they were doing.

Maybe we should have finished the school year so that we could assess what we taught during the exams (respondent 2B: 108)

We should start 1st September, if pupils feel we are their teacher discipline issues are reduced considerably (respondent 4A: .78)

Year Four students in both phases also made the point that they saw it as futile returning to college for two weeks, which caused issues for them from an accommodation perspective. It was suggest rather, that student teachers should return to college during the mid-term break for tutorials and lectures to focus them on their TP assignment, as this content would have served them better if received earlier in the TP experience.

Don't see the point of being back in college for two weeks. Give these lectures at the start and during mid-term break to allow us more time to prepare for TP, more knowledge for the (subject) assignment (respondent 4B: 57)

You are sleeping on a floor in a friend's house. Coming back after that nearly killed me. I couldn't understand the need for it and to be fair of the 4 education lectures we had, 3 of them were cancelled so that made it even worse. Yes and the information we were given in those lectures actually would have been - because a lot of that was to do with the assignment we had to do and would have being far more beneficial before we went out (GDG member: 9)

At Year Four not only did students want their TP to continue to the end of the school term, but they also felt it should start parallel with the school term. Phase One respondents felt this would allow them to get a clear picture of what a full teaching term would be like and would give them experience of setting and marking Christmas tests. It was also perceived that this would help to alleviate discipline issues caused by student

teachers not being seen as permanent staff members and would lessen the disruption caused to pupils and co-operating teachers. In line with their Year Four counterparts in Phase One, the focus group members also signalled that they would not have objected to starting in line with the school term in September. The primary basis for this suggestion was so they would be starting afresh, like any other teacher at the beginning of the school year and this would thus alleviate any issues about their status as a teacher and would cause less disruption to the pupils.

> *To run up to Christmas would be better. You have being teaching them all along and to be there for the exams and to correct the exams. Not that that's something I want to do but to be apart of it, to do that for the Christmas exams and have to input the grades and everything, to be fully part of the school (GDG member: 8)*

> *I think the best thing to do would be to start at the very beginning of the year first of all, when the school starts so that they don't automatically know that you're a student teacher, I thought that was huge. Like going in in 2nd year when was it March? Sure you might as well have walked in with a big sign (GDG member: 2)*

Participants in the main were agreeable with this type of arrangement and felt that student teachers across the board would be happy to come back to college earlier, as this would also facilitate them receiving the lectures on their TP assignment sooner and would allow time for them to exclusively focus on their FYP.

> *I think if it becomes part of the timetable, that people see that well I'm starting here but look I'm finishing in November and I got 2 months off where I can do an FYP, travel the world whatever (GDG member: 11)*

> *I think if they pushed it and gave us week 1 in college maybe week 0 as well, gave us those few lectures they gave us after teaching practice before we go out then you're teaching practice all of the way to the end. So the kids are definitely - as far as they are concerned you're their teacher. So even if you happen to return to that school to teach it doesn't take from your credibility, that side of things as well just to be there right to the end (GDG member: 24)*

Summary of findings

Students in general felt more prepared and less in need of support and guidance at Year Four than at Year Two, where four out of five students indicated that they felt prepared for the reality of the classroom teaching. In the main student teachers also found teaching personally rewarding, an opinion held by Year Two and Year Four students alike.

Student teachers were confident and felt they had managed well however, two out of three final year students reported that they had been left to their own devices during their time in the school. Relationships emerged between respondents' TP and educational studies grades and their feelings about TP and how well they had managed on TP. It was observed that as grade level decreased, there was a corresponding decrease in student confidence in their ability to manage and an increase in their demands / need for support and guidance on TP. Equally student teachers with lower QCAs felt they needed support and could not manage.

Students on the whole enjoyed TP, found it an enriching experience but they also showed awareness of the emotional and physical demands of the job. Teaching in and of itself was seen as complex and students found that the workload of TP accentuated the demands upon them. Students' TP experience was seen to be enriched where there was peer support and they also recognised the value of having a specific mentoring programme. Although they were cognisant that co-operating are working within a vacuum and without sufficient support from the college to act as mentors on teaching practice, they were of the opinion that co-operating teachers should have a more prominent role in TP assessment.

At Year Four an increase in confidence was evident and students identified that they had built on what they had learned in their previous TP. This maturation was both personal and educational, not only were they more confident in their classroom performance and persona but also in their choice to become a teacher. Learning on TP was seen as distinct because of its practical nature.

Students valued tutors who gave them practical advice, were encouraging and supportive of them experimenting with their own teaching style and professional in their approach to communicating with students. Tutors however received much censure for being overly critical and negative, too focused on the minute detail of written work, not supporting experimentation with teaching style and giving little positive feedback. Tutors were also seen as unconnected with the reality of teaching due to the unrealistic expectations they had, particularly those without recent teaching experience. Student teachers observed that in the main, subject tutors did not place the same importance or emphasis on campus based studies as educational personnel.

The main theme that emanated from the qualitative findings about tutors was the differing standards and expectations of tutors. Students bemoaned what they saw as the lack of consistency between individual tutors and the wide variance in tutor expectations, both in terms of classroom practices, written work and protocol around TP visits. Clearer guidelines, which all tutors must adhere to, were called for.

Two thirds of student teachers did not feel that the length of teaching practice in Year Two or Four should be extended. When consider in relation to gender, half of all females but only a quarter of male students were agreeable with increasing the length of the TP period. Reasons for advocating a longer TP were based on student's feeling that just when they felt settled in the school they had to leave and because of TP being cut short due to timetabled school holidays. At Year Four specifically students wanted additional time in the school without tutor visits to experience "real" teaching. Students didn't advocate any lengthening of the TP period due to; the workload involved in TP, the length of TP as reflective of their level of development and the physical and emotional impact of TP.

The written workload on TP was the biggest factor in students' reluctance for an increase in the time afforded to TP; if this was relaxed many would have opted for a greater proportion of their time to have been spent on placement in schools. Students advocated greater frequency of exposure to the classroom and continuity of experience commensurate with their level of development. Suggestions also focused on the need for TP to be aligned more closely with the second-level school terms and for consideration to be given to the timing of Year Four TP vis-à-vis the double burden of TP and FYP. Year Four students believed that lecture content post-TP would have served them better in advance of their placement and focused their studies more clearly.

Chapter Six – Discussion of findings

Introduction

It is noteworthy that at each time of testing, over three quarters of the year groups from which the study cohorts were drawn took part in this research. The high response rate achieved (76%-81%) was all the more pointed given the fact that respondents were self-selecting. The fact that such a high percentage of students were co-operative in the research indicates how strongly student teachers wanted to voice their opinions of their teacher education programme. Coupled with this, the high levels of consistency of findings highlight the strength of the data gathered and provide firm foundations on which to draw assumptions and generalisations, and on which to build discussions. In Ireland, approximately 30% of post-primary teachers are educated on concurrent programmes (Heinz, 2008). Of this figure, the University of Limerick has the largest stake, offering a quarter of the programmes currently available. The findings from this research therefore have potential implications for a large body of Ireland's teachers. However it would be limiting to ascribe the implications of this research to concurrent teacher education programmes only, as the issues emanating from the findings are pertinent to teacher education irrespective of whether it is concurrent or consecutive, or indeed focused on second-level or primary education. Consequently, the areas for discussion are designated at both a micro and macro level, which encompass and reflect the depth, significance and impact of the findings in relation to teacher education programmes both at the University of Limerick and across the spectrum of teacher education.

At the micro level, a number of more context specific issues, were commented on by student teachers such as: the length and frequency of teaching practice, the role of TP tutors, the workload on TP and other programmatic issues that should be considered as part of a revision to the programmes at the University of Limerick. These will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter. At a macro level, two key areas are considered for discussion, which are applicable to teacher education at a wider level, namely: student teacher profile and student teacher development.

Student teacher profile

From the first stage findings of this study a distinct picture emerged of the nature of and variation in student teachers studying at the University of Limerick. As the analysis progressed, further findings have clarified the "types" of students studying on the programmes and clear evidence of distinct student teacher profiles has emerged. Student profile has emerged as an unexpected but deep-rooted finding. Who students are, how they learn, and the impact of their own educational background / experiences, are recognised in the literature as foundational to how students develop as teachers and experience and interact with their pre-service programme[36] (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Calderhead, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Wegner, 1998; Holland et al., 2001; Sexton, 2008). Undoubtedly the relationship between teacher knowledge, skills and experiences prior to or upon entering ITE and subsequent classroom performance is critical to understanding what separates out a quality teacher, one who remains and thrives in the profession, but many authors have highlighted the dearth of this type of impact research (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Beijaard et al., 2004; Merseth et al., 2008; Killeavy, 2006; Su, 1990). It is highlighted internationally that there is a clear need for gathering up-to-date demographic profiles of prospective teachers and understanding how these demographic variables relate to how teachers are prepared and how long they subsequently stay in teaching (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). In the Irish context however, current research on teacher education examines primary teacher education or consecutive teacher education for second-level teachers and these studies have not specifically focused on the profile characteristics of intending teachers (Lodge et al., forthcoming; Heinz, 2008; Drudy, 2006; Burke, 1992, 1997, 2000 & 2004; Killeavy, 2001).

> The implication is that the demographic profiles of teachers' influences teacher practice which in turn influences student learning. Although there was much research on teacher attitudes and expectations as they related to teacher demographics in the 1970s and 1980s, little attention has been paid to how the demographic profile may affect the practice of teaching and how that in turn may affect student achievement (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005:143)

[36] The study cohorts involved in this research comprised approximately eighty per cent of the overall student teacher populations studying at the University of Limerick and it is considered that the profile that has emerged of these student teachers can be directly related to the overall student teacher populations pursuing undergraduate concurrent Teacher Education Programmes at the University of Limerick.

The fact that there has been no evidence of a major outflow from the teaching profession, together with the homogeneous nature of student teachers, and the fact that teaching candidates are traditionally and continually high achievers (Drudy, 2001; Coolahan, 2003), means that student profile has not been problematised within Irish research. However, this research illustrates that the perceived homogeneity of the cohort masks high levels of differentiation, which impact on students' experience of the programme, their ability to internalise educational theory and potentially their subsequent experiences as teachers in the classroom.

Within this research key profile characteristics have emerged which provide important insights into the student teacher population in its own right, but have also been found to impact on the other areas of consideration within this study namely: student teachers' development and interaction with their pre-service programme. When data were analysed, clear profile distinctions were evident in relation to gender and course of study. The researcher acknowledges that gender may not be the determining variable, particularly as courses of study within UL are largely gender distinguished. Nonetheless, data illustrate that participants possess particular demographic qualities, which are largely differentiated by gender and course of study.

Gender

Both in the European and wider international context, the teaching profession and teacher education cohorts are characterised by gender imbalance and increased feminisation (OECD, 2005; Drudy, 2008 & 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005; AACTE, 1999; NEA, 2003; Heinz, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). In the Irish context feminisation has not been as evident at second-level as it is at primary-level. Nevertheless, the gender ratio of females to males teaching at second level ranks sixth highest in Europe (Drudy, 2008:31; UNESCO, 2003). The proportion of males applying for second-level teaching is much higher than for primary and the number of male student teachers at second-level is considerably higher than at primary level. Males however, still only make up one quarter of education students on the PGDE (Heinz, 2008; Drudy, 2006).

Within the current study, a very different profile emerged, with more males than females both involved in the research and studying at the University of Limerick. This is considered a unique aspect of this research, as it looks specifically at the impact of

teacher education on males at a crucial time in the Irish educational context. The 60:40 male to female gender stratification of the study cohorts is related to the type of subjects within the teacher education programme at the University of Limerick. The highest male to female ratio was evident in the M&CT and M&ET groups where 80-90% of the cohorts were male. These percentages are indicative of prevailing attitudes to typically "male" subjects. The concurrent model which is strongly associated with the education of teachers of practical, vocational and craft subjects is also a contributory factor in the attraction of a greater number of males to the programmes at the University of Limerick (Coolahan, 1991&2003; Gleeson, 2004).

The higher number of males may also be ascribed to the fact that the level of interest in teaching careers by males is sensitive to trends in overall labour market conditions as highlighted by Drudy (2006) who found that there was an increase in male applicants after 2001 when the range of career opportunities available began to wane. As discussed earlier in this thesis, in Ireland teaching is still held in high esteem and is still considered an attractive career; this may be another influencing factor in men's decision to enter ITE programmes.

Much concern has been expressed about the decreasing number of males entering the profession based on the premise that boys require male teachers if they are to develop both academically and personally. This has focused on the underachievement of males with much research confirming patterns of gender difference in academic achievement (Drudy, 2008; OECD, 2007). There has been a tendency to connect issue of boys' under performance with the feminisation of the teaching profession and while girls are doing better than boys, there is little evidence that is necessarily related to the feminisation of teaching (Drudy et. al., 2005). Similarly no evidence exists to support the view that more male teachers will positively influence boys' performance, and empirical data indicate that teacher gender is not an important factor in student achievement (Davison, 2007). In fact gender of teachers is seen to have little impact on academic motivation or engagement of students and an international review of research on gender and education found that the sex of teachers has little effect on pupil achievement (Carrington et. al., 2007; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007; Brophy, 1985; Evans, 1992).

There has also been widespread commentary on the assumed need for male role models, and existing research raises interesting questions about the social construction of

masculinity and highlights that teachers need to understand how boys construct their gendered identity (Connell, 2005; Keddie, 2006). In addition it indicates that teachers need to be aware of the way they interact with male and female students (Jones & Myhill, 2004). It has also been argued that maintaining a male/female teacher balance is not only intrinsically valuable for pupils, but is very important for the messages it sends about teachers and education. The perception that teaching as a female career is seen by some as having a negative impact on the status of the profession as well as possibly discouraging half the population from considering teaching as a viable career route. But what is clear is that we do not know enough about the impact of gender on other pupil outcomes or about its impact with other variables such as race, ethnicity or social class background (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005:143; ibid, 2008:417; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008).

This study does not address the impact of teacher gender on pupils' academic or social experiences of schooling but what it does clearly show is that gender impacted significantly on student teachers' experiences of, and academic progression within, teacher education. The gendered outcomes for teachers were obvious and their impact on the teaching persona will be discussed later in this chapter. By considering gender from the formative aspects of teacher development, this research will enrich and nuance the existent research in gender studies and pupil outcomes.

Academic performance

In relation to performance within the programme three key findings were observed, namely: how well students performed in certain aspects of their programme; the progression of student attainment; and noted differences in attainment based on gender.

Student teachers in general were awarded higher grades on TP than in educational studies and while grade improvements were noted in both areas from Year Two to Year Four, the degree of improvement was greater for TP grade. There remained at Year Four however, a consistent 10-15% of students who did not perform well. A clear pattern was evident in relation to student achievement, as those who did well in educational studies were also found to achieve higher grades for TP and had higher QCAs. At both times of testing, it was females as a group who achieved the highest grades both on TP and in educational studies, and the consistent 10-15% who did not perform well, were predominantly male. Similarly while an overall increase in QCA was noted from Year

Two to Year Four, there was no increase in the QCA of the M&CT or M&ET groups, rather this decreased slightly. Females demonstrated the highest QCA at Year Four.

These results illustrate that: student teachers overall faired better on the more practical components of their programme; those who were higher achievers were higher achievers throughout; there was a consistent 10-15% of student teachers for whom the programme was not transformative; females as a group perform better than males.

The fact that student teachers did less well in educational studies than on TP demonstrates that students had a greater ability to learn from practical rather than theoretical experiences (Counsel et al., 2000; Young, 1998; Hobson, 2003; Korthagen et al., 2001)). Qualitative findings from this study have shown that students placed more weight on the grade they were awarded for TP than for educational studies, which many dismissed as irrelevant. Perhaps this was a mechanism used by students to dismiss aspects of their programme that they perceived to be unachievable and is an indicator of their perceptions of the usefulness and applicability of educational studies (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Killeavy, 2006; Wideen et al., 1998; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Assuncao Flores, 20001).

The fact that those who were higher achievers in educational studies were higher achievers on TP further emphasises this. TP assessment evaluated practical teaching skills but also students' ability to plan and write effectively and to demonstrate teacher knowledge in their practice. Their ability to internalise educational studies, apply these to their practice and reflect, was rewarded and therefore those who were better able to assimilate theory clearly did better (Applegate, 1986; Dembo, 2001; Swackhamer et al., 2009). We know that students who did not achieve high grades in educational studies and TP were predominantly male and the pattern of lower achievement can be linked to certain courses of study, i.e. Materials programmes. This pattern was evident throughout the study and became more pronounced over time, as the 10-15% of the cohort who showed little or no academic improvement throughout the programme were predominantly male. This mirrors findings internationally which have highlighted that at graduation, male student teachers were less likely to be in the top half of the class than were females (Vegas et al., 2001). This is also reflective of a wider issue at third-level whereby males are underachieving in comparison to their female counterparts across various disciplines (OECD, 2007). Research in the Irish context has highlighted

that there is no evidence of a gendered culture that is disadvantageous to men's achievement. Rather, other factors appear to be at play, which create a particular culture where some students do not perform as well as others (Drudy, 2006 & 2008). In the context of the UL programmes we can clearly see that males are having a greater difficulty than females in reaching the level of theoretical knowledge and application expected of student teachers, and it became evident during the research that students' personal educational history and learning styles were contributory factors in their ability to assimilate the theoretical knowledge within their programme (Olsen, 2008; Dembo, 2001; Sexton, 2008).

Learning styles and educational history

It is clear, based on the their initial subject choice (Materials) and their subsequent academic development during the programme, that some student teachers who were more practical learners than others, were less comfortable with the academic aspects of the programme (Felder & Silverman, 1988). In their responses to this study, they requested greater flexibility in the format ascribed to written work to suit their own spatial, communication and thinking styles and they clearly wanted a move away from purely literary formats. They also desired greater flexibility in carrying out written work particularly in relation to the level of detail and presentation style required.

Although the school types chosen for TP were largely reflective of the national distribution, more students opted to undertake TP in vocational schools/community colleges than the national distribution would have suggested. This is not unexpected given the nature of the subjects being taught, but also sheds light on the aforementioned profile distinctions. Those who selected vocational schools and community colleges were awarded lower grades on TP and the school type selected by students for their practicum determined their grades. It is noteworthy that 65-80% of those who went to vocational schools were males, the majority of whom were Materials students.

Students' choice of school for TP is thought to be reflective of their own educational experience, with students drawn to teach in a context that is known and familiar. This may simply be due to a wish to be close to home for support or for financial reasons, but also to situate themselves in an environment that fits with their perception of teaching and which resonates with their own educational history (Sexton, 2008; Olsen, 2008; Biggs, 2003; Bullough et al., 1992; Lave & Wegner, 1991). We know students' lay

theories and perceptions are formed very early on in their educational experience, are long lasting and difficult to alter and student teachers strive to recreate educational experiences that reflect as closely as possible their previous apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992; He & Levin, 2008; Lee, 2008; Merseth et al., 2008; Sugrue, 1997; Kettle & Sellars, 1996; Huibregtse et al., 1994). Conversely students who selected other school types, and who attained higher grades on TP, were working from a different educational foundation and clearly had different educational experiences. Because of this difference in their educational history, they were more comfortable with and capable of handling the demands of their teacher education programme. So why are some students inducted into knowledge and learning in a manner that better aligns with the philosophy of teacher education at the University of Limerick than others? It can be asserted that those who study practical subjects have had less exposure to a strong, traditional literary-based education and that their prior educational experiences limit their ability to engage with the teacher education programme as compared with their peers.

Another key marker of differing experiences and subsequently different perceptions of the role of the teacher (Olsen, 2008; Ballou & Podgursky, 1999; Goodson, 1991) is the variation in the uptake of TP in disadvantaged schools. While a quarter of student teachers selected disadvantaged schools for their Year Two placement, this was much reduced at Year Four; nonetheless a much higher proportion of males still chose to undertake TP in these schools. This change in selection patterns highlights that ambitious students recognised the difficulty in attaining high grades in these particular schools (Abernathy et al., 2001). The data demonstrate a relationship between TP grade and school type selected, with student teachers attending secondary schools receiving higher grades than those attending other school types. Males were less likely to select secondary schools than females and their subsequent attainment was reflective of this choice.

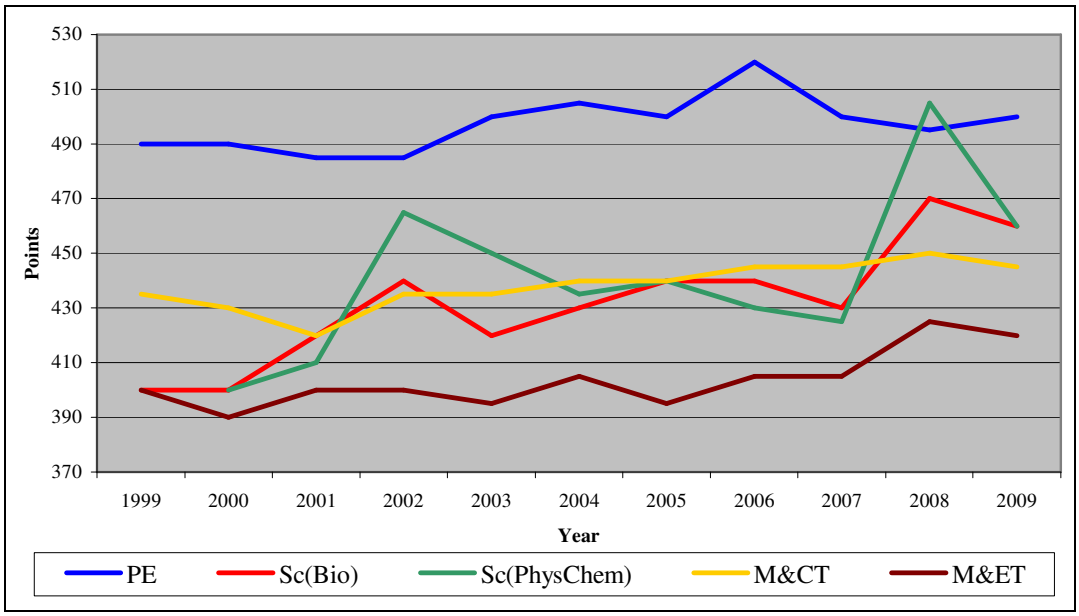
Entry-level attainment

One indicator of students' educational history is their attainment at Leaving Certificate level. An analysis of students' entry-level attainment revealed clear distinctions, and when students' performance is tracked over the period of their pre-service studies, it is evident that their ability to understand and apply knowledge from the programme could have been predicted at the outset. Those students who demonstrated the lowest levels of

academic attainment and development throughout their programme, also had the lowest academic attainment in terms of Leaving Certificate points when they transitioned to third-level.

The entry level requirements of the four programmes[37] in the period 1999-2009 demonstrate that the PE programme has traditionally attracted the highest rank students, with the Science and M&CT programmes commanding the second highest points level, while the M&ET programme has had the lowest points requirement for entry. This entry pattern to the M&ET programme has remained consistent for the last decade. However, in recent years in particular the PE and Science courses have commanded much higher entry points than either of the Materials courses. While it is acknowledged that points are primarily an indictor of the level of interest in a programme, they do provide a base measure of students' academic ability on entry to the programmes (Heinz, 2008; Drudy, 2006).

Figure LXXVII: Entry points for teacher education programmes at UL 1999-2009

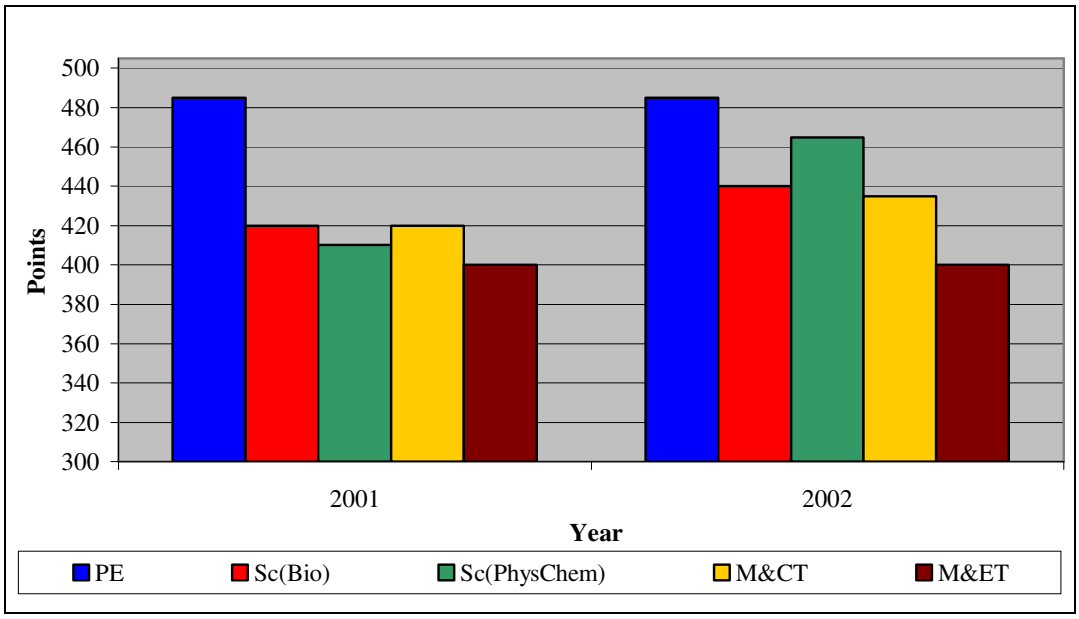


What this highlights, is that irrespective of other factors, in the year of entry of the student groups in this study, students had to achieve higher points to gain a place on the PE and Science programmes than on the Materials programmes and therefore had higher academic achievement levels in the Leaving Certificate. It is noteworthy that

[37] For the purpose of points analysis the science teacher education students are split into two cohorts, Sc(Bio) those studying biology and physics or chemistry and Sc(PhysChem) those studying physics and chemistry.

both the Science and PE cohorts comprised two thirds female, yet the Materials groups were over 80% male. This highlights that many males were lower achievers in terms of Leaving Certificate points than their female counterparts and that prior educational achievement plays a role in patterns of entry to ITE which mirrors findings in relation to primary teacher education entrants (Drudy, 2006). This also highlights how a traditional academic and literary measure of ability is not the best format of assessment for these students.

Figure LXXVIII: Entry points for teacher education programmes at UL 2001-2002



These findings highlight that knowledge of the profile of intending teachers is of great importance. Lack of awareness of profile characteristics, in particular gender and learning styles, has resulted in some student teachers not reaching the level of attainment that is expected at the conclusion of their programme, not being able to fully interact with programme and ultimately not becoming the best teachers they could be at this stage of their development. Lack of awareness of profile may also have impacted on student teachers' self-esteem and self-efficacy, generated a negative approach to theory and may result in a technicist approach to teaching, which undermines the whole philosophy of the hermeneutic model espoused at the University of Limerick.

Even in the United States, where much attention has been focused on the profile characteristics of teachers and intending teachers, there is an acknowledged lack of data on the impact of demographic profile on teacher practice and student learning (Zumwalt

& Craig, 2005). Research has highlighted that pupils learn from teachers with certain characteristics, skills and knowledge (Wayne & Youngs, 2003), that certain teacher characteristics impact on performance (Rice, 2003) and that pupil learning 'depends substantially on what teachers know and can do' (Darling-Hammond cited in Cochran-Smith, 2005b:41). It has also been acknowledged that our current potential teachers hold fundamentally different ideas about their intended career and the "psychic rewards" of teaching, and bring with them very different experiences and expectations of teaching than those currently in the profession (Lorie, 1975; Goodwin, 2008). As is evidenced in the next section of this chapter, profile characteristics have been found to strongly relate to levels of student teacher development over the course of their ITE. Subsequently, there is a clear need for gathering up-to-date demographic profiles of student teachers and understanding how these relate to how teachers are prepared, their subsequent teaching practices and the impact on their students' learning.

Similarly, the impact of a predominantly white and monolingual teaching force with relatively homogenous socio-economic backgrounds in light of growing changes in the demographic backgrounds of pupils has received relatively little attention internationally (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005; Merseth et al., 2008). In Ireland the homogeneity of intending teachers, of whom 98% are of Irish nationality, with less than 10% mature students and little representation of other ethnic minorities has also been highlighted (Heinz, 2008) and is reflected in the profile of student teachers in this research.

In light of the changing demography in Ireland, profile will have greater visibility, reflecting the inevitable increase in diversity of cohorts once the pupil population currently in first and second-level reach third-level institutions. Within a decade it is inevitable that the composition of our student teacher cohorts will be radically changed. These students will bring with them greater variations of cultural, linguistic, social and educational values. The recognised need 'to accommodate a greater diversity of entrants' within teacher education (Byrne, 2002: 106) is another clear reason, for gathering up-to-date demographic profiles of students entering teacher education and highlights why knowledge of the profile of intending teachers is so important.

Student teacher development

The profile distinctions already drawn have been found to dictate and underwrite the way and level at which student teachers develop, and it is evident that some student teachers develop more than others and this is pervasive throughout the results. Encouragingly what the results have shown is that development was evident over the duration of the programme. The level of development was not equal for all students however, and as a group, males and Materials students developed less than their female counterparts.

Evolving perceptions of the cycle of planning and reflection

Within this study, clear evidence of progressive appreciation of the written work involved in the planning and reflection cycle and of the process of reflection itself was apparent. However, according to the data, the benefits of the process of planning and reflection were not equal for all students.

The value and benefit of planning and reflection was more widely acknowledged by higher achievers, who specifically reported the usefulness of PLAs in their decision-making around planning for lessons. Males and lower achievers highlighted the value of PLAs in a functional and instrumental way. Rather than valuing PLAs as a form of refection, males and lower achievers placed weight on the actually process of writing PLAs. Student teachers at Year Four however, were in general much more articulate about the role of PLAs and highlighted that these were a useful tool for reflection, because these were perceived to be an accessible and personalised route to reflection.

In contrast, students did not place much weight on weekly observations, with only higher achievers recognising their value. While PLAs were valued as they were personalised, weekly observations were seen as an unnecessary repetition of PLAs. Because of this, student teachers didn't perceive that these added positively to their reflection and rather than being seen as an additional and complimentary route to reflection, they were perceived as having little purpose and something for which students had to manufacture issues to discuss. This highlights the importance student teachers place on the method used to reflect and the value they place on authentic reflection. This is illustrative of other studies on reflective practices, which highlighted the importance teacher candidates placed on personalising the process of reflection

(Lee, 2008; Daloglu, 2001). Of most concern is the fact that student teachers identified that the consistent level of demand placed on them affected their ability to focus on authentic critical incidences during their teaching practicum and prevented them from having the space and time to reflect. The consistent levels of demand, and rigid format imposed by the college, were also seen as problematic, as these did not take into account student teachers' maturation over the course of their pre-service programme (Lunn & Bishop, 2003).

The true purpose and value of reflection was something that higher achievers were found to be more aware of, as they observed reflection as a process in its own right and not just as an outcome of PLAs. They could see that reflection was a necessary part of learning to teach, how their reflective skills had improved and overall demonstrated a more conscious awareness of how reflection informed their subsequent teaching methods and practices. This reflects international findings, which indicate that reflective practices helped student teachers to chart their own development (Merseth et al., 2008), and that students with higher levels of self-efficacy were more interested and invested in learning about reform-based methods and developing their personal inquiry skills (Winstead Fry, 2009: Swackhamer et al., 2009; Lee, 2008).

It was also evident that the school environment itself presented challenges to students' development in relation to planning and reflection. It was clear that in many schools, both the physical and social environment of the staffroom in particular was not conducive to reflection. The lack of an appropriate area within the staffroom, as well as the fact that students rarely, if ever, witnessed the practising teachers in their school performing written reflections, emphasises the priority afforded to reflection and the level of incidence of reflection within schools. The results also illustrated that few practising teachers actively supported student teachers in their reflective practices and that many teachers were openly dismissive of the university's focus on written reflections and lesson plans. This highlights a conflict between the message about teaching espoused by the programme and the co-operating schools and undoubtedly influences how student teachers themselves will view reflection (Long & Stuart, 2004; He & Levin, 2008; Abernathy et al., 2001).

The data indicate that student teachers could see the value of planning and reflection, particularly in their final year of study and a progressive appreciation of written work

was evident. This is positive and demonstrates that all student teachers developed over the course of their pre-service programme. Their development was also evident in the fact that they could conceptualise that written work, particularly lesson plans had a specific place and were most appropriate for student teachers. They were aware of the need for scaffolding and support within the reflective cycle in one's early stages of teaching, but articulated that this should reduce as they gained in experience and should develop in parallel their changing professional competence.

Four key issues have emanated from the obvious differentiation in levels of development over the course of the programme, namely: the level at which students understand and appreciate the value of reflective tools and utilise these in their practice was varied; some student teachers dislike the strong literary requirement of the planning and reflective cycle; some students have difficulty with the level of demand this places on them during TP and the prescriptive nature of planning and reflection is not responsive to students' levels of development during their pre-service programme.

This differentiation in relation to ability and appreciation of the planning and reflection cycle is considered to be indicative of the student teachers' level of comfort with academic writing. Lesson plans, PLAs and weekly observations, aside from their aim of getting students to think about and plan for their teaching, are essentially an assessment of students' literary skills. While they are a function of what is considered the practical aspect of pre-service teacher education, the noted weight that the college puts on the ability to complete these within a prescribed formula, undoubtedly has an impact on students' ability to accurately utilise these conventions for their intended purpose (Gratch, 2001; Lunn & Bishop, 2003; Merseth et al., 2008). Even at this level it is clear that the construct of the programme assesses the literary and verbal ability of teachers, rather than considering in the first instance if teachers have developed the skills needed to be reflective practitioners, as advocated by the programme. While some educational studies modules require students to display coherent literary ability and the capacity to critique policies, the purpose of lesson plans is to enable students to plan for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. Given the clear indicators about the learning styles and preferences of student teachers highlighted in this research, teacher educationists should not conflate the requirements for both aspects, thereby creating impediments to students learning. Rather they should allow lesson plans as well as PLAs and weekly observations to serve their specific purpose.

While higher achievers may have been better at completing written work, because of their literary ability and level of comfort with academic writing, they were also better able to use this process to benefit their teaching. These students clearly gained a better understanding of the purpose of these as tools for their reflection, which is indicative of their ability to better access, and subsequently utilise the intended knowledge and skills provided in their pre-service programme. This is a consequence of their own educational history, which has provided them with a more traditional literary-based education and better inducted them into knowledge and learning. The fact that males were seen to rely more on the actual process of writing to reflect and wanted plans and appraisals to be more concise with reduced detail, indicates that these student teachers do not fully grasp the importance of articulating the teaching/learning process. Clearly these students require more guidance and specific support around the process of reflection so they can move away from their view of reflection as purely functional and develop an "inquiry stance". This according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) is crucial to teachers' professional development so that they can 'pose problems, identify discrepancies between theories and practices and challenge common routines' (2001:53; Lee, 2008).

A revision of the rigid format and specific nature of the content required for planning and reflection was the focus of student recommendations. Students called for recognition of various approaches and styles with an opportunity to incorporate more visual representations and to choose from a variety of formats including bullet points, flow charts and diagrams. Not only does this highlight their level of comfort with academic writing, it also illustrates their differing learning styles and strengths and preferred modes of expression (Dembo, 2001). The uniformity of the university requirements around TP highlights a conflict between the advocacy by the department of a mixed-methods approach and an awareness of differing learning styles in the second-level classroom, and the expectation that all student teachers will conform to a traditional literary style within the planning and reflective cycle. Concomitantly, rigid adherence in relation to the level of detail and format required also fails to take into account student teachers' growing competence over the course of their pre-service programme and actually served to lessen their interaction with the reflective process. This was compounded by the attitudes and behaviours of practicing teachers in relation to reflection.

These findings point towards a need to re-evaluate the constraints applied and the level of detail required in all elements of the planning and reflective process, to accommodate student teachers' learning preferences and recognise their growth and development over time (Kitchen, 2009; Lee, 2008). To do this, teacher education must develop a student-centred approach to reflective practice, because 'although teacher education cannot control the inherent personality traits of prospective teachers, we can design instructional experiences to help foster professional attitudes and approaches to reflective practices' (Fry, 2009:109).

Within a review of the programme, teacher educators will have to consider student teachers' learning styles (Deng & Gopinathan, 2003). Because, if teacher educators better understand the deeply embedded ways in which teachers learn, they can better support meaningful professional preparation (Olsen, 2008:23). According to Sexton (2008) ' teacher education is charged with moving student teachers from their largely personal, incoming understandings of teaching to a more balanced, professional view of their role as educators' (2008:86). At a practical level therefore, lecturers' own planning, presentation and assessment of the programme, must be informed by and cognisant of the varying learning styles and preferences of the student teacher population.

However, an awareness of learning styles is not enough, teacher education must be open to an exploration of each student's own personal biography, which encompasses his/her personal practical knowledge and his/her previous educational experiences (Cornett, 1990; Clandinin, 1986). This is timely if we are to prevent the continued dehumanisation of teacher education, as evidenced with the current "one-size fits all" approach, which appears to neglect individual difference within teaching cohorts (Elmore and Burney, 1999). Teacher educators must be aware of student teachers' beliefs and compare these with their own for mismatch, so they can better understand their students and are better placed 'to guide, assist and encourage teacher candidates in their professional development' (He & Levin, 2008:37). This openness to recognising individual difference within the student teacher population must be incorporated into the learning structures within teacher education if programmes are to be responsive to student teachers' needs (Fry, 2008). Failure to address these differences is a failure to recognise the influences of personal biography and student teachers' lay theories on their behaviour (Korthagen, 2004; Sugrue, 1997; Kettle & Sellars, 1996). Teacher

education should acknowledge student teachers' prior knowledge and use this as a starting point for reflection, discussion and inquiry, as, 'when student teachers are encouraged to reflect on their previous life experiences and relate them to their evolving view on education, they participating in a social constructivist approach' (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008:81).

As part of this, student teachers' growing levels of professional competence and maturation must be acknowledged within a developmentally staggered process of planning and reflection, with a relaxation in the level of detail required over time to reflect student teachers' professional maturation. The impact of current practices within schools in relation to reflection must also be considered, as must the obvious divergence between the message emanating from that school and from the university about reflective practices (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008, NDP, 2004; Abernathy et al., 2001). International research has highlighted that:

> A general match between the beliefs of cooperating teachers and teacher education can better support the development of teacher candidates through the consistent message they receive from both their courses and their field experiences during the teacher preparation program (He & Levin, 2008:51).

If student teachers view reflection as an isolated activity however, not engaged in by "real teachers" as part of a community of learners, it is difficult to see how teacher education can embed reflective practice within student teachers' teaching personas (Servage, 2008; Merseth el al., 2008).

Evolving perceptions of theory and practice

Student teachers overall were dismissive of content taught in college, with the exception of modules that they considered "practical" such as subject pedagogy and the practicum component and called for their educational studies to draw more from the reality of the classroom (Wideen et al., 1998; Fullan, 1995; O'Hara, 1988; Hargreaves, 1990). They were also able to clearly articulate the elements of their educational studies, which they felt would be better placed at a later junction in their development, as part of a programme of in-career development (Asher & Malet, 1999; Clifton et al., 1994).

Education modules that looked specifically at the wider issues outside of classroom practice were seen as least useful, with only higher achievers rating these as valuable.

Materials students were found to prioritise microteaching and modules centred on discipline and classroom resources, while Science and PE students prioritised educational modules that focused on the assessment of student learning and child development. This provides a clear indication of students' varying levels of development at the conclusion of their pre-service preparation. While lower achievers and males were still focused very much on the practical aspects of their learning, higher achievers have moved beyond this, were confident in their ability in relation to the management aspects of teaching and were focused on their pupils' learning. This type of shift in concerns towards pupil learning is acknowledged as a sign of progress in the process of learning to teach (Pigge & Marso, 1997; Kagan, 1992).

At Year Two students saw theory as useful for their planning for teaching, but at Year Four this had developed and they were more focused on the utilisation of theory to aid their reflection (Van Manen, 1977; Lee, 2005). This highlights that over the course of their studies, their understanding and use of educational theory had developed. This development was not even however, with males still placing the usefulness of theory very much at a planning level and females more aware of the benefit that their educational knowledge had in the reflective process. This again highlights the strong relationship between student teachers' capacity for learning, their level of development and their gender (Dembo, 2001).

At Year Four student teachers could see the link between theory and practice but found it difficult to make this connection as they saw their theoretical learning as happening in a vacuum, with little connection to their practice (Correy, 1980; Stones, 1989; Gargiulo & Pigge, 1982; Munro, 1993). In fact, while TP was considered a very valuable aspect of the programme because it was practical in nature, it was also seen as valuable because it gave students the opportunity to apply theory and make it personally relevant. This is considered a key purpose of the practicum, to allow for productive linking of university coursework with classroom experience (Holt-Reynolds, 1992), and to help students bridge the gap between their role as student and their goal of becoming a teacher (Abernathy et al., 2001). The work of Merseth et al., (2008) highlighted that the practicum experience is described by student teachers as the most important aspect of their pre-service programme and that, 'teachers learn as much, if not more, about teaching and themselves while teaching than while studying about or observing teaching' (2008:104). As such, practical teaching experience serves to deepen personal

identity and this is why TP and its practical orientation reign as a powerful intervention for student teachers.

> Professional identity formation is often presented as a struggle because [student] teachers have to make sense of varying and sometimes competing perspectives, expectations and roles that they have to confront and adapt to (Beijaard et al., 2004:115).

Earle et al., (2001) surmised that TP should 'allow prospective teachers to explore their idiosyncratic theories of learning, which should shift towards more advanced pedagogical constructs during preservice programs' (2001:60). While the student teachers in this study didn't see themselves as theory-makers, they did feel that they were capable of developing practical teaching strategies. This highlights how student teachers view the role of theory in their everyday teaching experiences and signals how effective the programme was in shifting students towards more advanced pedagogical constructs (Counsell et al., 2000; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bullough & Knowles, 1991).

Evidently a divide has already been created in their minds between educational theories and practical teaching strategies, which are developed in real life classrooms, based on lived experiences (He & Levin, 2008; Korthagen, 2004; Kettle & Sellars, 1996). Again this highlights the conflict between the message about teaching put forth by the university and by the school; as teacher education subscribes to a notion of teaching that is different to what student teachers witness in schools, so students have difficultly relating their university programme to real teaching and their experiences of the practices of real teachers on the ground. Many existing studies have highlighted that the goals and expectations of teacher education programmes are not always congruent with schools (Monson et al., 1995; Forsyth & Abernathy, 1998), that student teachers often refer to contradictions between school expectations, programme philosophy and their own teaching goals (Olsen, 2008), and that frequently, they encountered apposing realities as they began to move from thinking as a student to think as a teacher (Britzman, 2003). This difficulty in relating their programme content to their real-life experiences in the classroom was observed to be compounded by the fact that theory was presented in short lecture style session with little or no linkage to practice. This mirrors other studies in which student teachers reported that 'when their instructors used transmission approaches, and expected them to learn large numbers of concepts in isolation without practical support, many of them experienced difficulty and frustration'

(Bainbridge & Macy, 2008:79; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Assuncao Flores, 2001; Kennedy, 1987).

The findings in relation to educational studies also highlighted that even at Year Four, students preferred tutorials to lectures. In fact results showed that students at Year Four perceived education lectures as less valuable and applicable than they had at Year Two (Hobson, 2003). This is undoubtedly related to the accessibility of the tutorial format compared with lectures, as tutorials provide a more interactive learning environment, with not only greater student involvement but also a wider variety of teaching methods and content format. Lectures to large groups are traditionally more lecturer-centred, instructional and didactic. This further highlights the conflict between the advocacy by the education department of a mixed-methods approach in the second-level classroom and a more traditional, conservative approach taken by lecturers in respect of their students which models transmission pedagogy and flies against a constructivist approach (Lunn & Bishop, 2003; Long & Stuart, 2003; Bainbridge & Macy, 2008). This is also thought to contribute to a widening of the divide between students' practical teaching experiences and their educational studies after an extended period of TP (Veenam, 1984; Tillema, 1994).

It is clear that some student teachers are achieving a level of synthesis congruent with that expected of teachers at this stage, that they do value the higher order aspects of teaching and have an appreciation of the value of educational theory. They also recognise which elements of their educational studies are best placed within ITE and which would be more valuable later on in a CPD model. This level of synthesis and development however is not thought to be the result of their teacher education programme specifically, but rather is considered to be related to their particular educational background and learning experiences. Higher achievers can personalise their learning, irrespective of the way their programme is presented, because of the skills and learning attributes they already have (Dembo, 2001). These students as already highlighted, have had a very different educational and academic background and have already been inducted into learning. Because of this, they can access knowledge from their pre-service programme that others students cannot access as readily and they possess the skills to bring together the various elements of their learning from their ITE. These students can personalise their teacher education and can take different elements, which are perceived as useful, and apply them independently

without scaffolding or support. For others however, this is more problematic, as without the perquisite learning skills and without greater levels of support, they struggle to take on board and marry the varying elements of their programme. These findings raise questions about the appropriateness of current approaches to teacher education, especially in relation to creating the most appropriate environment for student teachers to reflect upon and explore their current understandings and the new ideas presented in their pre-service programme (Bainbridge and Macy, 2008). This is particularly important if teacher education wants to assist those teachers who experienced difficulty personalising their programmatic learning so they can truly develop and not become "stuck" teachers later in their career cycle (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Even though the programme provides the knowledge and information that students need to be truly professional teachers and reflective practitioners, this is clearly not readily accessible to all student teachers. The way the programme is presented to students doesn't actively assist them in realising the coherence within the programme or in bringing their different types of learning and experiences together in a way that facilitates these student teachers in assimilating theory and practice (Lee, 2008; Hegarty, 2000; Young, 1998). The dominance of large lectures and the prescriptive nature of the programme, encompassing rigid expectations of planning and reflective work and the expectation of literary analysis of teaching, appears to take little cognisance of students' own learning styles and preferences (Lunn & Bishop, 2003; Sexton, 2008; Gossman, 2008). Students therefore dismiss the message of teacher education because of the way it is presented to them, but also because it doesn't align with their experiences (Abernathy et al., 200; Leinhardt et al., 1995). It is evident that there is a definite group of students who require greater assistance in marrying programme content with their own concepts and experiences and who need a programmatic structure that is more attuned to their learning styles and preferences (Fry, 2009; He & Levin, 2008;) and therefore:

> The role of faculties of education must be, in part, to examine the expectations and perceptions that student teachers bring with them into the professional program and to scaffold a deeper understanding of the breadth and depth of teaching and learning (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008:80).

Both the type of educational theory and the way that this is presented to students in lectures also has an impact on students' ability to take on board educational knowledge

(Norris, 1994; Assuncao Flores, 2001; Long & Stuart, 2004). What the University of Limerick has envisaged is a focus on reflective practice as a tool of teacher growth, knowledge and development within ITE (Elliot, 1993; Leonard & Gleeson, 1999). Despite the hermeneutic approach however, students are still expected to take theory on board and utilise it in short bursts of teaching practice. While it is clear that the philosophical underpinnings of the programmes have changed, it is not as evident that the structure has been revised accordingly. It is true that there has been a move away from a discipline-based approach yet the actual structure of the programme, where TP is experienced in isolated periods, still requires student teachers to learn, teach and apply educational knowledge in isolation (McPhee & Humes, 1998; MacDonald et al., 2002; Goodlad, 1990).

The educational knowledge presented to students in the main could be classed as epistemic knowledge or theory with a "big T". This research supports the wealth of data already in existence, which has highlighted that if theory is presented to student teachers in an abstract manner divorced from practice and not seen as stemming from practice, it is unlikely that students will take this on board (Schwab, 1969; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Kessels & Korthagen, 1996). It is imperative that teacher educators present theoretical knowledge to students that is grounded in practice (theory with a "small t"), which can be achieved by linking educational studies with student teachers practical experiences. In this mode, theory making is viewed as an ongoing process, a conversation of active thoughtful individuals with their environment as they explore the concrete, the specific and the immediate (Korthagen, 1992; Copa, 1991). This would enable students to see theory as a support and remove the perception of theory as 'a cure all', which is why so many student teachers dismiss it as irrelevant.

> We recognise too that such theory as we teach to that end will need to be relevant to their actual concerns, quickly consolidated by their experiences, and supportive of the practice they see around them (Drever and Cope, 1999:108).

An opportunity is also being provided for lecturers to live the theory, model it in their practice, and to expose student teachers to lived and applied theory, thereby challenging their lay theories and existing gestalts (Long and Stuart, 2004; Korthagen et al., 2001; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996). It would seem from the data however, that irrespective of whether student teachers have been inducted into knowledge and learning, the programme has failed to induct them into the concept of teachers as theory

makers. Even though student teachers are generators of theory, they themselves don't recognise this. While they can situate a piece of theory with a particular incident and reflect at a technical level, they cannot elevate their practical teaching strategies to the level of educational theory (Van Manen, 1977; Lee, 2005). This is because they are not experiencing a programme that enables them to see the relevance of theory, as there is a clear disconnect between what happens in lectures, in their classrooms, and in their PLAs and with what they witness in schools.

> Bridging the gap between the information presented in training and teacher cognitions means that theoretical assumptions about the process of knowledge acquisition and restructuring become manifest, either implicitly or explicitly, in training design (Tillema, 1994: 602).

If teacher educators present theoretical knowledge to students that is grounded in practice and theory generation as an ongoing process, as already advocated, this can only serve to better induct student teachers into the concept of teachers as theory makers. Thus enabling student teachers to move to more advanced pedagogical constructs, which better link the theoretical knowledge presented in the programme with their own practical teaching strategies (Counsell et al., 2000; Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Similarly lecturers have the opportunity to organise the programme content and structure in a way that caters for the specific needs of different learners, however student teachers' experiences within their teacher education programme centre around a one-size fits all approach where detailed expectations are specified. This creates a dichotomy for student teachers, who on the one hand are encouraged to plan and present their lessons with all learners' styles, abilities and preferences in mind, yet they have no learning experience in their programme on which they can model their own teaching strategies (Lunn & Bishop, 2003). Other studies have indicated how powerful modelling is to scaffold teachers learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2006) and that an "instructional design" approach impacts the effectiveness of teacher education (Peck & Tucker, 1973).

> Prospective teachers were more likely to master teaching behaviours when they were modelled by their instructors, that direct or simulated involvement was more effective than lectures or instructional theory, and that using these procedures improved patterns of learning (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005:78).

In light of the changing practices in teacher education, particularly in relation to the Bologna Process and the objectives of ENTEP[38], an opportunity exists for lecturers to examine the programme modules through a different lens from a different perspective and re-conceptualise teacher education from a learner-centred, outcomes-based, constructivist perspective (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Humphreys & Hyland, 2002; Stones, 1989). While the emphasis hitherto has been on the inputs of lecturers, the findings presented suggest that a radical shift of focus from the lecturing of the lecturer to student learning is necessary. Teacher educators are now required to present their programmes in a different way, considering each module not just from its base objectives but from the perspective of students' learning outcomes, so they can forefront student learning and reconsider the learning outcomes attained by students. To enable each student to "personalise" their teacher education and all students to marry the educational knowledge present in their programme with their practical experiences as teachers, this emphasis challenges teacher educators not only to focus on student learning outcomes, but also on the inclusion of lived and applied theory. Teacher educators will have to differentiate their teaching styles and methods so as to enable all learners to access the knowledge they present and model practices in relation to inclusive teaching and applied theoretical knowledge (Fry, 2009; Loughran et al., 2003 & 2001; Korthagen, 2002). This is necessary so that they can 'distinguish themselves as teachers of teachers (and learners themselves) to allow students to seek them for the guidance they need and deserve' (Sexton, 2008:86).

Emerging personal and professional identity

A number of different findings regarding student teachers' expressed level of confidence, their ability to identify with teachers, the articulated influences on their teaching strategies, their self-reliance in relation to teaching approaches and their feelings within the school, combine to highlight that student teachers developed both personally and professionally over the course of their programme.

Identity, teaching approaches and influences

At Year Four student teachers were found to be more personally and academically confident and four out of five teachers indicated that they felt prepared for the reality of the classroom. This mirrors a recent study in Canada, which found that at the end of

[38] European Network on Teacher Education Policies.

their programme, student teachers exhibited gains in confidence and in their understanding of what it means to be a teacher and felt prepared to be teachers (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008). The UL students ascribed this to the distinct nature of their learning on TP and the fact that they were able to build on their practical learning from their previous practicum experiences. This, as already discussed, relates to the fact that learning to teach is a process not a product, which is acknowledged to be heavily influenced by the act of teaching itself (Feiman-Nemser, 2001;Merseth et al., 2008). Student teachers articulated an awareness of the demands of the job, they enjoyed TP and found it enriching, and encouragingly, most were confident in their decision to become a teacher. These are clear indicators of their level of confidence and also show that they are opinionated and pragmatic, traits that indicate the development of their identity as teachers (San, 1999). This highlights how important it is that teacher education fully engages with the TP experience and recognises more openly its impact on students' development (Beijaard, et al, 2004; Lampert, 2001).

> Teacher education faculty must become equal partners with full time practitioners in the coaching of beginning teachers; they must have a frequent and meaningful presence at the school (Merseth et al., 2008:103).

While student teachers aligned themselves with pupils at Year Two, there was a clear progression by Year Four as they identified with both pupils and teacher. This is positive and demonstrates that they no longer see themselves as students and have formed an identity of themselves as teachers, but also that they were cognisant of the importance of understanding and seeing things from their pupils' perspective (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Kagan, 1992). Specifically they validated their own teaching persona by the way they were treated by pupils and teachers and being treated like "real teachers" marked a watershed in their perception of themselves as teachers. Other studies too have recognised how the way that practising teachers and pupils in the school treat student teachers impacts on their self-concept as teachers and emphasise the importance of this acceptance for teacher socialisation (Earle et al., 2001; Gratch, 2001).

While they appreciated the support offered to them by their co-operating teachers at a practical level and were grateful for the advice offered by teachers, it was their pupils who were the biggest influence on their teaching approaches at Year Four. This signifies professional maturation as they are more self-reliant in relation to teaching approaches and more comfortable making their own decisions around teaching strategies and were

at times, critical of some of the methods employed by the practising teachers. This corroborates with other research, which has shown that over time student teachers become more independent and do not necessarily model other teachers' practices and beliefs (Abernathy et al., 2001). The fact that for these student teachers', pupils were their biggest influence on their practice, also shows that they have moved away from self-concerns typically associated with early field experience and have progressed to concerns about student learning. This type of shift in concerns is acknowledged as a sign of progress in the process of learning to teach (Kagan, 1992).

Males and lower achievers however, prioritised their co-operating teachers as their main influence in relation to teaching approaches. This indicates that this group of student teachers had not matured to the same degree and were more reliant on class teachers. They were less confident in their own abilities and still wanted more structured and specific support. Females and higher achievers on the other hand prioritised their pupils and placed much less emphasis on the influence of their co-operating teachers. These student teachers are clearly more developed, more comfortable in their role as a teacher and have higher levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy and so don't have the same need for assistance from their co-operating teachers. This is consistent with other research studies, which indicate that students who can control and recognise the factors that affect their learning will do better and have higher levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990; Swackhamer et al., 2009). Similarly, the varying levels of confidence displayed by students point to the fact that while teacher education programmes 'play an important role in fostering the resilience and persistence that help novices succeed', this development was not equal for all (Fry, 2009:97).

Students with higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence were quick to highlight that they felt the relationship with co-operating teachers shouldn't be seen in terms of a deficit with the practising teachers as the only ones with skills and knowledge to impart. Rather they believed this should be seen as a relationship of equals, with both parties learning from each other. They highlighted the importance placed on dual feedback and could see how both parties can learn from the TP experience (Earle et al., 2001; Killeavy, 2001).

The fact that males and lower achievers (who were predominantly Materials students) prioritised their co-operating teachers as their main influence in relation to teaching

approaches is perhaps related to the nature and type of teaching in the workshop environment. As these student teachers have come through the workshop setting themselves as pupils, they have been exposed to a very subject specific environment where pupil-teacher interaction is individualised. This perhaps may explain why they see the teacher as central to the process, a strong personal support and someone on whom one can rely. Coupled with this, their reliance on the knowledge, expertise and skills of the experienced teacher maybe also have been influenced by other factors such as; the quality of their teacher education programme, their understanding of the second-level curriculum and their own skills, knowledge and expertise. Therefore it is possible that a number of factors are at play which merit further research in the future.

All student teachers, irrespective of their levels of confidence, sense of self-efficacy or achievement, wanted the teachers in whose classes they taught, to have a more specific and acknowledged role in TP (NDP, 2004; Gratch, 2001). All students felt that co-operating teachers should be mentors, and that the university should provide more structured support during TP (Merseth et al., 2008). Research on the potential benefits of mentoring goes back at least twenty years (Huling-Ausitn, 1986), and it has been acknowledge that mentoring and induction support enhance confidence (Turley et al., 2006), and increase self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Winstead Fry, 2009). Similarly, respectful mentoring relationships have been found to contribute to professional growth (Kitchen, 2009), and have been accredited with helping student teachers to expand their cache of teaching strategies (Freiberg, 2002).

This analysis has confirmed that for some student teachers, it is imperative that they get this type of support, as they really need this to develop as teachers. For others, it is clear that they don't have the same support needs and will develop independently, but having a more structured and definite relationship with their co-operating teacher would enrich their experience. This 'underscore[s] the importance of effective student teaching placements with cooperating teachers who mentor in addition to just providing a place to hone teaching skills' (Winsted Fry, 2009:109; Servage, 2008; Killeavy, 2006).

It is noteworthy that the students who were placed with specifically trained mentors during TP were more aware of the value of educational theory for reflection and articulated this awareness much earlier than other student teachers. These students were also found to place a higher level of importance on the influence of their co-operating

teacher than other students. This stands to reason as these teachers are providing the type of support that students advocate and have been properly briefed by the university on the needs of student teachers and their role in the students' TP experience (Kitchen, 2009; Abernathy et al., 2001). At a general level this demonstrates that the Lucent programme provides a clear and solid example of a model that benefits students. Student teachers, particularly those lower achievers, clearly need more support in accommodating their learning and the Lucent students received that support because their co-operating teachers were inducted into the ethos and philosophy of ITE at UL. These teachers were provided with a professional development programme, which focused on the specific needs of students and appropriate mentoring strategies to be applied during the placement, the benefits of which are widely recognised (Killeavy, 2006; Moir & Gless, 2001). Therefore, they were better placed to encourage and assist students in the reflective process and were also more likely to have been supportive of practices advocated by the college, thus lessening the divergence that these students felt between practices advocated by the college and those enacted in the school (NDP, 2004; He & Levin, 2008; Olsen, 2008; Merseth et al., 2008; Britzman, 2003).

Students on the Lucent project were in the main female science teachers who were also higher achievers. So even without the Lucent programme these were the students who had the capacity to develop the most, to better access the knowledge presented to them in teacher education, to personalise it and embody it in their practice. This emphasises the need for such a mentoring programme to be available to all students, particularly those who would most benefit from additional support to aid their development and future mentoring programmes should be focused across all of the subject groups within the teacher education programme.

> In order to increase opportunities for new teachers to move from survival through mastery to expertise (Huberman, 1993), the timely support of sensitive and skilled mentors is important (Kitchen, 2009:60).

These findings have also highlighted the need to provide mentoring at different levels. While the Materials students clearly relied more heavily on their co-operating teachers, this did not adequately enable them to reach the levels of synthesis experienced by other students. It is clear that the type of support offered to these students focused very much on practical advice around the everyday managerial aspects of teaching and that they received what could be described as "know how" or declarative type mentoring from

their co-operating teachers. At this level students were not encouraged to or assisted in considering their practices and experiences at a reflective level, but rather were focused on developing a bank of practical knowledge that would aid them in their everyday teaching. Therefore the support they received did not extend to mentoring at a more reflective or rationalisation "know why" and "know if" level (Blanton, 1992; Lee, 2005; Earle et al., 2001). While practical "know how" mentoring is clearly valuable for students who require that greater level of support, it is the availability of mentoring support that encourages student teachers to reflect which would be beneficial to all student teachers irrespective of their stage of development (Lee, 2008). As such, teacher education programmes need to provide opportunities for student teachers to develop relationships with practising teachers which provide a forum to discuss teaching practice, in which student teachers are supported in critically reflecting on their experiences (Kitchen, 2009; Gratch et al., 2001).

> It is important to prepare teacher candidates for teaching by fostering professional learning, that focuses on critical thinking and reflection, so that knowledge and beliefs interact with the teacher education program, including field experiences, to facilitate more sophisticated conceptions of the teaching and learning process (Lee, 2008:117).

Coupled with this, relationships between student and experienced teachers that have a more specific reflective purpose will undoubtedly be beneficial for practising teachers also. Research in the Irish context has highlighted that every teacher can benefit from preparation for mentoring and that a vast body of literature already exists which highlights the 'possibilities for professional development and leadership roles for mentors during the process of helping new teachers' (Killeavy, 2006:173). They also have the potential to create a dual learning opportunity for both the student and experienced teacher and would help to narrow the gap between practices espoused by teachers and those advocated by the university. Research in the United States, which examined the impact of mentoring on mentor teachers found that,

> Teachers, often isolated within the four walls of a classroom, were experiencing renewal as they were treated as professional…advised and learned from professors as practice and theory reinforced one another…took responsibility for mentoring, observing and assessing preservice students' learning and learned from one another (Earle et al., 2001:63).

The benefit to practising teachers of being involved in a mentoring relationship is clear. If as continually highlighted, we want teachers in our schools to be part of a professional learning community, what better way to instil this ethos than through support mentoring and collaboration with student teachers (Servage, 2008; NDP, 2004). According to Killeavy (2006), the induction phase is intended to provide a support space for new teachers to properly take the time to analyse and consider their practices and engage in critical dialogue with their colleagues (2006:169-170). This is what mentored TP should offer to student teachers. If we engage practising teachers in this process through mentoring, then surely this will pave the way and better prepare practising teachers to engage with new teachers as part of an induction process. Coupled with this, it will also provide the opportunity to research student teachers' experiences of ITE, which it has been previously argued should be considered in the formulation of a policy on Induction in Ireland (Coolahan, 2003).

Student teachers' feelings of their place within the school

After their final TP, students overwhelmingly agreed that they had felt part of the school community. This was related to: the specific dynamics of school environment in which they completed TP, the existing relationships within the school and how they were treated by practising teachers and pupils. These affected how students felt in the school and the extent to which they integrated and signify the impact of the culture of the school in which student teachers experience their TP (Gratch, 2001). Student teachers articulated an understanding that being accepted takes time, and an awareness that it takes time to become part of a community and fit in, which indicates their levels of maturation. Students in the main were also confident that they had managed well. Lower achievers however were less agreeable that they had managed well and this was amplified by the fact that 10-17% of student teachers indicated that they felt isolated and alone. While this isolation was seen to be from an academic rather than a social perspective, this reflects the needs of lower achievers as all those who felt isolated and alone were in the lower grade range and so are less independent and require greater support.

Aside from this, 60% of student teachers reported that they felt left to their own devices and while they felt part of the school community, they were isolated in their classrooms. This mirrors findings from the Induction Pilot Project in Ireland, where 75% of participants indicated that they were left to their own devices (NDP, 2004). Within the

current study, some student teachers found this negative while others found it liberating. This indicates both where these students are developmentally and also the type and level of academic support they received. Higher achievers were happy to be left alone in their teaching, as they were confident and self-assured in their ability to adequately meet the demands of classroom teaching. In relation to lower achievers however, this isolation served only to lessen their level of learning on TP and so they did benefit as much from the experience. Not surprisingly those with higher TP and educational studies' grades felt they managed better and those with lower QCAs, felt they needed additional support and couldn't manage. The school type in which student teachers undertook TP was also observed to relate to how well students felt they had managed, as those in community colleges and vocational schools were less positive about how well they had managed. These findings are not surprising given what already know about teaching as a highly contextualised practice and the impact of local communities on the practices and experiences of teachers (Battey & Franke, 2008; Goodson, 1991). It is believed that these findings do not indicate that differing levels of support are offered in different school types specifically, but rather that the students who undertook TP in these schools, as already highlighted, require a type and level of support not available in any school outside of a mentoring programme.

This reaffirms the huge benefit that would have been accrued to students if a mentoring programme had existed for all, or even if co-operating teachers had a heightened awareness of the specific support needed by student teachers to navigate the process of TP (He & Levin, 2008). There is a clear need for teacher educators to be proactive and to ameliorate the sense of isolation experienced by certain student teachers by addressing the specific support needs of different students. While the programme seeks to enable student teachers to identify attributes associated with different stages of school development, isolation was still evident. Teacher educators need to recognise that every school is unique, with differing approaches and values and to make students aware that their experiences won't be uniform. Research has highlighted that recent emphases in teacher education have distracted teacher educators 'from the need to prepare teachers to negotiate the political terrain of teaching' (Gratch, 2001:122). For a complete representation of collaborative practices, critical reflection on schools as complex social and political entities is essential (Servage, 2008), as are seminars and other experiences that stress the political nature of schooling, as these will empower teachers (Merseth, et al., 2008). The introduction of a strong mentoring programme would support and

promote greater inclusion within the school community during TP and therefore, 'it is crucial that teacher educators participate fully at practice sites…and help experienced teachers become effective mentors' (Merseth et al., 2008:103). Within this structure a mentor could introduce student teachers to the everyday workings of school life and make them aware of relevant school information, which would aid their integration.

Students themselves were cognisant of the need for more specifically tailored support structures, of the type and level of supports that should be made available to student teachers and that the role of school during the teaching practicum is not being communicated adequately by their teacher education programme. What these findings affirm is that student teachers really don't appear to receive much academic support during TP, either from within the school or from their teacher education programme, unless they are involved with a mentor teacher. They also highlight that, teacher education doesn't focus purposefully enough on the elements of practice that are outside of its control, but which impact greatly on students' experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2005b; Earle, et al., 2001).

Currently the majority of student teachers are placed in schools for extended periods of teaching practice, but at no point before or during the practicum does the university programme engage in an appropriate, respectful dialogue with schools. Neither the role of the school in the practicum nor the university's expectations of the school in supporting student teachers in the learning process are communicated openly to the school and teachers. At a practical level, teacher education needs to re-examine its relationship with schools. It must engage with schools in defining more openly the role of both the school and cooperating teacher in TP and work with practising teachers as partners in the TP process, because 'systemic reform of teacher education requires quality partnering if we are to successfully produce quality teachers' (Earle et al., 2001:67; Byrne, 2002). Greater attention must be focused on providing teachers with a clear understanding of the programme objectives, types of teacher skills and aspects of teaching on which student teachers should focus during TP (Lampert, 2001).

This research also highlights that, very early in the teacher education process, it is possible for teacher educators to identify the differing needs of their student teachers. A knowledge and understanding of teacher profiles and a willingness to share information about the differing needs of students will enable practising teachers to better support

student teachers in their classroom. Accordingly, 'knowing their teacher candidates' could allow both teacher educators and co-operating teachers to better facilitate teacher candidates' development' (He & Levin, 2008:39).

There can be no doubt that the development of this type of an open and equal relationship between schools and the university would create a more beneficial situation for all student teachers in navigating both school structures and their role as a teacher. It is clear that to address the challenges of preparing effective teachers, schools and teacher education programmes must work together in partnership, and we must consider this relationship as a synergistic union rather than a dichotomy (Earle et al., 2001). This synergy would also help to address issues of divergence between the messages about teaching students receive on campus and those they experience in classroom.

> A general match between the beliefs of cooperating teachers and teacher education can better support the development of teacher candidates through the consistent message they receive from both their courses and their field experiences during the teacher preparation program (He & Levin, 2008:51).

Aside from how teacher education engages with schools at a practical level, the findings also raise issues about how student teachers are supported from a college perspective and also the responsibility that is given to teachers. There is a clear need for active academic advisors throughout the core curriculum, with both mentors in the school environment and a consistent advisor in the university environment as part of a programme offering more tailored support and learning opportunities (Kitchen, 2009).

> Teacher educators…need to consistently and effectively provide research-based support rather than leaving novices to find it on their own least we leave the success of new teachers – and their students – to trial and error (Winstead Fry, 2009:109).

The argument has been made that within a review of teacher education, programmes should be revised to incorporate lived and applied theory and changes to programmatic structure that are cognisant of all learners and assist student teachers in marrying their theoretical knowledge with their experiences in the classroom. At a practical level, this should also involve a shift in the roles of faculty, who as well as lecturing on their own areas of the programme would take up the role of academic advisors. Within this framework, core faculty would each be allocated a group of students at the beginning of their pre-service programme, whom they would mentor and act as academic advisors to

throughout their teacher education journey. These advisors would tutor their students for each element of the academic programme, which would provide the opportunity for tailoring each module to suit the individual requirements and learning styles of student teachers. This type of an integrated curriculum within the ITE will allow for the enrichment of the pre-service experience without "watering down" the curriculum (Earle, et al., 2001).

The results of this study highlighted that students were critical of the Department of Education and Professional Studies for not clearly highlighting how the various different areas of their pre-service programme were linked and married together to form the overall guiding philosophy of the programme. A further benefit of the academic advisor model is that it would allow for a cross-curricular understanding on the part of faculty of the different areas of the programme and create an opportunity to marry all modules more clearly within the philosophical underpinnings of the programme (Bartell, 2001). This will enable faculty to create a shared vision and clear understanding of the programme philosophy that permeates all aspects of the programme (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Research in the international context has highlighted that when 'faculty members discuss issues together, they learn from each other so that programs can be refined and inconsistencies reduced' (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008:81). This would also lessen the staff requirements within the tutorial system, as core faculty would themselves act as tutors for their own students at every stage of the programme.

Aside from the benefits already noted, this structure would allow for alternative modes of assessment, more inclusive of all learners. There would also be scope for the inclusion of a continuous assessment model, which is more accommodating of different types of learners and provides the opportunity for all aspects of student teachers' learning to be documented and go towards their final award (Gossman, 2008).

Within this structure it would be possible to include personal portfolios, where student teachers could document their own growth and development. This process could have an action research orientation, thus allowing students to utilise more personally appropriate forms of documentation as well as enabling them to live the methods of reflection espoused in their programme. This type of structure where students can examine their learning and reflect simultaneously provides a medium, which could

'travel with students across courses, into student teaching, and even form the basis for the final teaching statement/portfolio/philosophy that accompanies completion of many programs' (Olsen, 2008:37). These types of portfolios, learning autobiographies or personal teaching journals have been found to stimulate students interest in their learning and development, enhance their motivation and levels of personal confidence and also 'enrich their conceptions of a learning community' (Cole et al., 1998 cited by Lee, 2008:119). Additionally, they would also create a situation where student teachers could actively generate their own theory and would gain a better sense of how to link the theory learned in lectures with their own experiences. Other research studies have highlighted that 'this type of personal portfolio have been found to carry benefits like promoting autonomous learning, enhancing confidence, and helping students connect course content and teaching' (Lee, 2008:17). As such they are considered an influential instrument in preparing teachers who,

> Recognize the complexity of teaching, are thoughtful about their teaching practices, question their own assumptions and make informed decisions about the learning needs of their students (Schulz & Manduzuk, 2005:315).

Portfolios, in which students consider their own learning, would also provide the opportunity to give recognition to student teachers' engagement with teaching and learning outside of their programme, which impact on their development as teachers and should also be considered as part of their learning journey (Feiman-Nemster, 1983).

This transformative and differentiated model is about "personalising" teacher education. Rather than student teachers being passive receptors within a transmission model, this would make student teachers active agents in their own learning and development. It would give them professional autonomy and allow for teacher educators to respect their development over the course of their studies. This type of active learning, where student teachers track their own development is recognised as underlying the constructivist approach to teacher development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Within this, the advocated focus on profile would be two-dimensional. At one level teacher educators would be required to know the profile of their students and tailor their teaching towards all types of learners with a strong emphasis on modelling applied theory and a focus on outcomes rather than inputs. The second dimension involves student teachers themselves being active agents in their education, documenting their

own profile, knowing their own learning strengths and needs and assessing their own development and early professional development (EPD) needs (Day, 2004 & 2002; Olsen, 2008). This stance requires the student teachers themselves to:

> Take active responsibility for the goals to which they are committed…to determine their own agency through a critical and continual evaluation of the purposes, the consequences and the social context of their calling (Zeichner & Liston, 1996:11).

This will provide them with a basis for consideration of their learning as a continuum, something often discussed within educational circles, but rarely enacted (Huebner, 2009). In allowing students to be active agents in their own learning, teacher educators must be open to what Loughran and Russell (1997) termed "meeting students on their own terms".

> We share a view that our practices as teacher educators must acknowledge, develop and challenge the various perspectives that preservice teachers bring to the task of learning to teaching. We believe that experience precedes full understanding, so that part of meeting new teachers on their own terms involves showing them how experience extends into their understanding and enables them to use it to guide future teaching (1997:164).

This will enable student teachers to see their learning as a lifelong journey and provide them with the skills to continue this type of personal discovery and learning into their teaching career.

Just as within the planning and reflective process, workload was cited as a key factor in stopping students from theorising and it is clear that the educational objective of TP is being stunted by the current focus on written work in the grading of TP (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006; McCann et al., 2005). Students' focus on meeting the specifications of individual tutors is preventing them from fully concentrating on the ultimate aim of TP – to become competent practitioners who can utilise the knowledge gleaned from educational studies to benefit their teaching.

It is also naïve to expect that all teachers will begin their teaching career at the same stage of development. While there must be a clear level of competence to graduate from the programme, we have to show an understanding that some students will take longer to develop an awareness of the value of reflection and educational knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2001). This developmental process is personalised and relates to many

things and will therefore occur at a different rate for different students. This, as already discussed, highlights the need for a proper mentoring and induction programme to ensure all teachers actually reach their maximum level of development at this stage of their careers (NDP, 2004; Killeavy, 206). Within the proposed differentiated model, there would be greater scope to create a more equitable grading structure for TP, as a clear student teacher profile, to which both academic advisors and student teachers themselves have contributed from the outset of the programme, and which charts students' development through portfolios, would provide tutors with the opportunity to gain a more thorough understanding of their students' skills and development during TP. This, in addition to the current structure of critiquing student teachers' lesson plans and PLAs and observing their teaching, would provide a more holistic basis on which to assess students' teaching competence.

Considerations specific to the University of Limerick

The findings of this research study indicate that the concurrent teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick have succeeded in many ways. There is clear evidence of student teachers' growth and development over the course of their studies and that they do, although at varying levels, value the educational component of the programme. Two out of three student teachers at Year Four felt their pre-service programme had helped them to better understand their experiences on TP; therefore the impact of the programme cannot be in doubt. A number of context specific issues emerged from the findings however, which although not broadly applicable across the spectrum of teacher education, are worthy of discussion and merit consideration in any future revisions to the UL programmes.

Preparation for TP

Even at Year Four, 90% of student teachers felt their preparation for TP was rushed and stressful and wanted more time to be allocated to preparation for TP. It is noteworthy that those who didn't feel their preparation was rushed and stressful had higher QCAs. This reaffirms the argument presented earlier in this chapter, that certain students because of their educational history and existing learning styles can better access, and utilise the intended knowledge and skills provided in their pre-service programme, and are better equipped to work within the existent programme structure (Dembo, 2001). Of most significance however, is that clearly preparation for TP is seen as a distinct part of

programme and not as something that every aspect of the programme is encapsulating (Hobson, 2003; McNally et al., 1996; Young, 1998; Stones 1989).

It is the programme itself, the way it is structured and delivered that is creating the perception of TP and practical teaching as divorced from theory (Doyle & Carter, 2003; Stokking et al., 2003; Norris, 1994; Leinhardt et al., 1995; Young, 1990 & 1998; Wideen et al., 1998). This highlights the need to reconsider how preparation for TP and TP itself are presented within the programme and further emphasises the necessity to present educational theory in a way that it is seen as stemming from and inculcating practice (Korthagen et al, 2001; Long and Stuart, 2004; Copa, 1991; Ball, 1995). Clearly teacher educators must create learning opportunities within the programme whereby theory is espoused in a realistic and memorable way (Loughran et al., 2001).

Programme content

Qualitative data highlighted that students were critical that subject departments did not differentiate the programme specifically for teacher education students and a key finding of this research was that student teachers did not feel prepared to teach the second-level curriculum (Olsen, 2008; Grossman, 1990). Participants recommended that their subject content ought to command a greater proportion of their overall studies, and that content should mirror more closely the type and level of knowledge they would require for teaching. Elective subjects were more frequently mentioned as receiving less attention during their studies and being disconnected from second-level pedagogy and syllabi. Subject pedagogy was an aspect of the programme that commanded much attention and was consistently highlighted by student teachers as a very valuable aspect of their studies. This mirrors other findings, which have highlighted that student teachers experienced inadequate integration of course content (Earle et al., 2001), that they want to know more about pedagogy (Jedge & Taplin, 2000), and that pedagogy should be at the heart of any programme (Stones, 1989).

It emerged very strongly, that the programme should be re-oriented to ensure that greater emphasis is placed on learning how to teach subjects and not just learning subject matter. As ITE programmes come to be reviewed by the Teaching Council, teacher educators will have to demonstrate how the content of each programme meets the subject requirements as stated in the *Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009*, in which subject content must parallel and compliment the second-level syllabus

(2009:17). Therefore, a re-evaluation of the appropriateness of placing student teachers in general subject modules that are not differentiated for teacher education students and also the proportion of programme time that is allocated to both subject studies and pedagogy is timely, as clearly, knowing what to teach and also how to teach is important (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

The role of TP tutors

Student teachers valued tutors who gave them practical advice, were encouraging and supportive of them experimenting with their own teaching style and professional in their approach to communicating with students. Tutors received much censure for being overly critical, too focused on the minute detail of written work, not supporting experimentation with teaching style and giving little positive feedback (Killeavy, 2006). Tutors were also seen as unconnected with the reality of teaching due to the unrealistic expectations they had, particularly those without recent teaching experience (McNally et al., 2001). Student teachers observed that in the main, subject tutors did not place the same importance or emphasis on campus-based studies as educational personnel. This was also found to be the case with education tutors who were not EPS staff, as these tutors exhibited limited awareness of the programme philosophy and content and again placed little emphasis on linkage with campus based studies. This mirrors other research findings which revealed that supervisors from the teacher education institute made little reference to educational theory, thus impacting the student teachers' new found realisation regarding the relevance of theory in actual teaching situations (Tang, 2003).

The most prevalent theme that emanated from the qualitative findings was the differing standards and expectations of tutors. Students bemoaned what they saw as the lack of consistency between individual tutors and the wide variance in tutor expectations, both in terms of classroom practices, written work and protocol around TP visits.

These findings highlight a number of issues in relation to the selection, identity and role of TP supervisors. At a basic level, the inconsistency in the standards and expectations of tutors demonstrates that clearer and more transparent guidelines for all TP supervisors must be devised and that all tutors must adhere to these uniformly. The message about the connectivity of teaching practicum with campus-based aspects of the programme varies greatly between tutors both education and subject specific. Therefore, a basic awareness of the programme structure and content and its philosophical

underpinnings must be prerequisite for any person undertaking a TP tutoring position, to insure consistency in the message about teaching delivered by the college (Winstead Fry, 2009; Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2001).

TP tutors were found to be the second greatest influence on student teachers' practices after their pupils and many students cited that they taught in a particular way to meet the specifications of their tutor. We must consider how the grading of TP impacts on its educational objective and how the role of the tutor as an educational guide is circumvented by the fact that they are the determining factor in the level of award received for TP. If TP grading were revised, as advocated within the academic advisor / learning portfolio model, this would create a situation whereby tutors would no longer have to focus exclusively on acting as an expert judge and external critic. Rather they could focus on their role as a helper in enabling student teachers to meet the educational objective of TP. This would allow tutors to practice 'relational teacher development' which involves helping the student teacher to face problems, respecting and empathising with them, showing an understanding of their personal practical knowledge and being receptive to growing a relationship with their students (Kitchen, 2009:49).

The length and frequency of TP

Two out of three student teachers did not advocate any increase in the length of TP. Divergences according to gender were noted, as while half of females were agreeable with the idea of a longer stint of practical teaching, only a quarter of males were found to concur. The level of written work on TP was the only reason cited as to why student teachers did not want their TP to be extended (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006; Mc Cann et al., 2005). All respondents however, advocated greater frequency of exposure to the classroom and continuity of experience throughout their ITE. They believed the length of TP should be reflective of their level of development and should consider the physical and emotional impact of TP (Earle et al., 2001; Assuncao Flores, 2001). This resonates with other studies on the teaching practicum, which have documented 'the enormous social and emotional challenges…that occur when teacher candidates take charge of class' (Merseth et al., 2008:102).

Specifically at Year Four, all students wanted more time teaching as real teachers without the weight of assessment. The timing of TP vis-à-vis school terms and the double burden of TP and FYP was also an issue. The type of responsive teacher

education already advocated would provide an opportunity for teacher educators to consider these very real issues for student teachers and create a scenario where their experiences are more closely aligned with practising teachers (Monson et al., 1995; Forsyth & Abernathy, 1998).

> University policies regarding admissions standards, calendars, advising practices, workload allocations, program and course adoption practices and so forth, can serve to foster or constrain successful practices in teacher education. These policies need to be examined and changed, if necessary, to support our work in better ways (Bartell, 2001:193)

The workload factor

It consistently emerged, that the workload specified by the college took away from student teachers' learning on TP and that the expectations of the programme exceed the capacity of students from the point of time and energy. The level of written work on TP was cited as: preventing students from focusing on authentic critical incidences in their reflection; stopping them from theorising; hampering their integration and experience within the school and ultimately, it was the main reason why they didn't advocate longer periods of TP (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006; McCann et al., 2005).

Students are calling for their growing professionalism and experience to be recognised by the college with a reduction in requirements and greater freedom in the presentation of written reflections and plans. Teacher educators need to recognise this by allowing students greater freedom in how they structure their planning and reflection. As is reflective of international findings, a bridging of the gap between the requirements of planning and reflection advocated by the university and school must occur, so student teachers will see this as something they can feasibly continue (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008, He & Levin, 2008; Abernathy et al., 2001).

Conclusion

This discussion of the research findings has highlighted that while ITE prepares students to teach, it does little to prepare them to be teachers. The act of teaching is one thing, but being a teacher requires a whole other skill set aside from those needed to teach. Both revisions to the programme structure and content, and more structured mentor support in schools and on campus are needed so student teachers will view teacher education and the wider school community as entities they can reach out to for

appropriate support. These are also needed, to better prepare students for teaching, better equipped them to deal with aspects of the job outside of the classroom and to instil in students appropriate planning and reflective practices.

> The major concerns of existing programmes were inadequate integration of course content and teaching practice throughout the program, inconsistent fusing of the experiences of public school teachers with the methodological expertise of university personnel, and the compartmentalization of courses, resulting in unnecessary repetition, fragmented schooling, and inconsistent definitions of good teaching (Earle et al, 2001:60).

If we acknowledge that 'preservice teacher education is only a starting point in learning about teaching, not an end unto itself' (Loughran & Russell, 1997:164), and that 'teacher development is a journey' (Kagan, 1992:91), then it is important that we embed in student teachers, practices they can feasibly sustain throughout their career, which will encourage them to see their learning as a continuum and create a 3Is model encompassing initial, induction and in-career provisions to fully support teachers (NDP, 2004; Byrne, 2002).

> A well-crafted teacher education program can play a powerful role in helping aspiring teachers begin their careers with the skills and competencies to become successful teacher leaders or agents of change with progressive goals (Merseth et al., 2008:103).

Chapter Seven: Recommendations

Following from the data gathered, clear findings have emanated, which highlight that if teacher education is to be as effective as possible, it must be more responsive to the evidenced experiences, needs and preferences of its students and also to schools and the curriculum. As such, the following recommendations, which firstly address broader issues applicable across the spectrum of teacher education and then focus more specifically on the University of Limerick programmes, are presented.

Teaching and learning within teacher education needs to respond to the challenge of accommodating different learning preferences

The research has highlighted that some students do not have the perquisite skill set to enable them to internalise and personalise the knowledge presented during their teacher education programme. There is a definite student body who require greater assistance in marrying programme content with their own concepts and experiences, and who need a programmatic structure that is more attuned to their learning styles and preferences. Recognition of these levels of difference within the student body will result in an acknowledgement that a traditional literary measure of ability is only one of a range of assessment options available, and that widening the range of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment will result in greater opportunities for inclusion within the programme. Both teacher educators and the wider third-level community need to consider and explore the validity of other modes of teaching, learning and assessment practices in order to address the needs and preferences of all learners.

Teacher education must envision teacher learning as a continuum

The outcomes of ITE are not uniform for all students; on completion of their pre-service programme not all student teachers have fully developed both personally and professionally in their role as teachers. Yet once they have met minimum criteria for the award of the degree, they will embark on their careers as teachers. Teacher education should look beyond the immediate concerns of pre-service programmes and consider its role in support of teachers in schools, to ensure that teachers' personal and professional development continues beyond their ITE.

Teacher educators must allocate time and resources specifically for induction, early professional development, and renewal activities for new teachers as well as to develop

possibilities for continuous professional development experiences and graduate classes for experienced classroom teachers. It is believed that increased faculty involvement with and visibility in schools will serve to enhance the influence of teacher educators across all areas of education and support and promote opportunities for professional development and renewal for teacher educators.

Student teacher identity must be considered as a starting point for teacher education

It is evident from the research that knowledge of the profile of student teachers is very important. Teacher education should respond to evidenced teacher characteristics such as gender, learning styles and preferences and educational history, as these impact on students' experiences and progression within their programme. To facilitate this, teacher education programmes must gather up-to-date demographic information on their students at entry. It is recommended that this profile be augmented during the academic programme and reviewed pre-selection of TP placements.

While profiles should be generated for all ITE students, this process would be valuable in identifying the persistent percentage of students for whom the programme is not transformative. Early identification of these students would allow for the provision of additional and targeted support. In particular, these students should also be prioritised in the development of any systematic mentoring programme.

Further to this, a focus on how demographic characteristics relate to teacher knowledge, attitudes and practices might provide new insights into consistent issues related to student achievement and learning. In the longer term, this will help teacher educators to better prepare prospective teachers to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse pupil population in Ireland.

Having a clear understanding of the profile of intending teachers will also enable teacher educators to have informed discussions about what a realistic achievement and ability profile of student teachers should look like. This is particularly important in the current climate, given the multitude of societal needs with which teachers are expected to contend.

Programmatic structures and specifications must show an awareness of student teacher development

It is evident that student teachers themselves developed over the course of their studies, and that the level and type of engagement that student teachers required changed over the four years of their ITE. This development however, was not acknowledged in any way in terms of programme requirements and flexibility.

It is incumbent upon teacher education providers that they recognise student teachers' growing professionalism and accredit their maturation and development. The nature, purpose and format of programme requirements should be clearly identified and teacher educators must be realistic about student teachers' capacity, in terms of overall programme demands, particularly within the school environment. Flexibility should be afforded to student teachers as their ITE progresses, to develop a system of planning and reflective practices that: adequately meet the college's specifications; acknowledge individual learning preferences and preferred modes of expression; recognise student teachers' growth and development over time; enable students on TP to fully engage in school life; and can realistically sustain throughout their teaching careers.

The role of schools and practising teachers within the teacher education cycle must be more clearly defined and enacted

The schools in which students experience TP, the classes given to them, the opportunities to reflect and witnessed occurrences of other teachers reflecting as well as the school philosophy, ethos and culture, play a significant role in student teachers' learning and subsequent teaching practices. This impact that the school has on how student teachers develop must be more widely acknowledged and teacher education must engage in respectful dialogue with schools to enable the development of their role as partners in the TP process.

Clear communication with schools is needed so schools are aware of the expectations of teacher education providers during TP and to provide clarity as to what the role of the school, the co-operating teachers and the student teachers is during the practicum placement. Concomitantly, greater attention must be focused on providing teachers with a clear understanding of the programme objectives, types of teacher skills and aspects of teaching on which student teachers should focus during TP.

The relationship with schools should also be developed to enable teacher educators to become more involved in the life cycle of teaching within schools. As part of the reciprocity in teacher education, faculty could provide EPD for beginning teachers and CPD for more experienced staff. This would allow teacher education to play a role in supporting practising teachers in schools and provide an arena for teachers to truly consider and experience their learning as a continuum.

A strong mentoring element within pre-service programmes should be considered a key aspect of ITE

Student mentoring must become a core aspect of teacher education programmes. This should not be simply an outcome of TP, but a planned and scheduled activity within ITE. A system of mentors should to be established within schools, as part of the model of school / teacher education partnership already recommended and in recognition of the ad hoc role practising teachers already fulfil and the impact they have on student teachers. Although not all student teachers have the same support needs, a more structured and definite relationship with co-operating teachers would enrich the TP experience for all students.

Within each school placement, student teachers should have a school-based mentor. This relationship should be multi-purposeful, providing practical support and assistance, as well as a forum for student teachers to examine and develop their reflective practices. Mentoring relationships between student and experienced teachers that have a more specific reflective purpose will undoubtedly be beneficial for practising teachers also, as it will enable them to see the role that reflection could play in their everyday teaching, thus encouraging practices that many teachers appear to discontinue once in full-time teaching.

Coupled with this, if teachers were inducted into the ethos and philosophy of the programme as advocated in the previous recommendation, this should help to narrow the divergence in practices espoused by teachers and those advocated by the university. A strong mentoring support system within schools would also go some way towards addressing the isolation experienced by student teachers, as their mentor could introduce them to the everyday workings of school life, which would aid in their integration.

The overall coherence of the UL programme must be considered and re-conceptualised from a learner-centred, constructivist approach

The way the programme is presented to students doesn't actively assist them in realising the coherence within the programme or in bringing their different types of learning and experiences together in a way that facilitates the assimilation of theory and practice. This is because of the way educational theory is presented and the type of educational knowledge espoused. To make the programme more transformative for students, a number of changes are required.

At a basic level, if teacher education wants to address the issue of students' ability to understand and apply educational knowledge, educational knowledge must be presented in a way that it is seen as stemming from and embodying practice. Teacher educators must offer knowledge that is grounded in practice, which can be achieved by linking students' educational studies with their practical teaching experiences. This will create a situation whereby student teachers will be exposed to theory that offers practical support to their experiences, rather than theory, which is perceived as divorced from their reality of schools and teaching.

To enable students to refocus their view of educational theory as recommended above, teacher educators must themselves live the theory, model it in their practice, and expose student teachers to lived and applied theory within their campus-based studies. This is essential if we want teacher education students to view theory as stemming from practice and also because student teachers require solid examples of lived and applied theory in action on which to model their own strategies for integrating educational knowledge into their practical theories of teaching.

Within the suggested revisions outlined above, teacher educators should consider how they differentiate their own teaching, learning and assessment methods in light of the obvious differences in students' learning styles. This is necessary so that all student teachers experience a programmatic structure that is more attuned to their learning styles and preferences and so all learners can equally access the knowledge presented within the programme. Aside from differentiating their teaching so all learners are accommodated, the added value of lecturers prioritising the use of a variety of teaching and learning practices, is that it will provide student teachers with solid, real-life examples of inclusive teaching on which they can model their practices at second-level.

As part of a programme offering more tailored support and learning opportunities, there is a clear need for active academic advisors throughout the core curriculum, with both mentors in the school environment as already recommended, and a consistent advisor in the university environment. This academic advisor would work with the same group of students throughout their ITE and act as their tutor for all modules within the programme. Therefore they would transcend their own module parameters and could see teacher education from a programmatic / cross-curricular perspective, which would enable the hermeneutic philosophy which has already been articulated to be enacted.

Another key aspect of enabling teacher education students to personalise their teacher education is to build into the programme the capacity for student teachers to be active agents in their own learning and development. This will involve initiating a process whereby student teachers track their own learning and develop an awareness of their own profile as student teachers. This would allow them to set their own individualised targets for teaching and consider their EPD needs in school. Through development of their own personal portfolio they will be more aware of their own learning as teachers. The portfolio will also provide a realistic and personalised tool for real reflection, as well as a relevant medium by which to integrate their learning in their academic studies and in schools.

This focus on their development through continuous portfolio would be promoted and made possible through the academic advisor structure and changes in relation to applied theoretical knowledge already advocated. The portfolio will also provide a personalised reflective tool to assist student teachers in realising how educational theory is practically applicable to them and over time would enable student teachers to appreciate their role as generators of theory. A continuous focus on individual portfolios will also help to instil the concept of genuine self-inquiry, a key tenet of reflective practice. If this is embedded within ITE there is a greater likelihood that student teachers will continue this into full-time teaching and that reflective practices will be a core aspect of their teaching persona. Such a type of portfolio would begin in year one of ITE and could continue right throughout their teaching lives, thus providing a path for teachers to examine their learning as a continuum throughout their professional career.

The subject specific component of the UL programme must focus more purposely on what teachers need to know to teach in second-level classrooms

While it is recognised that student teachers may not possess the relevant level of classroom experience to fully appreciate the extended areas covered as part of their subject knowledge courses, the apparent lack of focus on second-level teaching in terms of pedagogy and content relevance merits examination.

Clearly there is a disconnect between the type of subject knowledge that student teachers' experience within their pre-service programme and the subject knowledge base they require to teach at second-level. A review of the appropriateness of the current subject specific modules is necessary to examine if these adequately meet the needs of intending teachers. Teacher educators must ensure that subject modules are relevant to student teachers and that the type and level of subject knowledge offered provides an adequate foundation to teach the relevant second-level syllabi.

Refocus the role of the TP tutor as an educational mentor

Greater clarity is needed around the role of the TP tutor within the teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick, with more definitive and clear guidelines for supervision, to which all tutors must adhere. Teacher education must be realistic about student teachers' capabilities within the school. Tutors should not conflate the requirements in relation to planning and reflection beyond what is necessary and recognise student difference by affording student teachers the freedom to use a variety of modes of expression to satisfy the university's requirements. It is necessary that these changes are enacted to ensure that students' experiences are more uniform, to acknowledge student difference and maturation and to negate the evidenced difference in the standards and expectations of tutors, which serve only to compound students' negative perceptions of ITE.

Accordingly, all tutors irrespective of their subject specialism must have a clear knowledge and understanding of the programme's educational objectives and philosophy. They must also be aware that they need to facilitate students in linking their practical experiences with their learning on campus so a consistent message about teaching emanates from college personnel.

Revise the current TP component to provide greater frequency of exposure to classroom experiences throughout the UL programme

Episodes of practical teaching experience should be more prevalent throughout ITE, with greater frequency of exposure to classroom and continuity of experience throughout the programme offered by the University of Limerick. A more regular and consistent transition from campus-based studies to classroom experience is necessary to continually reaffirm the link between theory and practice. Also, the frequency and length of TP should be considered vis-à-vis student teachers' levels of development, with the length and frequency of TP increasing incrementally. This will also allow student teachers to see that their growing professionalism and maturation is acknowledged and accommodated by their programme, which will add to their feelings of involvement in their own learning.

Selection of schools for TP should not be haphazard, but should be made in consultation with academic advisors, to ensure that each student teacher is placed in a school that can provide the best support and experience for that student. The student profile should be reviewed pre-selection of TP placements to enable this level of student facilitation.

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Appendix A Recommendation of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education

The Advisory Group Recommends that:

- Induction programmes be provided for all beginning teachers
- Induction year be seen as part of a continuum of the first five years of the beginning teacher
- A designed process of partnership between school mentors, teacher education departments and the Teaching Council be put in place to organise, manage and mentor the inductee teacher
- Agreement be reached between education partnership, the Teaching Council, and the teaching profession concerning the maximum number of hours per week that the inductee may teach
- Portfolio exercises be used in the induction programme as a means of extending the reflective practice model
- Teacher education departments engage in research projects with inductee teachers to more accurately assess their needs
- Specific continuous professional development programmes be introduced leading to a masters degree for the beginning teacher
- Induction programmes be suitably flexible to allow for a concentration on the individual school where the inductee is in post
- Induction programmes seek to develop critical levels of personal awareness among beginning teachers
- Assessment be supported as a key competence over the period of the initial programme

Recommendation of the Advisory Group on Post Primary Teacher Education on Induction: **Source** ***The Report of the Advisory Group on Post Primary Teacher Education*** **(2002:84).**

Appendix B Structure of concurrent teacher education programmes at the University of Limerick

Programme Outline

LM094 - Bachelor of Technology (Education) in Materials and Construction Technology

Year 1	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4001	Introduction to Teaching	EN4002	Introduction to Primary Education	
WT4201	Wood Technology 1	WT4302	Wood Technology 2	
PN4001	Technical Graphics 1	PN4002	Technical Graphics 2	
PN4101	Intro to Materials Processing (Ed)	PN4102	Process Technology 1 (Metal)	
MA4701	Technological Maths 1	MT4002	Materials 1	
IE4771	Manufacturing Integration	WT4102	Wood Science 1	

Year 2	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4003	Planning and Management of Learning	EN4004	Introduction to Reflective Practice	
WT4103	Wood Technology & Design 1	WT4004	Wood Technology & Design 2	
PN4003	Technical Graphics & 2D CAD	EY4104	Subject Pedagogics 1	
ET4003	Electro Technology (Ed)	EN4014	Technology and Society	
WT4603	Wood Processing Safety & Practice	TP4004	Teaching Practice 1	
PD4024	Design for Environmental			

Year 3	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4005	History of Education	EN4006	Curriculum Studies	
WT4005	Architectural Technology: Heritage & Design	WT4006	Architectural Technology: Services & Control Technologies	
WT4205	Architectural Technology: The Built Environment	WT4106	Architectural Technology: Materials Technology & Design	
PN4005	Engineering Design Graphics 1	PN4006	Engineering Design Graphics 2	
MT4905	Materials Technology 4	ET4006	Electronics Ed	
WT4503	Structural Mechanics	EY4106	Subject Pedagogics 2	

Year 4	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4007	Studying School Organisation	EN4008	Teacher as Professional	
TP4007	Teaching Practice 2	PN4208	Engineering Design Graphics 3	
WT4917	Final Year Project 1	EN4108	Diversity & Equality in Education	
		WT4008	Safety in Technology Classrooms	
		WT4938	Final Year Project 2	

Programme Outline

LM092 - Bachelor of Science (Education) in Biological Sciences with Physics or Chemistry

Year 1	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4001	Introduction to Teaching	EN4002	Intro to Principles and Practice of P.E.	
BY4001	Biology 1	BY4002	Biology 2	
CH4701	General Chemistry 1	CH4152	Organic Chemistry 1	
PH4101	Physics (Mechanics/Heat)	PH4202	Physics 4 (Sound and Light)	
MA4601	Science Maths 1	MA4602	Science Maths 2	
CS4911	Introduction to Information Technology	CH4252	Inorganic Chemistry 1B	
EN4021	Life Skills (Optional) Audit			

Year 2	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4003	The Planning and Mgt of Classroom Learning	TP4004	Teaching Practice (6 weeks)/6crs	
BY4013	General Microbiology	EN4004	Introduction to Reflective Practice	
BY4003	Diversity of Organisms	EY4054	Subject Pedagogics 1 (Science)	
BY4215	Soil Science	HC4304	Horticulture 1	
SE4004	Science (Education)			
Students to Choose Chemistry or Physics Option				
	Chemistry Option			
PH4301	Physics 2 (Electricity and Magnetism)	CH4153	Organic Chemistry 2B	
	Physics Option			
PH4301	Physics 2 (Electricity and Magnetism)	PH4401	Physics 3 (Modern Physics)	

Year 3	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4005	Education and Society in Ireland	EN4006	Curriculum Studies	
BY4205	Agriculture 1	EY4056	Subject Pedagogics 2 (Science)	
BY4005	Vertebrate Structure and Function	BY4104	Ecology 1	
BY4505	Pollution Biology	BY4006	General Biochemistry	
HC4305	Land and Landscape Management			
	Chemistry Option		Chemistry Option	
CH4253	Inorganic Chemistry 2B	CH4354	Analytical Chemistry for Environment	
		CH4054	Introductory Physical Chemistry	
	Physics Option		Physics Option	
PH4403	Quantum Mechanics	PH4404	Physics 10	
		PH4302	Physics 5 (A.C. circuits)	

Year 4	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
TP4007	Teaching Practice 2 (10 weeks)/12crs	EN4008	Teachers as Professional	
EN4007	Studying School Organisation	BY4008	Genetic and Molecular Biology	
EJ4207	Project 1	BY4208	Agriculture 2	
		BY4018	Plant and Animal Physiology	
		EJ4208	Project 2/6crs	
			Chemistry Option	
		CH4554	Environmental Chemistry	
			Physics Option	
		MA4604	Science Maths 4	

Programme Outline

LM094 - Bachelor of Technology (Education) in Materials and Construction Technology

Year 1	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4001	Introduction to Teaching	EN4002	Introduction to Primary Education	
WT4201	Wood Technology 1	WT4302	Wood Technology 2	
PN4001	Technical Graphics 1	PN4002	Technical Graphics 2	
PN4101	Intro to Materials Processing (Ed)	PN4102	Process Technology 1 (Metal)	
MA4701	Technological Maths 1	MT4002	Materials 1	
IE4771	Manufacturing Integration	WT4102	Wood Science 1	

Year 2	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4003	Planning and Management of Learning	EN4004	Introduction to Reflective Practice	
WT4103	Wood Technology & Design 1	WT4004	Wood Technology & Design 2	
PN4003	Technical Graphics & 2D CAD	EY4104	Subject Pedagogics 1	
ET4003	Electro Technology (Ed)	EN4014	Technology and Society	
WT4603	Wood Processing Safety & Practice	TP4004	Teaching Practice 1	
PD4024	Design for Environmental Sustainability			

Year 3	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4005	History of Education	EN4006	Curriculum Studies	
WT4005	Architectural Technology: Heritage & Design	WT4006	Architectural Technology: Services & Control Technologies	
WT4205	Architectural Technology: The Built Environment	WT4106	Architectural Technology: Materials Technology & Design	
PN4005	Engineering Design Graphics 1	PN4006	Engineering Design Graphics 2	
MT4905	Materials Technology 4	ET4006	Electronics Ed	
WT4503	Structural Mechanics	EY4106	Subject Pedagogics 2	

Year 4	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
EN4007	Studying School Organisation	EN4008	Teacher as Professional	
TP4007	Teaching Practice 2	PN4208	Engineering Design Graphics 3	
WT4917	Final Year Project 1	EN4108	Diversity & Equality in Education	
		WT4008	Safety in Technology Classrooms	
		WT4938	Final Year Project 2	

Programme Outline

LM096 - Bachelor of Science (Education) in

Physics and Chemistry

Year 1	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
MA4601	Science Mathematics 1	MA4602	Science Mathematics 2	
CH4701	General Chemistry A	CH4152	Organic Chemistry 1B	
PH4511	Introduction to Physics	PH4202	Physics 4 (Sound/Light)	
PH4101	Physics 1 (Mechanics/Heat)	CH4252	Inorganic Chemistry 1B	
BY4001	Biology 1	BY4002	Biology 2	
EN4001	Introduction to Teaching	EN4002	Primary Education	

Year 2	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
MA4613	Mathematics for Physics 1	TP4004	Teaching Practice	
CH4153	Organic Chemistry 2B	EY4054	Subject Pedagogics 1	
PH4301	Electricity and Magnetism 1	EN4004	Reflective Practice	
PH4401	Modern Physics	SE4004	Science Education	
BY4013	General Microbiology			
EN4003	The Planning and Management of Classroom Learning			

Year 3	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
PH4403	Quantum Physics	PH4404	Space and Time	
CH4253	Inorganic Chemistry 2B	CH4054	Introduction to Physical Chemistry	
PH4103	Mechanics	MA4604	Science Maths 4	
PH4204	Applied Optics 1	CH4354	Analytical Chemistry	
BC4903	Biochemistry 1	EN4006	Curriculum Studies	
EN4005	Education and Society in Ireland	EY4056	Subject Pedagogics 2	

Year 4	Semester 1	Semester 2		Summer
TP4007	Teaching Practice	EN4008	Teacher as Professional	
SE4007	Project 1	CH4554	Environmental Chemistry	
EN4007	Studying School Organisation	CH4255	Bioinorganic Chemistry	
		PH4304	Electricity and Magnetism 2	
		SE4008	Project 2	

LM090 Bachelor of Science in Physical Education

Programme Outline for Year 1

	Semester 1		Semester 2
PY4054	Applied Studies in Outdoor Adventure Education	PY4022	Physiology and Anatomy
PY4031	Foundation of Teaching and Learning Physical Education	PY4032	Applied Studies in Games/Gym
PY4041	Applied Studies in Health Related Activity/Aquatics	SS4102	Psychological Foundations of Sport and Exercise
EN4001	Introduction to Teaching	EN4002	Introduction to Principles and Practice of Primary Education
	Elective Option		Elective Option
	Elective Option		Elective Option

Programme Outline for Year 2

	Semester 1		Semester 2
PY4038	Qualitative Biomechanics	PY4011	Physical Education Curriculum and Assessment
PY4043	Applied Studies in Athletics/Aquatics	PY4064	Teaching and Learning for Individuals in Physical Education
PY4063	Applied Studies in Dance/Gym	TP4004	Teaching Practice
EN4003	The Planning and Management of Clasroom Learning	EN4004	Introduction to Reflective Practice
	Elective Option	EY4034	Subject Pedagogics 1
	Elective Option		Elective Option

Programme Outline for Year 3

	Semester 1		Semester 2
PY4045	Applied Studies in Dance/Games	SS4103	Psychology of Movement: Development from Infancy to Adolescent
PY4055	Sociological Concepts of Teaching and Learning in Physical Education	PY4026	Youth Sport and Policy
PY4065	Integrated and Inclusive Physical Education	EJ4106	Project 1
EN4005	Education and Society in Ireland	EN4006	Curriculum Studies
	Elective Option	EY4036	Subject Pedagogics 2
	Elective Option		Elective Option

Programme Outline for Year 4

	Semester 1		Semester 2
TP4007	Teaching Practice 2	PY4053	Philosophy and Aesthetics in Physical Education
EN4007	Studying School Organisation	PY4048	Pedagogy, Exercise and Children's Health
EJ4107	Project 2	PY4058	Applied Studies in Athletics/Outdoor Adventure Education
		EN4008	Teachers as Professionals
			Elective Option
			Elective Option

Appendix C Original student teacher questionnaire

Student Teacher Questionnaire

Please tick ✔ the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Course of Study:

Materials & Construction Technology ☐ Physical Education ☐

Materials & Engineering Technology ☐ Science Education ☐

3. Before Teaching Practice
(Please circle the appropriate response)
SA = strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Unsure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

(a) The preparatory period before TP was rushed and stressful	SA	A	U	D	SD
(b) I would have preferred a longer preparatory period before TP	SA	A	U	D	SD
(c) I felt adequately prepared for TP	SA	A	U	D	SD

4. Within the University Context

(a) I found the pre-T.P. lectures helpful	SA	A	U	D	SD
(b) I found the pre-T.P. tutorials helpful	SA	A	U	D	SD

5. During TP

(a) I found lesson plans useful and of benefit to me during T.P.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(b) Post Lesson Appraisals helped me in my planning for subsequent lessons	SA	A	U	D	SD
(c) Weekly Appraisals formed part of my professional development and planning while on T.P.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(d) I was confident that I understood the purpose of Post Lesson Appraisals	SA	A	U	D	SD
(e) I could not see the point of Weekly Appraisals	SA	A	U	D	SD

(f) I was aware of the importance of a lesson plan	SA	A	U	D	SD
(g) Post Lesson Appraisals were written mainly to keep my University Tutors happy	SA	A	U	D	SD
(h) Post Lesson Appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching	SA	A	U	D	SD
(i) Writing Post Lesson Appraisals enabled me to make decisions about my planning and teaching	SA	A	U	D	SD
(j) My Post Lesson Appraisals were mechanistic and written to a formula	SA	A	U	D	SD
(k) Lesson plans are of no real use and are merely a waste of paper	SA	A	U	D	SD

Further comments

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(For questions 6 – 11, please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

6. Within the school, did you feel part of the school community?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Further comments

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7. Within the School

(a) Were you given adequate time to write your Post Lesson Appraisals?

Yes ☐ No ☐

(b) Had you access to a quiet place? Yes ☐ No ☐

(c) Were the teachers in your T.P. school supportive of your reflective practice?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Further comments

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8. Which of the following best describes what you think of reflection?

Very Useful ☐ Useful Sometimes ☐ Of no use at all ☐

9. In the School during T.P. how did you feel?

Isolated and working alone ☐ Part of the wider teaching community ☐

Further comments

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10. At the beginning of T.P. with whom did you identify more?

The Pupils ☐ The Teachers ☐ Neither ☐

11. Teaching Approaches
(Please circle the appropriate response)

SA = strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Unsure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

(a) My co-operating teacher strongly influenced my teaching	SA	A	U	D	SD
(b) The pupils in my classes most influenced my teaching approaches	SA	A	U	D	SD
(c) My University tutor strongly influenced my choice of teaching approaches	SA	A	U	D	SD

12. Student Teacher Concerns

(a) What were you most concerned about when you started T.P.?
(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

Maintaining discipline	☐
My subject knowledge	☐
Being accepted as a teacher	☐
My T.P. grade	☐

Further comments

(b) Which of the following were you most concerned about during TP?

(Rate it order of importance, 1= very concerned, 7= of no real concern to you)

(Please circle the appropriate number)

Being able to plan and evaluate your lessons	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Managing your class / classes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Having a good relationship with your co-operating teacher/s	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Working with others in the profession	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being a credible teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Pleasing your university tutor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Having effective discipline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

(c) At the end of T.P. had your concerns altered at all? Yes ☐ No ☐

Further comments

13. Co-operating Teacher (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

(a) Did you find your co-operating teacher helpful? Yes ☐ No ☐

Further comments

(b) Do you feel that your co-operating teacher influenced you in any way? Yes ☐

No ☐

Please explain

(c) Did your Co-operating teacher stimulate you to think more deeply about your teaching? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please explain

14. Educational Theory (Please circle the appropriate response)

SA = strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Unsure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

(a) I found my knowledge of educational theory was useful

In my planning before TP	SA	A	U	D	SD
In my reflection during TP	SA	A	U	D	SD
In my reflection after TP	SA	A	U	D	SD

(b) I felt that my theoretical knowledge was inadequate

For my planning before TP	SA	A	U	D	SD
For my reflection during TP	SA	A	U	D	SD
For my reflection after TP	SA	A	U	D	SD

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

15. Would you have liked T.P. to have been longer? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please explain

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16. Respond to each of the following statements using the abbreviations given:

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

Even before teaching practice, I found educational studies of little relevance to me as a student teacher. ☐

I tried to make use of the educational studies we did in college, but on the whole I found it was irrelevant to me on teaching practice. ☐

The educational studies that I did in college before T.P. were useful to me sometimes and I did use them, but they didn't always give me the answers to the problems I encountered everyday in my classroom. ☐

The things I had studied in college, about education and teaching prior to T.P. helped me to think through issues encountered during T.P. ☐

My education studies helped me to understand my planning and my classroom experience ☐

17. Of the areas of education that you studied at University before T.P. which did you find worthwhile/useful to you during T.P.?

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box/boxes)

Theory of Motivation	☐	Classroom Management	☐	Learning Styles	☐
Reflective Practice	☐	Discipline	☐	Child Development	☐
Problem Analysis	☐	Using Computers/Video	☐	Pastoral Care	☐
Microteaching	☐	Lesson Presentation Skills	☐	Self-evaluation	☐
Lesson Planning	☐	Assessment of Student Learning	☐	Classroom Climate	☐
Curriculum Evaluation	☐	Student–Teacher Interaction	☐	Using Group Work	☐
Resource Preparation	☐	Using Visual Aids	☐	Questioning Skills	☐

Please comment

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18. Overall Experiences (Please circle the appropriate response)

On the whole I managed well	SA	A	U	D	SD
I was left to my own devices	SA	A	U	D	SD
I felt totally unprepared for the reality of the classroom	SA	A	U	D	SD
I found teaching to be a personally rewarding experience	SA	A	U	D	SD
The university programme helps me understand my teaching practice experience better	SA	A	U	D	SD
I experienced difficulties with classroom management	SA	A	U	D	SD
I found dealing with pupils from deprived backgrounds difficult	SA	A	U	D	SD
I felt unprepared to deal with mixed ability classes	SA	A	U	D	SD
I felt need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming	SA	A	U	D	SD
I experienced difficulties dealing with parents	SA	A	U	D	SD
I was unsure how to accommodate students with special needs / learning disabilities	SA	A	U	D	SD
I experienced difficulties dealing with other members of staff	SA	A	U	D	SD
I experienced difficulties associated with my classroom teaching	SA	A	U	D	SD
The school Principal was helpful to me personally	SA	A	U	D	SD
The school Principal was helpful with regard to my classroom teaching	SA	A	U	D	SD

19. Do you feel the same way now about teaching as you did before TP?

Please explain

How do you feel as a student teacher that Teaching Practice / Teacher Education has impacted on you?

Thank-you for your co-operation.
It is greatly appreciated.

Appendix D Revised student teacher questionnaire

Student Teacher Questionnaire

Please tick ✔ the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Course of Study:

Materials & Construction Technology ☐ Physical Education ☐

Materials & Engineering Technology ☐ Science Education ☐

3. Before Teaching Practice *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) The preparatory period before TP was rushed and stressful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) I would have preferred a longer preparatory period before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) I felt adequately prepared for TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

4. Within the University Context

(a) I found the pre-TP lectures helpful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) I found the pre-TP tutorials helpful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

5. During TP

(a) I found lesson plans useful and of benefit to me during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) Post Lesson Appraisals helped me in my planning for subsequent lessons	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) Weekly Appraisals formed part of my professional development and planning while on TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(d) I was confident that I understood the purpose of Post Lesson Appraisals	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(e) I could not see the point of Weekly Appraisals	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(f) I was aware of the importance of a lesson plan	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

(g) Post Lesson Appraisals were written mainly to keep my University Tutors happy	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(h) Post Lesson Appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(i) Writing Post Lesson Appraisals enabled me to make decisions about my planning and teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(j) My Post Lesson Appraisals were mechanistic and written to a formula	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(k) Lesson plans are of no real use and are merely a waste of paper	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

Further comments

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(For questions 6 – 11, please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

6. Within the school, did you feel part of the school community? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

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7. Within the School

(a) Were you given adequate time to write your Post Lesson Appraisals? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

(b) Had you access to a quiet place? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

(c) Were the teachers in your T.P. school supportive of your reflective practice? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

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8. Which of the following best describes what you think of reflection?

Very Useful ☐ Useful Sometimes ☐ Of no use at all ☐

9. In the School during T.P. how did you feel?

Isolated and working alone ☐ Part of the wider teaching community ☐

Further comments

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10. At the beginning of T.P. with whom did you identify more?

The Pupils ☐ The Teachers ☐ Both ☐ Neither ☐

11. Teaching Approaches *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) My co-operating teacher strongly influenced my teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) The pupils in my classes most influenced my teaching approaches	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) My University tutor strongly influenced my choice of teaching approaches	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

12. Student Teacher Concerns

(a) What were you most concerned about when you started TP?
(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)

Maintaining discipline ☐
My subject knowledge ☐
Being accepted as a teacher ☐
My TP grade ☐

Further comments

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(b) Which of the following were you most concerned about during T.P.?

(Rate it order of importance, 1= very concerned, 7= of no real concern to you)
(Please use each number in the grading scale only once)

(Please circle the appropriate number)

Being able to plan and evaluate your lessons	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Managing your class / classes	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Having a good relationship with your co-operating teacher/s	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Working with others in the profession	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Being a credible teacher	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Pleasing your university tutor	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Having effective discipline	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*

(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)

(c) At the end of T.P. had your concerns altered at all? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

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13. Co-operating Teacher ***(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)***

(a) Did you find your co-operating teacher helpful? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

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(b) Do you feel that your co-operating teacher influenced you in any way? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Please explain

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(c) Did your Co-operating teacher stimulate you to think more deeply about your teaching?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please explain

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14. Educational Theory ***(Please circle the appropriate response)***

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) I found my knowledge of educational theory was useful

In my planning before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
In my reflection during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
In my reflection after TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

(b) I felt that my theoretical knowledge was inadequate

For my planning before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
For my reflection during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
For my reflection after TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

15. Would you have liked T.P. to have been longer? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Please explain

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16. Respond to each of the following statements using the abbreviations given:

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

Even before teaching practice, I found educational studies of little relevance to me as a student teacher. ☐

I tried to make use of the educational studies we did in college, but on the whole I found it was irrelevant to me on teaching practice. ☐

The educational studies that I did in college before T.P. were useful to me sometimes and I did use them, but they didn't always give me the answers to the problems I encountered everyday in my classroom. ☐

The things I had studied in college, about education and teaching prior to T.P. helped me to think through issues encountered during TP. ☐

My education studies helped me to understand my planning and my classroom experience. ☐

17. Of the areas of education that you studied at University before T.P. which did you find worthwhile/useful to you during T.P.?

(Please tick ✔the appropriate box/boxes)

Theory of Motivation	☐	Classroom Management	☐	Learning Styles	☐
Reflective Practice	☐	Discipline	☐	Child Development	☐
Problem Analysis	☐	Using Computers/Video	☐	Pastoral Care	☐
Microteaching	☐	Lesson Presentation Skills	☐	Self-evaluation	☐
Lesson Planning	☐	Assessment of Student Learning	☐	Classroom Climate	☐
Curriculum Evaluation	☐	Student–Teacher Interaction	☐	Using Group Work	☐
Resource Preparation	☐	Using Visual Aids	☐	Questioning Skills	☐
	☐	Knowledge of Change in Education	☐		

Please comment

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18. Overall Experiences *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

On the whole I managed well	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I was left to my own devices	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt totally unprepared for the reality of the classroom	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I found teaching to be a personally rewarding experience	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The university programme helps me understand my teaching practice experience better	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties with classroom management	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I found dealing with pupils from deprived backgrounds difficult	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt unprepared to deal with mixed ability classes	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I was unsure how to accommodate students with special needs / learning disabilities	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties dealing with parents	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties dealing with other members of staff	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

I experienced difficulties associated with my classroom teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The school Principal was helpful to me personally	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The school Principal was helpful with regard to my classroom teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

19. Do you feel the same way now about teaching as you did before TP?

Please explain

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How do you feel as a student teacher that Teaching Practice / Teacher Education has impacted on you?

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Thank-you for your co-operation.
It is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to make any further comments about any aspects of your Teacher Education Programme / Teaching Practice, please feel free to do so in the space provided.

Appendix E Amended student teacher questionnaire

Student Teacher Questionnaire

Please tick ✔ the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

2. (a) Course of Study:

Materials & Construction Technology ☐ Physical Education ☐

Materials & Engineering Technology ☐ Science Education ☐

2. (b) Teaching Practice School:

(i) What type of school did you attend on teaching practice?

Secondary ☐ Vocational School/Community College ☐

Comprehensive School ☐ Community Schools ☐

(ii) Was your teaching practice school designated disadvantaged? *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐

3. Before Teaching Practice *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) The preparatory period before TP was rushed and stressful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) I would have preferred a longer preparatory period before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) I felt adequately prepared for TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

4. Within the University Context

(a) I found the pre-TP lectures helpful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) I found the pre-TP tutorials helpful	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

5. During TP

(a) I found lesson plans useful and of benefit to me during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

(b) Post Lesson Appraisals helped me in my planning for subsequent lessons	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) Weekly Appraisals formed part of my professional development and planning while on TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(d) I was confident that I understood the purpose of Post Lesson Appraisals	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(e) I could not see the point of Weekly Appraisals	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(f) I was aware of the importance of a lesson plan	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(g) Post Lesson Appraisals were written mainly to keep my University Tutors happy	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(h) Post Lesson Appraisals made me think in greater detail about my teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(i) Writing Post Lesson Appraisals enabled me to make decisions about my planning and teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(j) My Post Lesson Appraisals were mechanistic and written to a formula	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(k) Lesson plans are of no real use and are merely a waste of paper	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

Further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(For questions 6 – 11, please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

6. Within the school, did you feel part of the school community? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Within the School

(a) Were you given adequate time to write your Post Lesson Appraisals? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

(b) Had you access to a quiet place? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

(c) Were the teachers in your T.P. school supportive of your reflective practice? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Which of the following best describes what you think of reflection?

Very Useful ☐ Useful Sometimes ☐ Of no use at all ☐

9. In the School during T.P. how did you feel?

Isolated and working alone ☐ Part of the wider teaching community ☐

Further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. At the beginning of T.P. with whom did you identify more?

The Pupils ☐ The Teachers ☐ Both ☐ Neither ☐

11. Teaching Approaches *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) My co-operating teacher strongly influenced my teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(b) The pupils in my classes most influenced my teaching approaches	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
(c) My University tutor strongly influenced my choice of teaching approaches	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

12. Student Teacher Concerns

(a) What were you most concerned about when you started TP?
(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)

Maintaining discipline	☐
My subject knowledge	☐
Being accepted as a teacher	☐
My TP grade	☐

Further comments

(b) Which of the following were you most concerned about during T.P.?

(Rate it order of importance, 1= very concerned, 7= of no real concern to you)
(Please use each number in the grading scale only once)

(Please circle the appropriate number)

Being able to plan and evaluate your lessons	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Managing your class / classes	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Having a good relationship with your co-operating teacher/s	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Working with others in the profession	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Being a credible teacher	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Pleasing your university tutor	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Having effective discipline	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*

(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)

(c) At the end of T.P. had your concerns altered at all? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

13. Co-operating Teacher ***(Please tick ✔the appropriate box)***

(a) Did you find your co-operating teacher helpful? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

(b) Do you feel that your co-operating teacher influenced you in any way? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Please explain

_____

_____

_____

(c) Did your Co-operating teacher stimulate you to think more deeply about your teaching?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Educational Theory ***(Please circle the appropriate response)***

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

(a) I found my knowledge of educational theory was useful

In my planning before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
In my reflection during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
In my reflection after TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

(b) I felt that my theoretical knowledge was inadequate

For my planning before TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
For my reflection during TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
For my reflection after TP	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

A = Always; O = Often; S = Sometimes; N = Never (Please circle the appropriate response)

(c) How often did your tutor/s refer to campus based aspects of your programme during teaching practice visits?	A	O	S	N

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box)

15. Would you have liked TP to have been longer? *Yes* ☐

No ☐

Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Respond to each of the following statements using the abbreviations given:

SA = strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **U** = Unsure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

Even before teaching practice, I found educational studies of little relevance to me as a student teacher. ☐

I tried to make use of the educational studies we did in college, but on the whole I found it was irrelevant to me on teaching practice. ☐

The educational studies that I did in college before T.P. were useful to me sometimes and I did use them, but they didn't always give me the answers to the problems I encountered everyday in my classroom. ☐

The things I had studied in college, about education and teaching prior to T.P. helped me to think through issues encountered during TP. ☐

My education studies helped me to understand my planning and my classroom experience. ☐

17. Of the areas of education that you studied at University before T.P. which did you find worthwhile/useful to you during T.P.?

(Please tick ✔ the appropriate box/boxes)

Theory of Motivation	☐	Classroom Management	☐	Learning Styles	☐
Reflective Practice	☐	Discipline	☐	Child Development	☐
Problem Analysis	☐	Using Computers/Video	☐	Pastoral Care	☐
Microteaching	☐	Lesson Presentation Skills	☐	Self-evaluation	☐
Lesson Planning	☐	Assessment of Student Learning	☐	Classroom Climate	☐
Curriculum Evaluation	☐	Student–Teacher Interaction	☐	Using Group Work	☐
Resource Preparation	☐	Using Visual Aids	☐	Questioning Skills	☐
		Knowledge of Change in Education	☐		

Please comment

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Overall Experiences *(Please circle the appropriate response)*

On the whole I managed well	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I was left to my own devices	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt totally unprepared for the reality of the classroom	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I found teaching to be a personally rewarding experience	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The university programme helps me understand my teaching practice experience better	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties with classroom management	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I found dealing with pupils from deprived backgrounds difficult	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt unprepared to deal with mixed ability classes	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I felt need for support and guidance that was not forthcoming	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I was unsure how to accommodate students with special needs / learning disabilities	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties dealing with parents	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties dealing with other members of staff	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
I experienced difficulties associated with my classroom teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The school Principal was helpful to me personally	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
The school Principal was helpful with regard to my classroom teaching	*SA*	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*

19. Do you feel the same way now about teaching as you did before TP?

Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you feel as a student teacher that Teaching Practice / Teacher Education has impacted on you?

Thank-you for your co-operation.
It is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to make any further comments about any aspects of your Teacher Education Programme / Teaching Practice, please feel free to do so in the space provided.

Appendix F Original ethics approval for the study

University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar's Office, University of Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022, Fax: (061) 330027, Email: Sandra.Grehan@ul.ie

14th April 2003

Dr Teresa O'Doherty
Department of Education and Professional Studies
University of Limerick

ULREC No. 03/15 – Teacher education at the Department of Education and Professional Studies: the graduate teachers' experience
ULREC No. 03/19 - An analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

Dear Dr O'Doherty,

The above applications were considered by the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee at its meeting on 9th April 2003.

I have pleases in informing you that full approval is hereby granted for both studies.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kevin Kelleher
Chairman
University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

Appendix G Ethics approval for additional aspects of the study

Sent: Wednesday, September 07, 2005 1:40 PM

To: 'teresa.odoherty@mic.ul.ie'

Subject: FW: ULREC 03/19

University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar's Office, University of Limerick

Tel: (061) 202022, Fax: (061) 330027, Email: VPAReg@staffmail.ul.ie

07 September 2005

Dr Teresa O'Doherty

Head of Education

Mary Immaculate College

Limerick

Re: ULREC No. 03/19 - An analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

Dear Dr O'Doherty

The above application for changes to approved application was considered by the Chair, University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee.

Full approval has now been granted for this study.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kevin Kelleher

Chairman

University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

Appendix H Volunteer information sheet

Title of the study: An Analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education.

I am currently pursuing post-graduate studies in Education under the supervision of Dr. Teresa O'Doherty and I am seeking volunteers in order to complete my research on the above topic. Through the co-operation of students such as yourselves, I hope to analyse the concerns and perceived needs of student teachers at varying stages of their initial teacher education, using questionnaires as my main form of data collection.

This analysis will prove worthwhile, as I will be able to compare the different concerns and perceived needs of student teachers in second year and fourth year. This research may also aid in defining the needs of student teachers and may provide the basis for the development of some generic courses or modules in the area of student teacher development.

This research study takes place in two stages. Phase one of the current study has already been completed with student teachers in week 13 of semester two, 2004 when volunteers completed a questionnaire on their experiences on second year teaching practice and on their experiences of their teacher education programme to date.

Phase two of the research will be conducted in December 2005 where participants will once again be invited to complete a questionnaire after their fourth year teaching practice. You will also be asked for details such as gender, third level course being pursued, school type attended on teaching practice and your permission for the researcher to retrieve data from the Student Academic Administration Office on your academic achievement. With the help of this information analysis can be done using different independent variables, such as, does gender affect the perceived needs of the student teacher? Do different types of teachers have different concerns? This information will be treated with the utmost confidence and anonymity and your participation in this study will in no way affect you academic progression. Once analysis has been completed all student questionnaires will be destroyed. You are not required to write your name on the questionnaire only on the consent form, to show that you are a willing participant in this research.

After the preliminary collection of data, it is anticipated that a cohort of students would be invited to participate in focus groups to gain a greater insight into some of the information gathered. The focus group sessions will be completely confidential and at no time will the name of any participants appear anywhere in the published version of this research. It is anticipated that the focus groups will be short in duration, lasting approximately twenty to thirty minutes and will be conducted solely with Lisa Coady.

Participation in all stages of this study is voluntary and completion of the questionnaire will take some 25-35 minutes. The results from study will be reported in my thesis. If you have any further queries or require further information on the topic, feel free to contact me.

Lisa Coady ***email: lisa.coady@ul.ie*** ***December 2005***

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent source, you may contact;

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
C/o Registrar & Corporate Secretary's Office, University of Limerick

Appendix I Volunteer consent form

Title of the study: ***An Analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education.***

I hereby declare that I have read the information leaflet in detail and understand the particulars of the research project for which I am volunteering as a subject. I understand that my identity will not be revealed at any stage in reporting this research and all information will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

I agree to volunteer to complete the questionnaire for the above study.

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

I.D. NUMBER: _____

Appendix J Amended volunteer consent form

Title of the study: ***An Analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education.***

I hereby declare that I have read the information leaflet in detail and understand the particulars of the research project for which I am volunteering as a subject. I understand that my identity will not be revealed at any stage in reporting this research and all information will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

I give permission to the researcher to retrieve data from the student Academic Administration Office on my academic achievement. I agree to volunteer to complete the questionnaire for the above study.

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

I.D. NUMBER: _____

Appendix K Letter and consent form sent to the first study cohort

September 10th 2005

Dear Graduate,

I am writing to you with regards to a research study entitled: An Analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education, in which you took part during your undergraduate teacher education programme at the University of Limerick. As part of this study you signed documentation to consent to your involvement in this research.

I am currently working towards a PhD and to increase the number of independent variables within the analysis of the study and thereby increase the depth of research project I wish to retrieve information from the Student Academic Administration Office on all volunteers that have taken part in this study. This limited retrieval will seek:

1. **Overall Level of Educational Attainment**
2. **Academic Achievement in Modules taken in Education**
3. **School Type attended on Teaching Practice**

I am writing to you therefore, to ask for your permission to retrieve the aforementioned data from the Student Academic Administration Office. As with all other parts of this research project, all information received will be treated in the strictest of confidence and your identity will not be revealed at any stage in the reporting of this research.

Please take the time to fill in the consent form, which has been enclosed and return in the stamped addressed envelope provided. This additional information is invaluable as it is hoped that it will provide a greater insight into the results already obtained as part of this study.

Should I not hear from you by October 20th 2005 I will assume that you have no objection to my retrieving this data.

If you have any further queries or require further information, please feel free to contact me, or my research supervisor Dr. Teresa O'Doherty.

Thanking you for your participation and continued support.

Yours Sincerely,

Lisa Coady

Telephone: 061-213460
E-mail: *lisa.coady@ul.ie*

Dr. Teresa O'Doherty

Telephone: 061-204995
E-mail: *teresa.odoherty@mic.ul.ie*

Volunteer Consent Form

Title of the study: ***An Analysis of the "Connectedness" of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education.***

I hereby declare that I have read the permission letter and information leaflet in detail and I give permission to the researcher to retrieve data from the student Academic Administration Office on my academic achievement and school type attended on teaching practice. I understand that my identity will not be revealed at any stage in reporting this research and all information will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

U.L I.D. NUMBER: _____

Appendix L Guided discussion group topic guide

Several issues and themes have emerged from the Literature review and the questionnaire and it is felt that an exploration of the following areas would serve to illuminate the phenomena more explicitly.

ICE BREAKER / INTRODUCTORY QUESTION

Many students comment that Teaching Practice is the most enjoyable time of their undergraduate programme. Would you agree? Why?

PREPARATION

Did you get the school of your choice for T.P.?

Why did you pick that particular school?

How prepared did you feel going out on teaching practice?

What made you feel prepared?

Did any situation arise in the school where you felt unprepared?

LESSON PLANS, POST LESSON APPRAISALS, WEEKLY OBSERVATIONS

Many respondents felt that lesson plans were useful. Do you agree?

What are your opinions on post lesson appraisals and weekly observations?

Did you have a similar experience in second year?

REFLECTION

What does reflection mean to you? Was it valuable to you during your TP?

To what extent did your tutor assist you in your reflection?

What about your co-operating teachers did they play a part in your reflection?

CO-OPERATING TEACHER

What did you perceive to be the role of your co-operating teacher(s)?

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

During T.P. did you feel part of the school community? Why?

Do you think the culture of the school affected you in any way?

CONCERNS

What were your main concerns during T.P.?

Why were you concerned about these things?

LENGTH OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Were you satisfied with the length of teaching practice?

SUMMARY QUESTION

Following your final teaching practice how do you feel about going into teaching?

Appendix M Structure of guided discussion groups

The following structure for the guided discussion groups was decided upon:

1. Welcoming the participants to the session.
2. *Introducing & explaining the role of the researcher as facilitator.*
3. Discussing the purpose of the guided discussion group.
4. Providing an overview of the process, duration and explanation of the ground rules.
5. Opening with a compelling introductory question to stimulate the discussion.
6. Ending with a summary question to draw the discussion to a conclusion.
7. Thanking participants for their participation.

Appendix N Guided discussion group expression of interest sheet

GUIDED DISCUSSION GROUPS – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

After the preliminary collection of data, it is anticipated that cohorts of students would take part in guided discussion groups to gain a greater insight into some of the information gathered. The guided discussion group sessions will be completely confidential and at no time will the name of any participants appear anywhere in the published version of this research. It is anticipated that the guided discussion groups will be short in duration, lasting approximately one hour and will be conducted exclusively by Lisa Coady.

Participation in this research is entirely on a voluntary basis. If you would be interested in volunteering to take part in a guided discussion group session, would you please fill in your contact details in the appropriate spaces provided.

As fore mentioned, all information obtained will be dealt with in the strictest of confidence and the anonymity of all individuals involved in this research will be preserved at all times.

Your progress at university will not be affect in any way by your decision to agree or decline to participate in the guided discussion group sessions.

When you have filled in your information details below, detach this sheet from the main questionnaire and place it in the box provided.

NAME: _____

CONTACT TEL. NO.: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Appendix O Guided discussion group volunteer consent form

Volunteer Consent Form

Title of the study: *An Investigation into Student Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparedness to Teach.*

I hereby declare that I have been fully informed as to what my involvement in the guided discussion group will entail and understand the ground rules decided upon by the group.

I understand that my identity will not be revealed at any stage in reporting this research and all information will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

I agree to abide by the ground rules for the guided discussion group as decided by the group.

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

I.D. NUMBER: _____

Appendix P Guided discussion group ground rules

Guided Discussion Group Ground Rules

Before outlining any pre-determined rules the facilitator, will invite the participants to explore what conditions they feel are necessary to ensure their participation in a safe environment and what ground rules they feel are necessary for the session? As part of this, the issue of confidentiality will be addressed and the participants' and researcher's understanding of confidentiality will be clarified. Each participant will then be given the opportunity to give his or her own opinions. If not specifically mentioned by the participants, the following rules will be listed along with any others specified and agreed upon by the participants:

Participants Conditions

1. Respect of difference of each participant.
2. No Participant can divulge any comments made by others in the group.
3. No participant can divulge the identity of other participants in the discussion group.
4. No participant can identify any individual tutor, teacher or university teaching staff by name during the discussion.
5. Each participant will sign a consent form.

Facilitator Conditions

1. All information received will be treated with the strictest of confidence.
2. Although the session will be audio-taped, no one will be identified in the transcribing.
3. All taped recordings of the guided discussion groups will be erased once transcription is completed.
4. No group member's identity will be revealed at any stage in the reporting of this research.

Appendix R Demographic profile: accompanying figures & tables

Table I: Percentage of total population enrolled in each programme

COURSE OF STUDY BREAKDOWN FOR OVERALL POPULATION				
	M&CT	PE	M&ET	SCIENCE
Cohort 2A	21.3%	37.0%	21.3%	20.5%
Cohort 2B	33.8%	37.9%	16.2%	12.1%
Cohort 4A	25.4%	35.4%	18.5%	20.8%
Cohort 4B	36.3%	33.7%	14.5%	15.5%

Table II: Breakdown of Teaching Practice grades awarded for each of the cohorts

	Cohort 2A	Cohort 2B	Cohort 4A	Cohort 4B
A_1	4.9% n=5	2.6% n=4	12.3% n=13	11.3% n=17
A_2	13.6% n=14	11.3% n=17	25.5% n=27	23.8% n=36
B_1	26.2% n=27	19.9% n=30	22.6% n=24	33.1% n=50
B_2	14.6% n=15	18.5% n=28	19.8% n=21	15.9% n=24
B_3	17.5% n=18	18.5% n=28	9.4% n=10	9.3% n=14
C_1	13.6% n=14	9.3% n=14	0.9% n=1	1.3% n=2
C_2	1.9% n=2	6.6% n=10	1.9% n=2	2.0% n=3
C_3	2.9% n=3	5.3% n=8	6.6% n=7	2.6% n=4

Table III: Breakdown of awards in educational studies obtained by each cohort

	Cohort 2A	Cohort 2B	Cohort 4A	Cohort 4B
A_1	1.9% n=2	7.9% n=12	1.9% n=2	2.0% n=3
A_2	1.9% n=2	12.6% n=19	15.1% n=16	13.2% n=20
B_1	10.7% n=11	31.8% n=48	21.7% n=23	17.9% n=27
B_2	13.6% n=14	22.5% n=34	26.4% n=28	25.2% n=38
B_3	8.7% n=9	8.6% n=13	17.9% n=19	25.2% n=38
C_1	10.7% n=11	11.9% n=18	9.4% n=10	11.3% n=15
C_2	19.4% n=20	2.0% n=3	6.6% n=7	3.3% n=5
C_3	30.1% n=31	2.6% n=4	0.9% n=1	0.7% n=1

Figure I: **Gender / Teaching Practice grade cross tabulation – Cohort 2A**

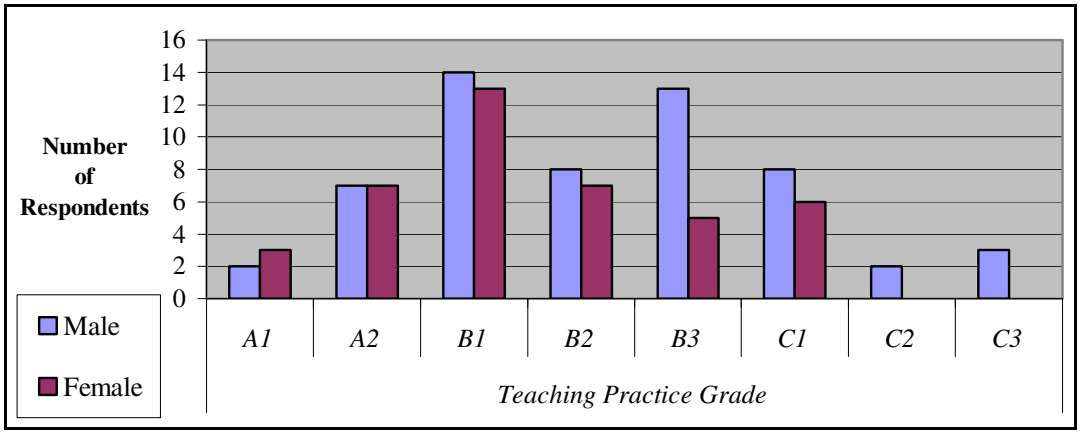


Figure II: **Gender / Teaching Practice grade cross tabulation – Cohort 4A**

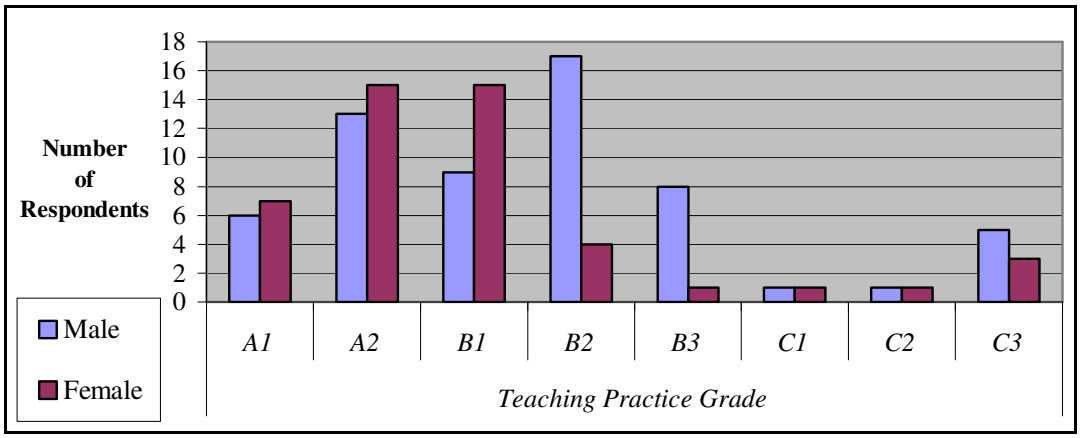


Figure III: **Gender / Educational studies grade cross tabulation – Cohort 2A**

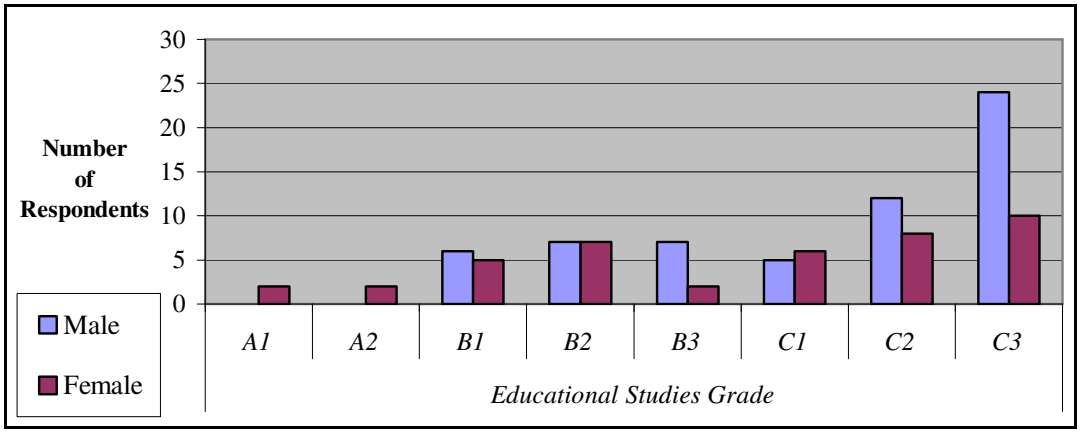


Figure IV: **Gender / Educational studies grade cross tabulation – Cohort 2B**

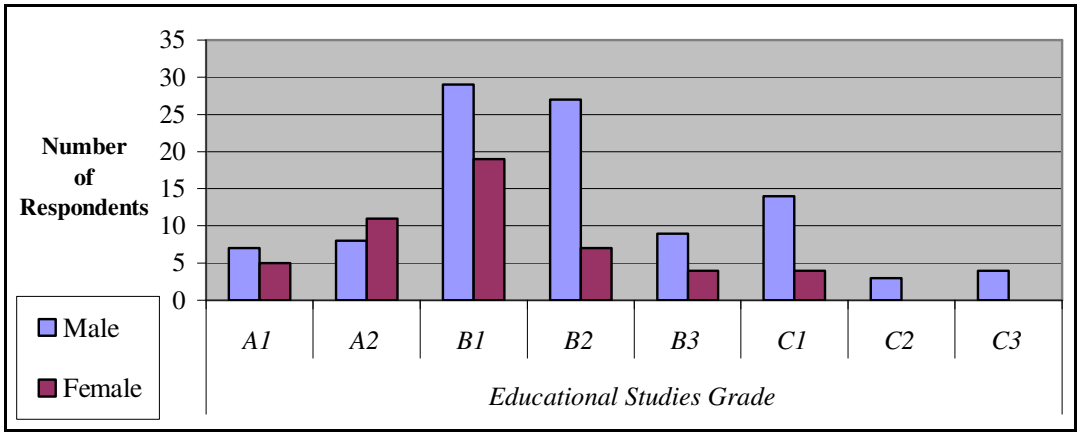


Figure V: **Gender / Educational studies grade cross tabulation – Cohort 4A**

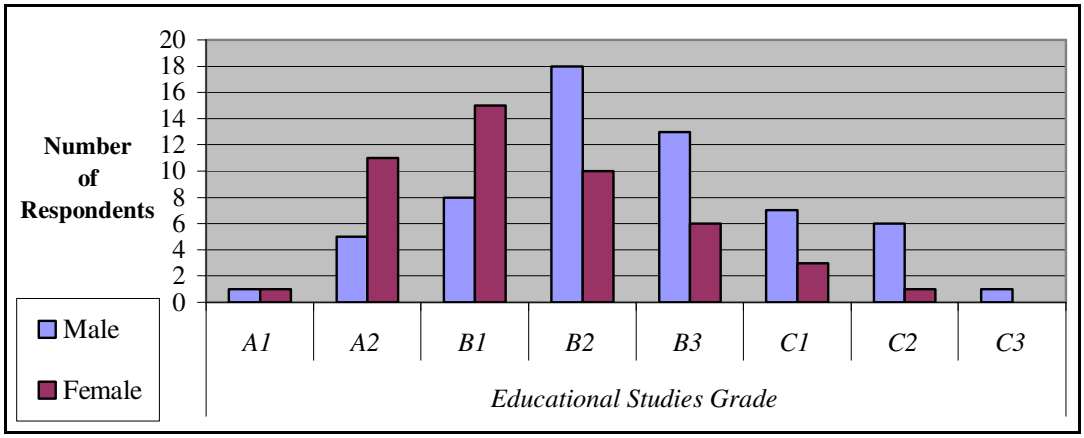


Figure VI: **Gender / Educational studies grade cross tabulation – Cohort 4B**

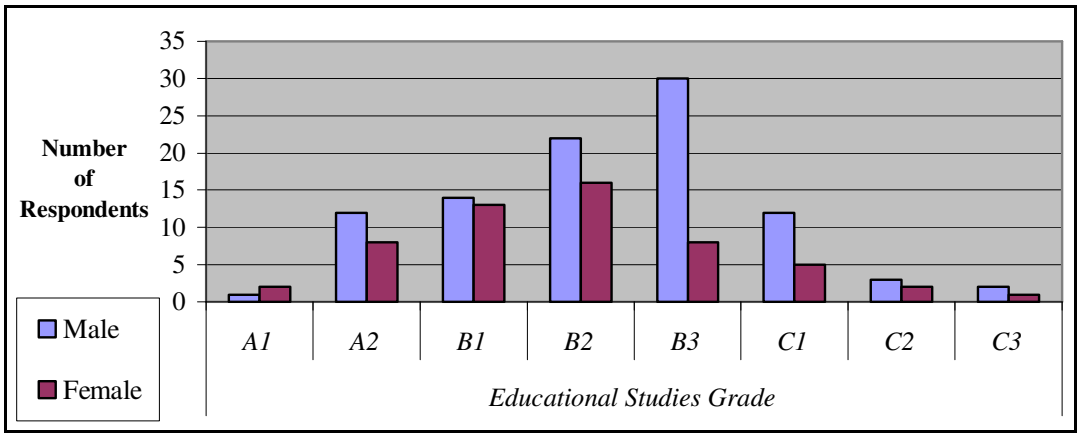


Figure VII: Normal probability plot of QCA – Cohort 2A

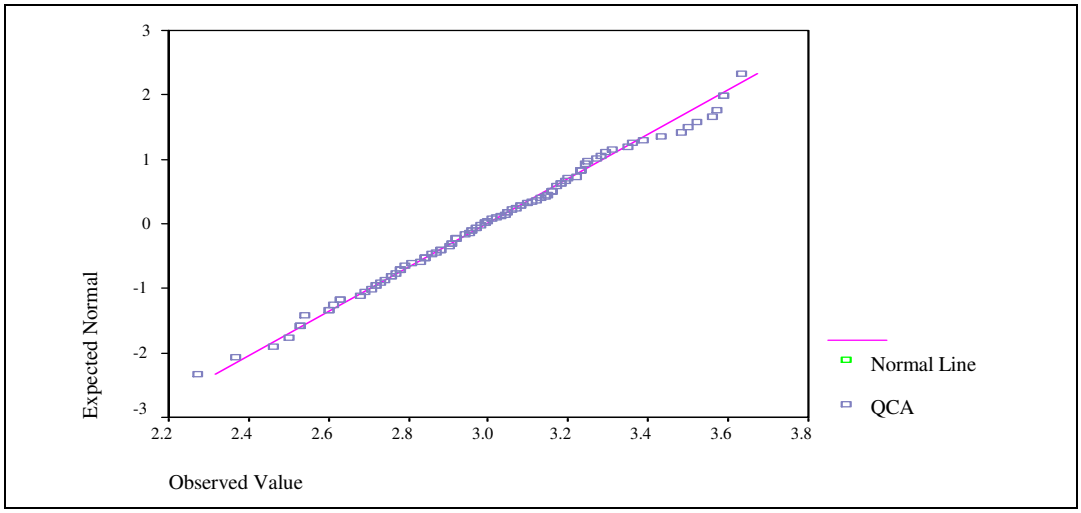


Figure VIII: Normal probability plot of QCA – Cohort 2B

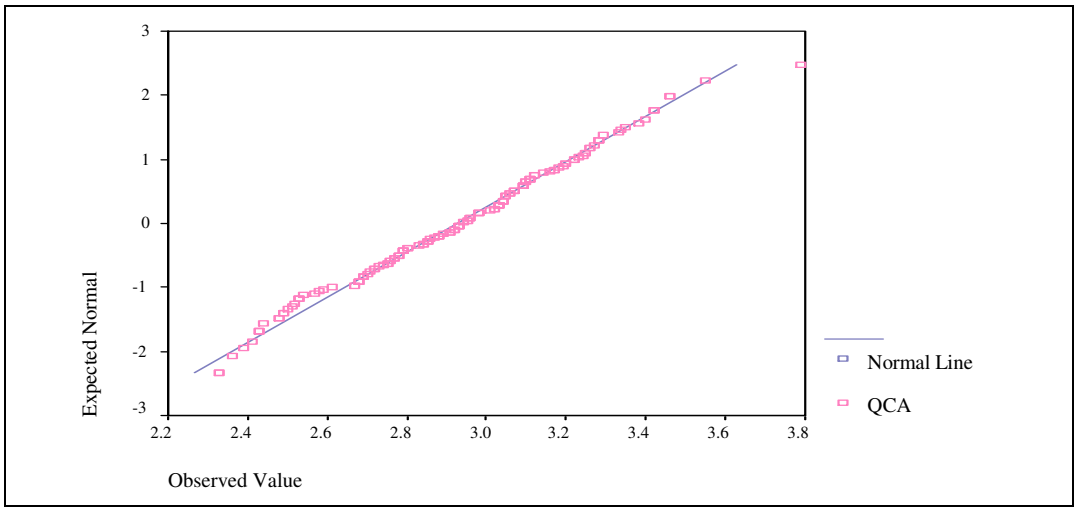


Figure IX: Normal probability plot of QCA – Cohort 4A

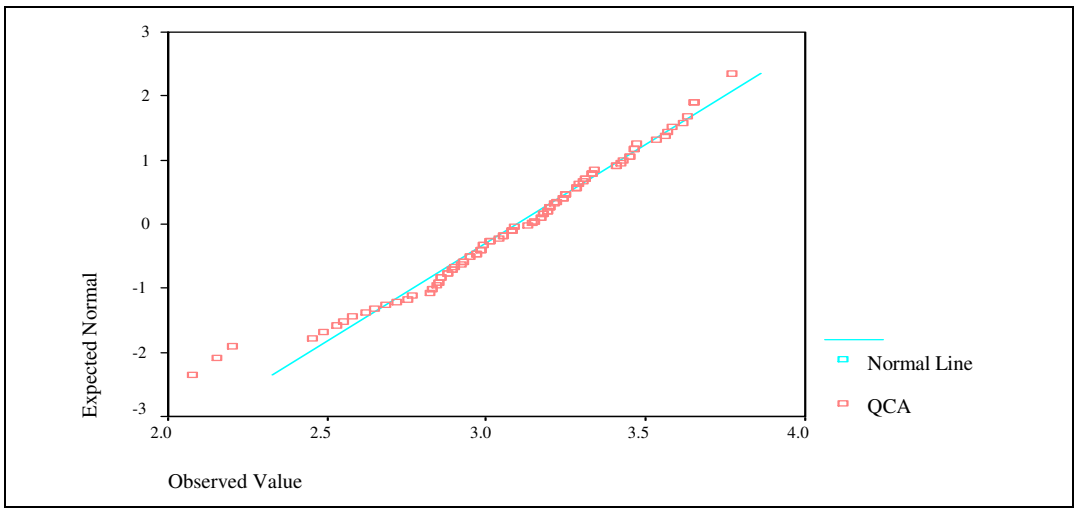


Figure X: Normal probability plot of QCA – Cohort 4B

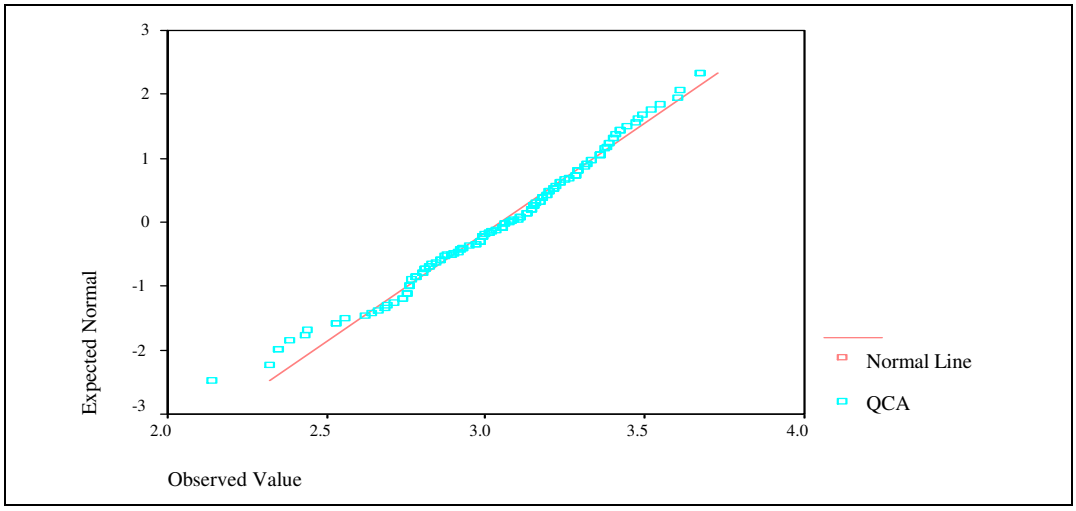


Figure XI: Histogram of QCA distribution – Cohort 2A

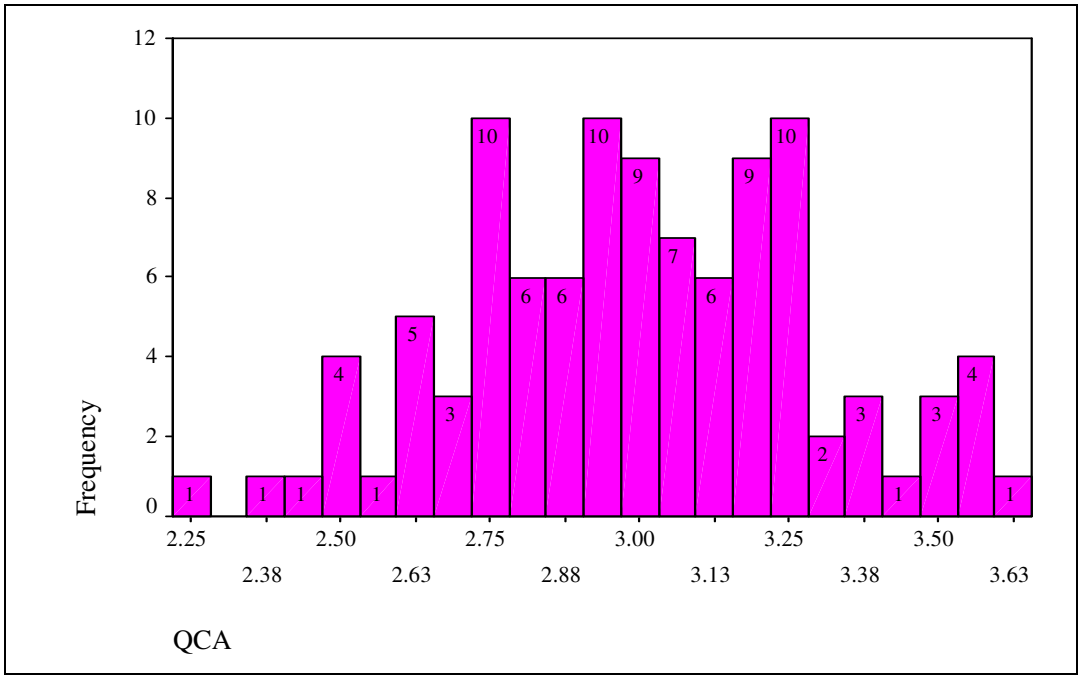


Figure XII: Histogram of QCA distribution – Cohort 2B

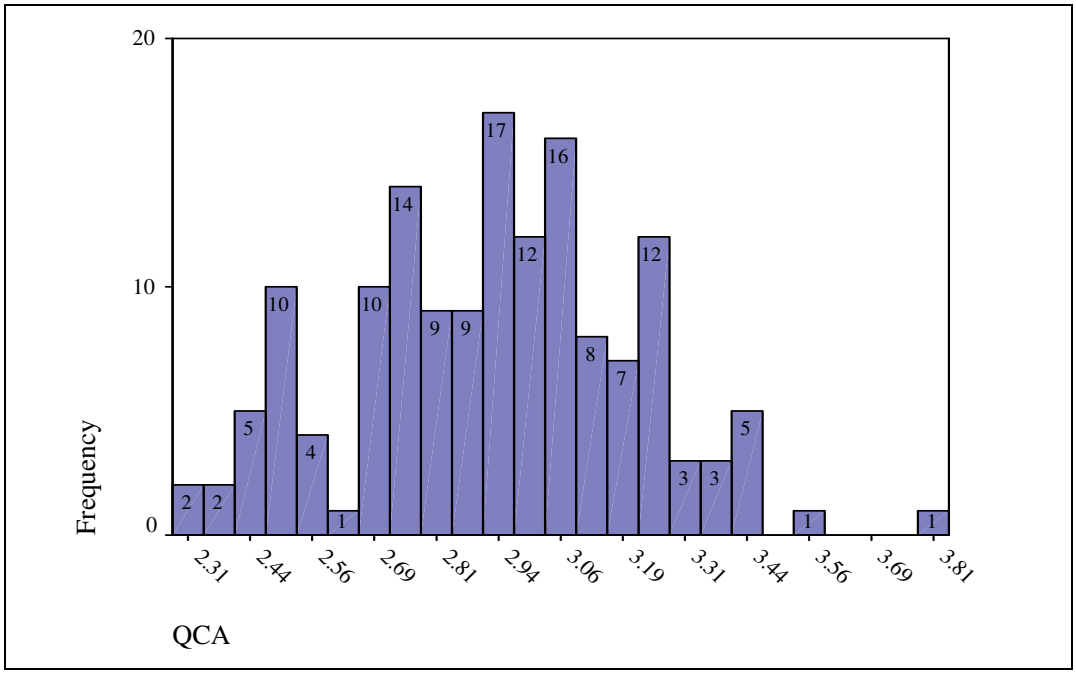


Figure XIII: Histogram of QCA distribution – Cohort 4A

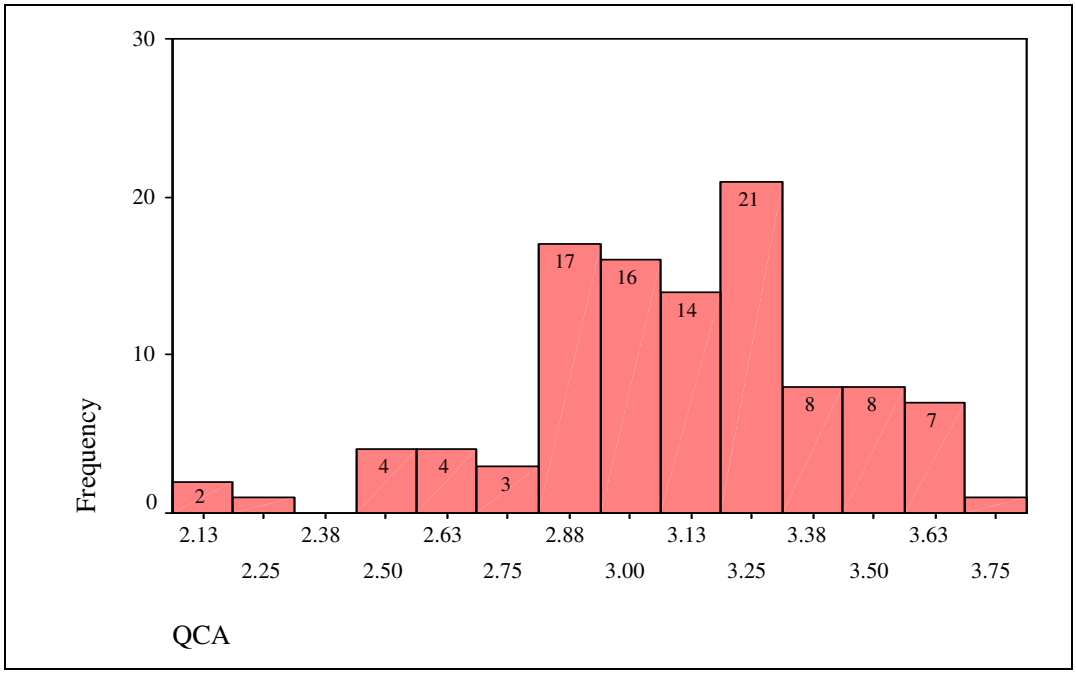
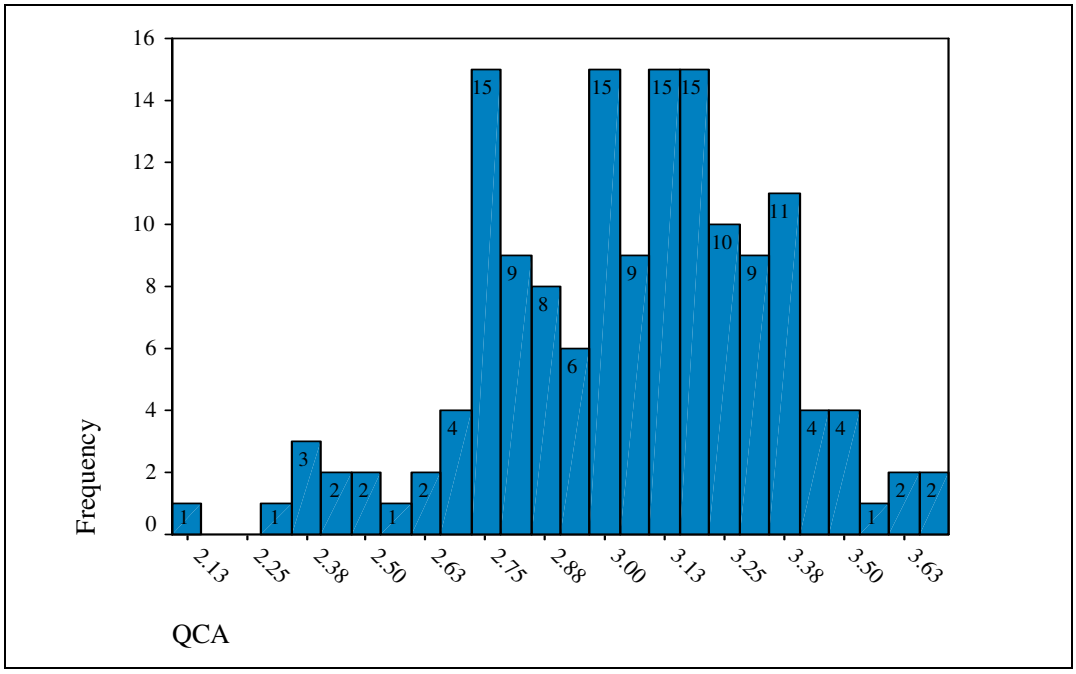


Figure XIV: Histogram of QCA distribution – Cohort 4B



Appendix S Perceptions of planning: accompanying figures & tables

Figure I: Perceptions of lesson plans 1 – Cohort B

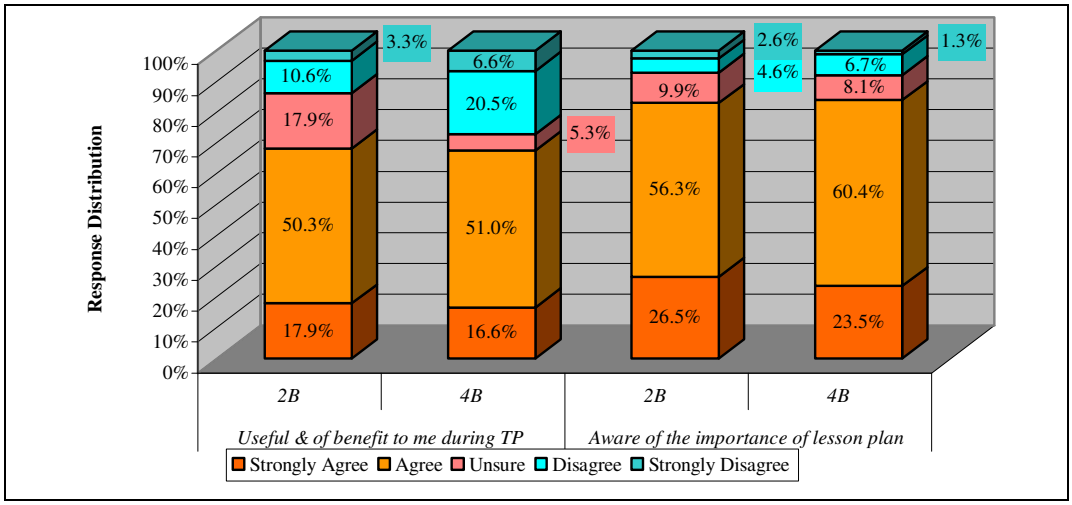


Figure II: TP grade and opinion of benefit of lesson plans – Cohort 2B

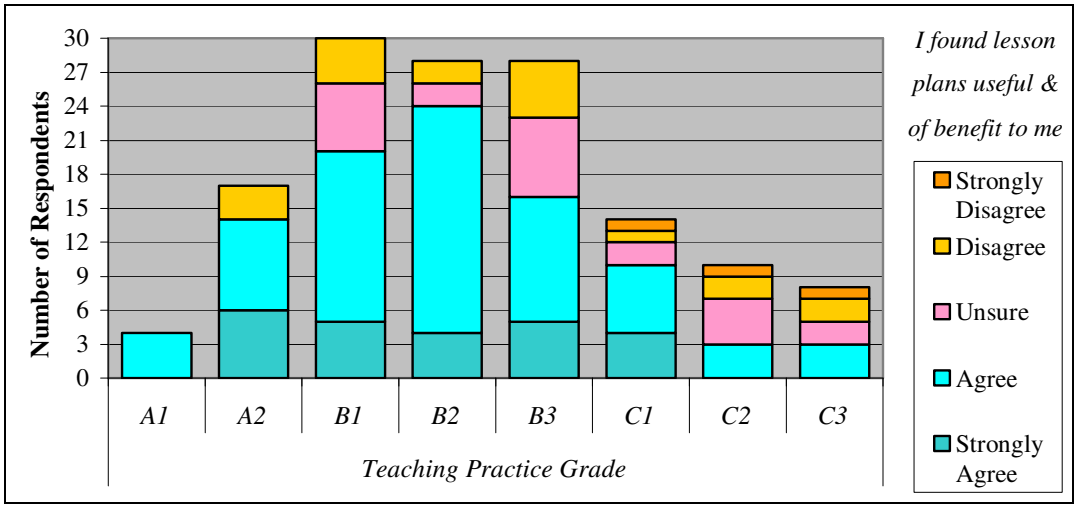


Figure III: TP grade and view of usefulness of lesson planning – Cohort 2B

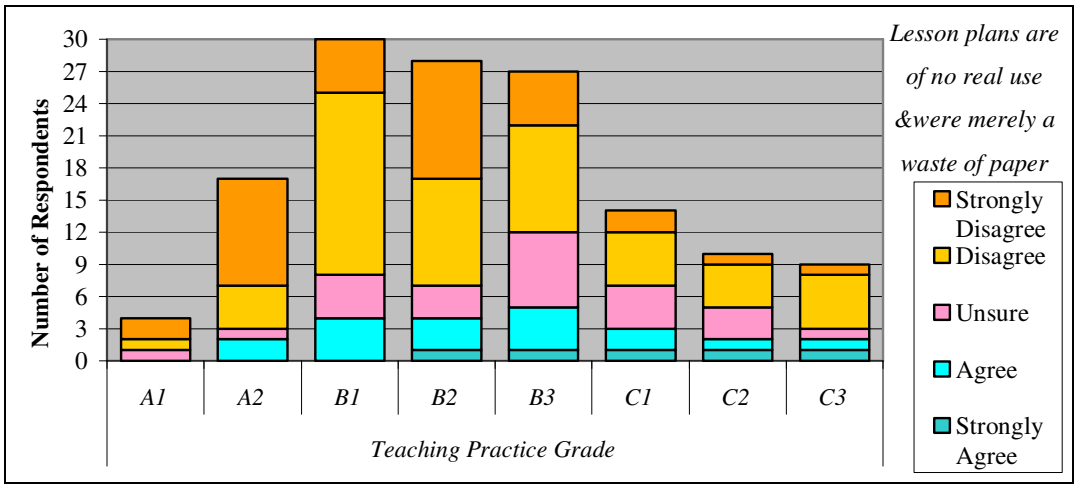


Figure IV: Positive perceptions of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 2B

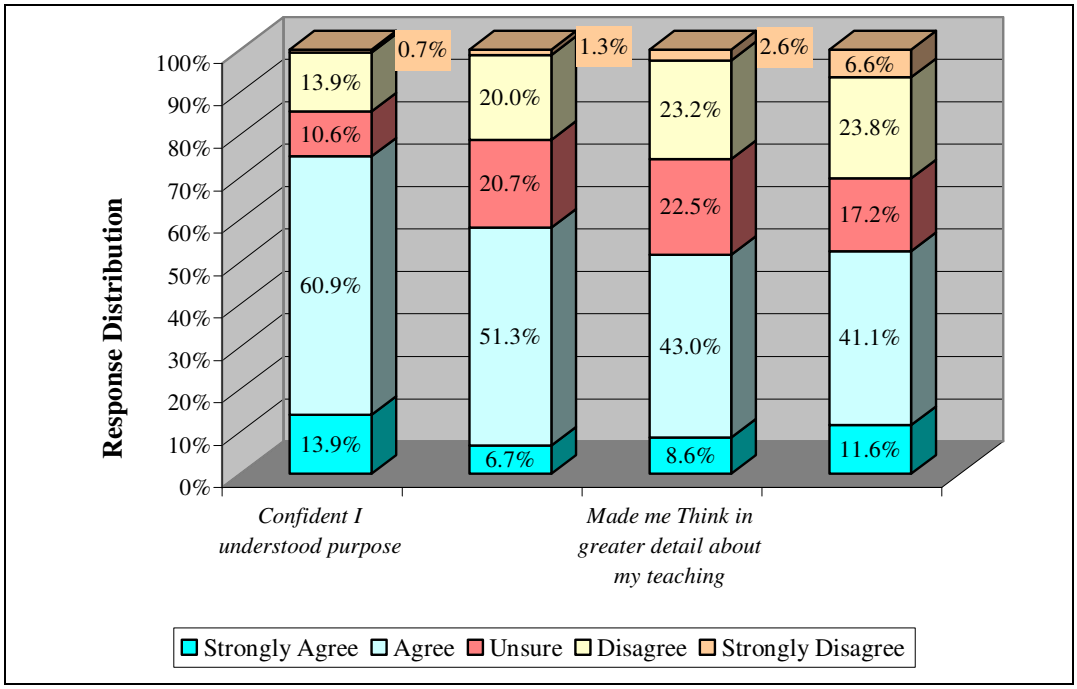


Figure V: Positive perceptions of post-lesson appraisals – Cohort 4B

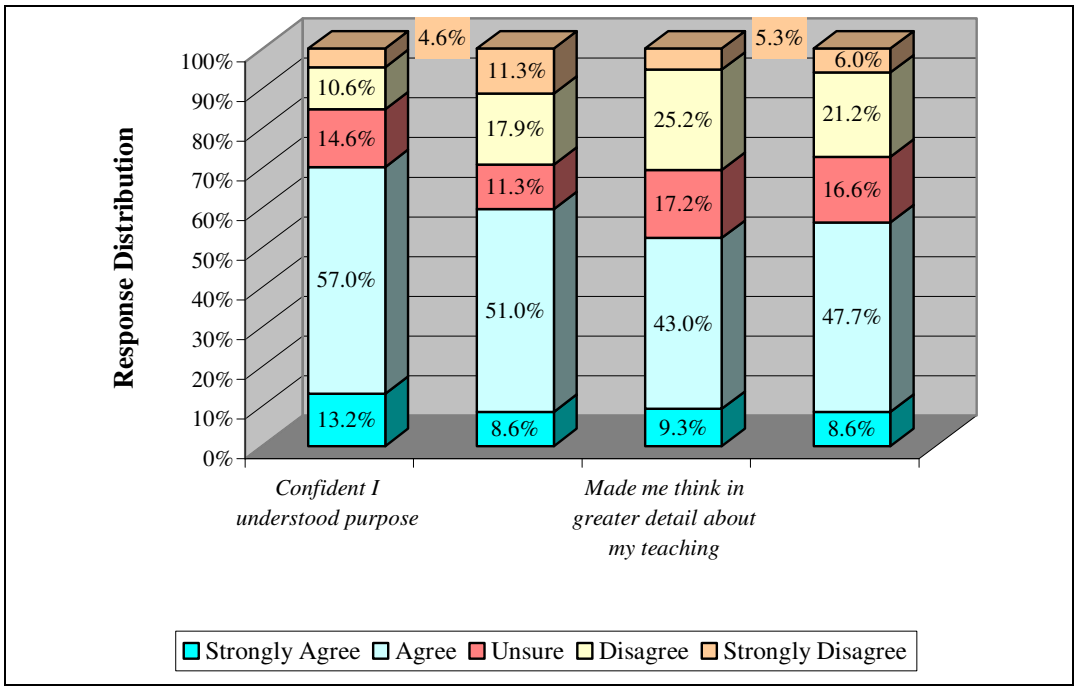


Figure VI: Grade in educational studies and perception of PLAs – Cohort 2A

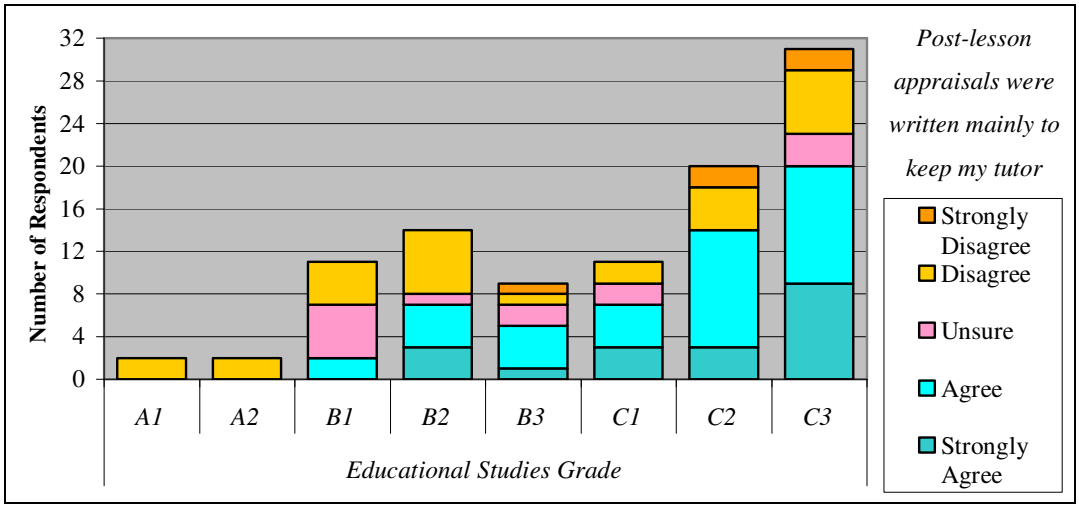


Figure VII: Grade in educational studies and opinion of PLAs – Cohort 2A

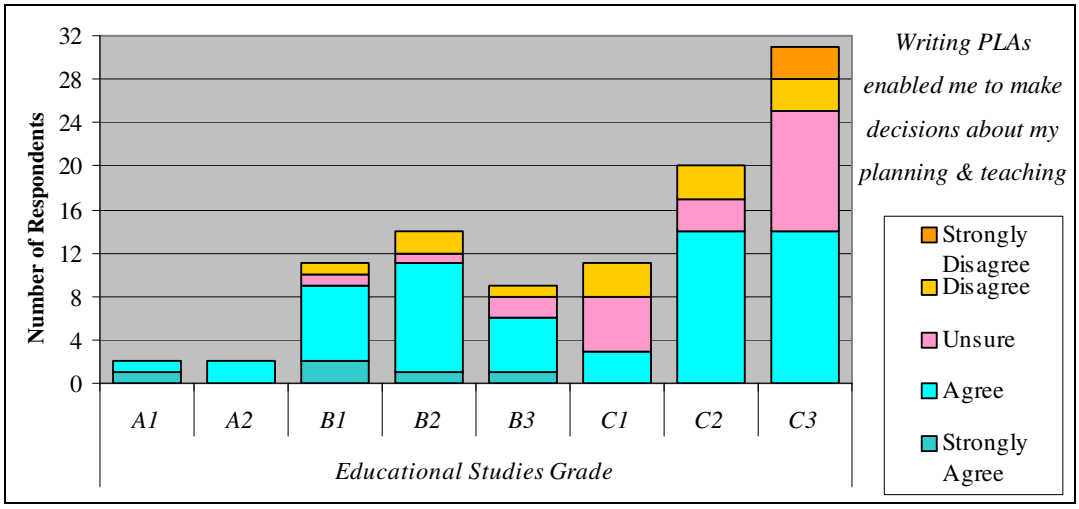
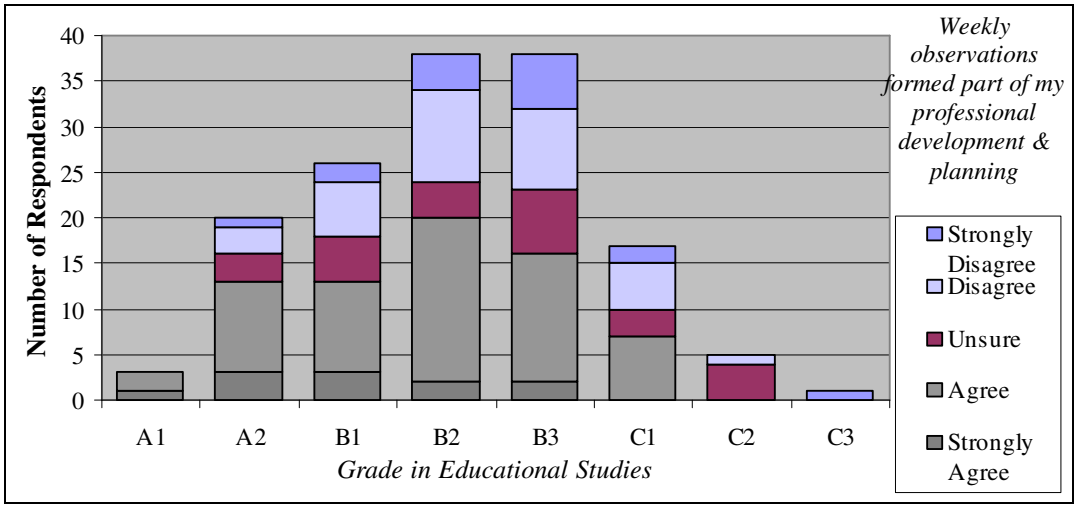


Figure VIII: Educational grade & view of weekly observations – Cohort 4B



Appendix T Frequency of comments on areas of planning & reflection

Lesson planning:
In Strand One seventy-seven individual comments were made about lesson planning by Cohort 2A, twenty-three favourable and fifty-four unfavourable. Respondents in Cohort 2B made sixty-six comments on the area of lesson planning, fifteen were deemed as favourable and fifty-one unfavourable. Within Strand Two fifty-eight individuals from Cohort 4A commented on lesson planning, of which fourteen comments were favourable and forty-four unfavourable. Forty-seven comments were made by members of Cohort 4B about lesson planning eleven of which were favourable and thirty-six unfavourable.

Post-lesson appraisals:
At Year Two, fifty-four Cohort 2A participants added additional comments about PLAs, seventeen were favourable and thirty-seven unfavourable. Thirty-one respondents from Cohort 2B commented on PLAs these comments were further divided into thirteen favourable and eighteen unfavourable. At Year Four thirty-three respondents from Cohort 4A commented on PLAs, of which fifteen were favourable and eighteen unfavourable. Within Cohort 4B, twenty-five respondents made comments about PLAs, eight favourable and seventeen unfavourable.

Weekly observations:
In Strand One, only ten personal comments received from Cohort 2A were about weekly observations, all of which were unfavourable. Five comments were made by Cohort 2B participants, one favourable and four unfavourable. In Strand Two eleven student teachers wrote qualitatively about weekly observations, four made favourable comments and seven made unfavourable comments. In Cohort 4B, of the five additional comments received abut weekly observations four were unfavourable and only one was favourable.

Reflection:
At Year Two seven Cohort 2A participants added further comments in relation to reflection, five favourable and two unfavourable. In Cohort 2B all five comments received about reflection favourable. In Cohort 4A, two favourable comments were recorded and in Cohort 4B, two comment regarding reflection were made, one favourable and one unfavourable.

Appendix U Experiences of teacher education: accompanying figures & tables

Table I: **Aspects of the education component of their ITE that students prioritised as useful–Cohort 2A**

	Cohort 2A	
	Specific as useful	Not specified as useful
Resource preparation	46.6% (n=48)	53.4% (n=55)
Theory of motivation	44.7% (n=46)	55.3% (n=57)
Using group work	43.7% (n=45)	56.3% (n=58)
Using visual aids	43.7% (n=45)	56.3% (n=58)
Student-teacher interactions	39.8% (n=41)	60.2% (n=62)
Classroom Climate	35.0% (n=36)	65.0% (n=67)
Reflective Practice	31.1% (n=32)	68.9% (n=71)
Learning styles	30.1% (n=31)	69.9% (n=72)
Assessment of student learning	29.1% (n=30)	70.9% (n=73)
Self-evaluation	22.3% (n=23)	77.7% (n=80)
Child development	15.5% (n=16)	84.5% (n=87)
Problem analysis	12.6% (n=13)	87.4% (n=90)
Pastoral care	10.7% (n=11)	89.3% (n=92)
Using computers / video	6.8% (n=7)	93.2% (n=96)

Table II: **Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP–Cohort 2B**

	Cohort 2B	
	Specified as useful	Not specified as useful
Classroom Climate	46.4% (n=70)	53.6% (n=81)
Resource preparation	45.0% (n=68)	55.0% (n=83)
Student-teacher interactions	43.0% (n=65)	57.0% (n=86)
Using visual aids	42.4% (n=64)	57.6% (n=87)
Theory of motivation	35.1% (n=53)	64.9% (n=98)
Self-evaluation	34.4% (n=52)	65.6% (n=99)
Using group work	33.8% (n=51)	66.2% (n=100)
Reflective Practice	31.1% (n=47)	68.9% (n=104)
Assessment of student learning	28.5% (n=30)	71.5% (n=108)
Learning styles	26.5% (n=40)	73.5% (n=111)
Problem analysis	21.2% (n=32)	78.8% (n=119)
Child development	12.6% (n=19)	87.4% (n=132)
Using computers / video	9.3% (n=14)	90.8% (n=137)
Pastoral care	7.9% (n=12)	92.1% (n=139)

Table III Aspects of the education component of their ITE that students prioritised as useful–Cohort 4A

	Cohort 4A	
	Specified as useful	Not specified as useful
Using group work	49.1% (n=52)	50.9% (n=54)
Discipline	47.2% (n=50)	52.8% (n=56)
Resource preparation	46.2% (n=49)	53.8% (n=57)
Student-teacher interactions	46.2% (n=49)	53.8% (n=57)
Micro-teaching	45.3% (n=48)	54.7% (n=58)
Reflective Practice	34.9% (n=37)	65.1% (n=69)
Self-evaluation	34.0% (n=36)	66.0% (n=70)
Theory of motivation	34.0% (n=36)	66.0% (n=70)
Classroom Climate	33.0% (n=35)	67.0% (n=71)
Assessment of student learning	22.6% (n=24)	77.4% (n=82)
Problem analysis	17.0% (n=18)	83.0% (n=88)
Using computers / video	13.2% (n=14)	88.8% (n=92)
Pastoral care	10.4% (n=11)	89.6% (n=95)
Knowledge educational change	9.4% (n=10)	90.6% (n=96)
Child development	9.4% (n=10)	90.6% (n=96)
Curriculum evaluation	4.7% (n=5)	95.3% (n=101)

Table IV: Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP–Cohort 4B

	Cohort 4A	
	Specified as useful	Not specified as useful
Lesson presentation skills	45.0% (n=68)	55.0% (n=83)
Using group work	44.4% (n=67)	55.6% (n=84)
Micro-teaching	37.7% (n=57)	62.3% (n=94)
Student-teacher interactions	37.1% (n=56)	62.9% (n=95)
Classroom Climate	35.8% (n=54)	64.2% (n=97)
Theory of motivation	33.8% (n=51)	66.2% (n=100)
Reflective Practice	33.8% (n=51)	66.2% (n=100)
Self-evaluation	32.5% (n=49)	67.5% (n=102)
Using computers / video	28.5% (n=43)	71.5% (n=108)
Assessment of student learning	27.2% (n=41)	72.8% (n=110)
Child development	21.9% (n=33)	78.1% (n=118)
Problem analysis	19.2% (n=29)	80.8% (n=122)
Pastoral care	13.9% (n=21)	86.1% (n=130)
Knowledge educational change	4.6% (n=7)	95.4% (n=144)
Curriculum evaluation	0.7% (n=1)	99.3% (n=150)

Figure I: Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP – Cohort 2B

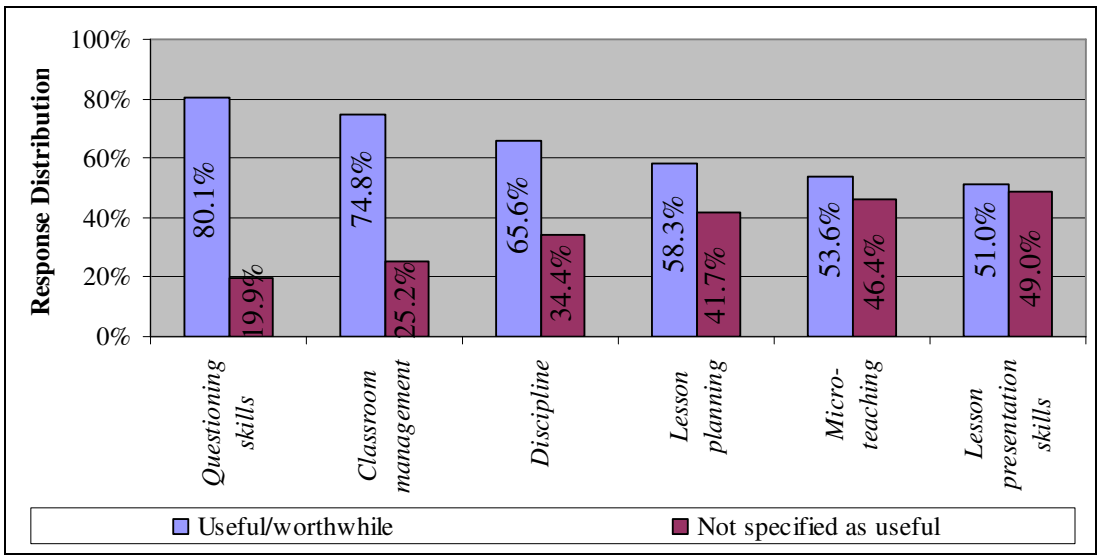


Figure II: Elements of the education component of ITE that student teachers felt were useful to them during TP – Cohort 4B

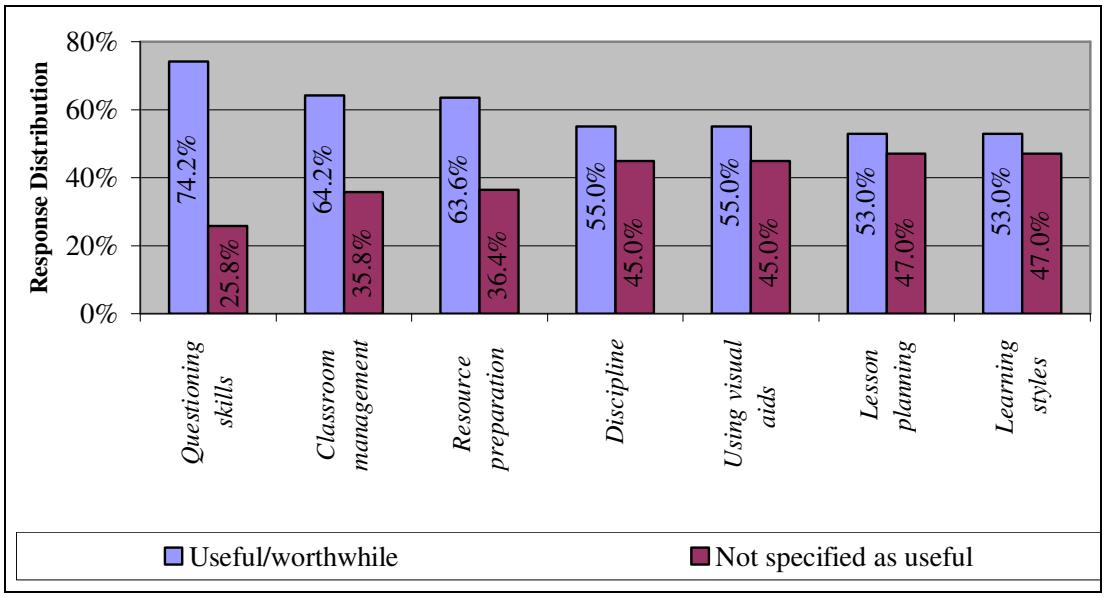


Figure III: TP Grade & perceived usefulness of pastoral care studies – Cohort 4B

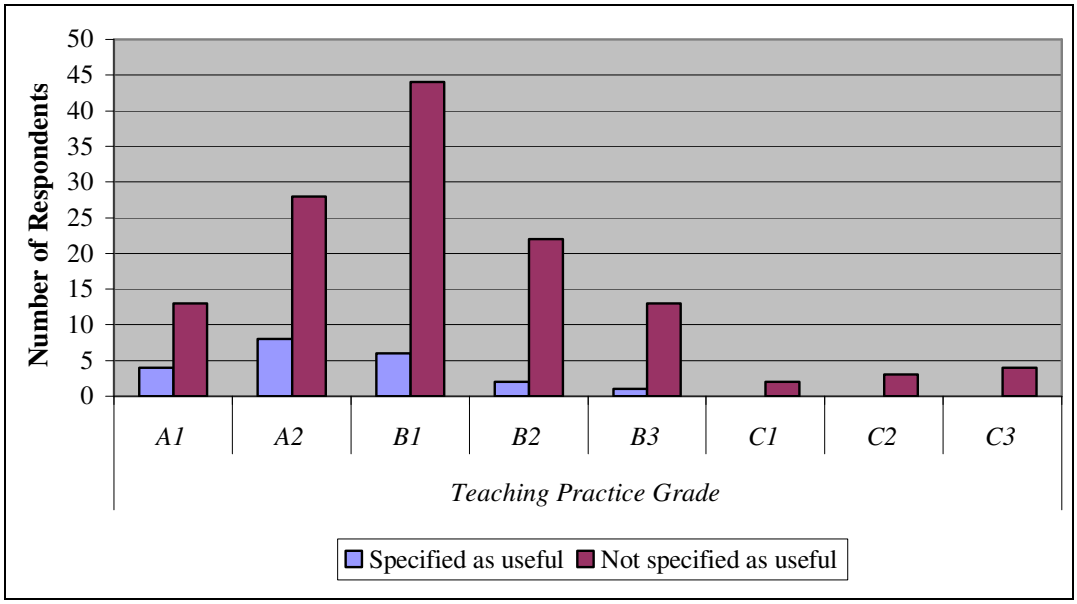


Figure IV: Educational studies grade & perceived usefulness of pastoral care studies – Cohort 4A

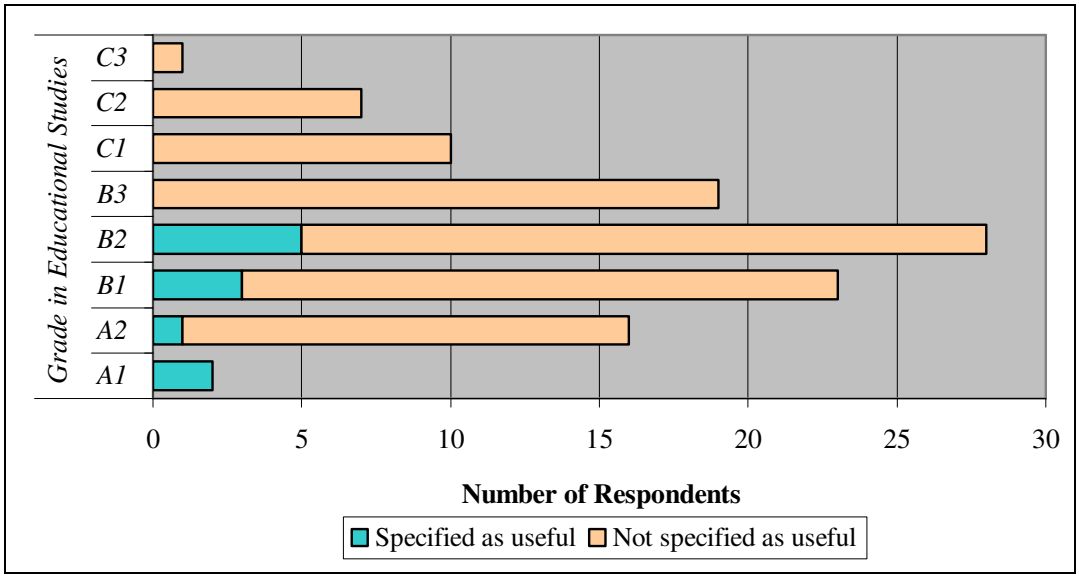


Figure V: Respondents' opinions of educational studies 1 – Cohort 2A

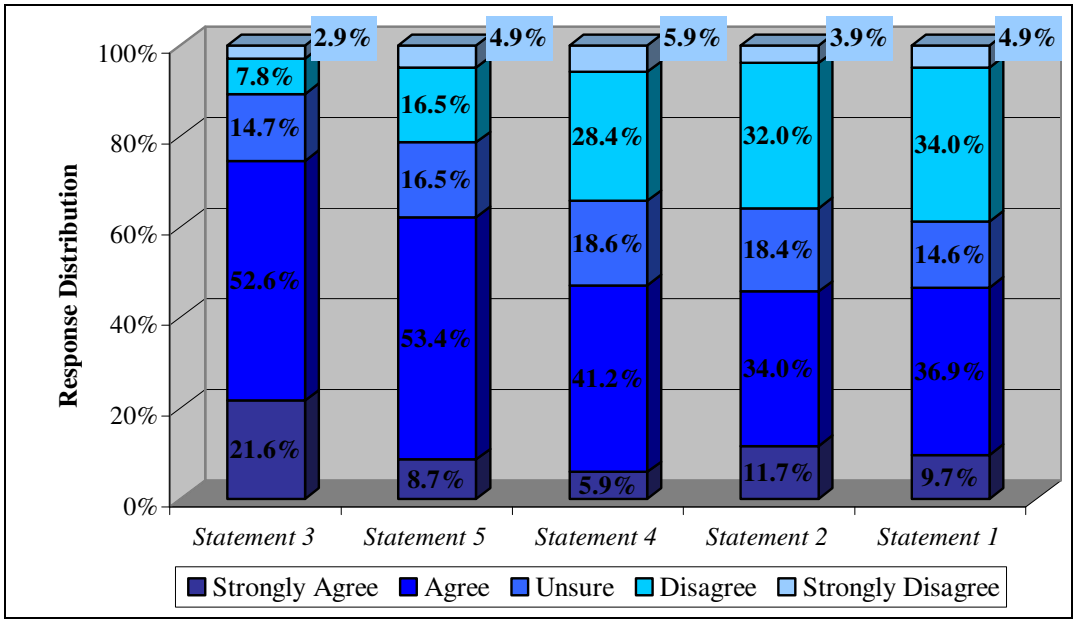


Figure VI: Respondents' opinions of educational studies 1 – Cohort 4A

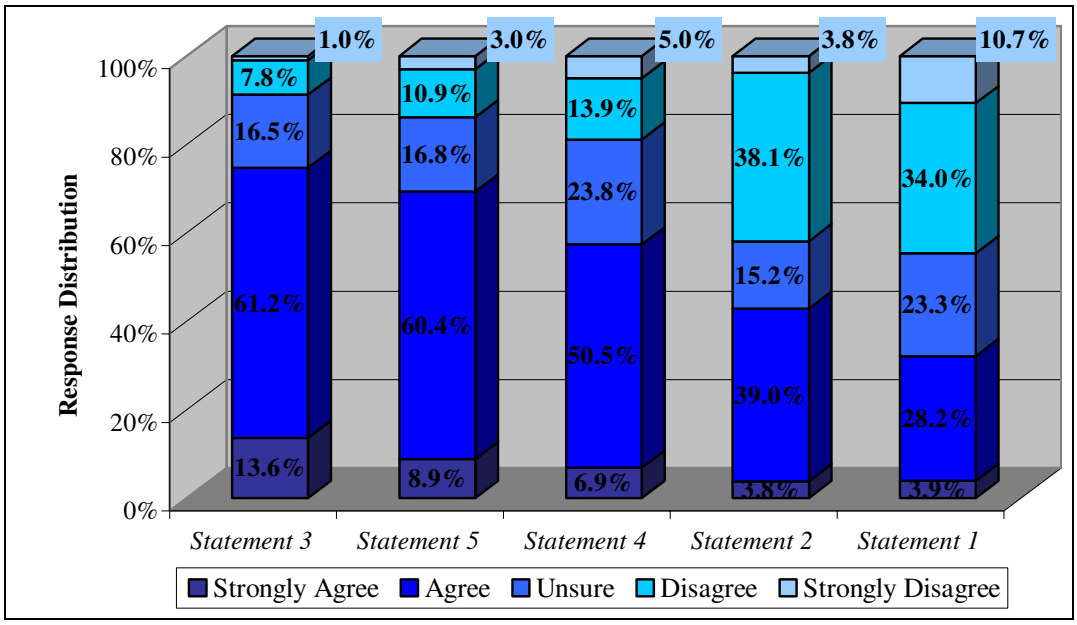


Figure VII: Respondents opinions of educational studies 1 – Cohort 2B

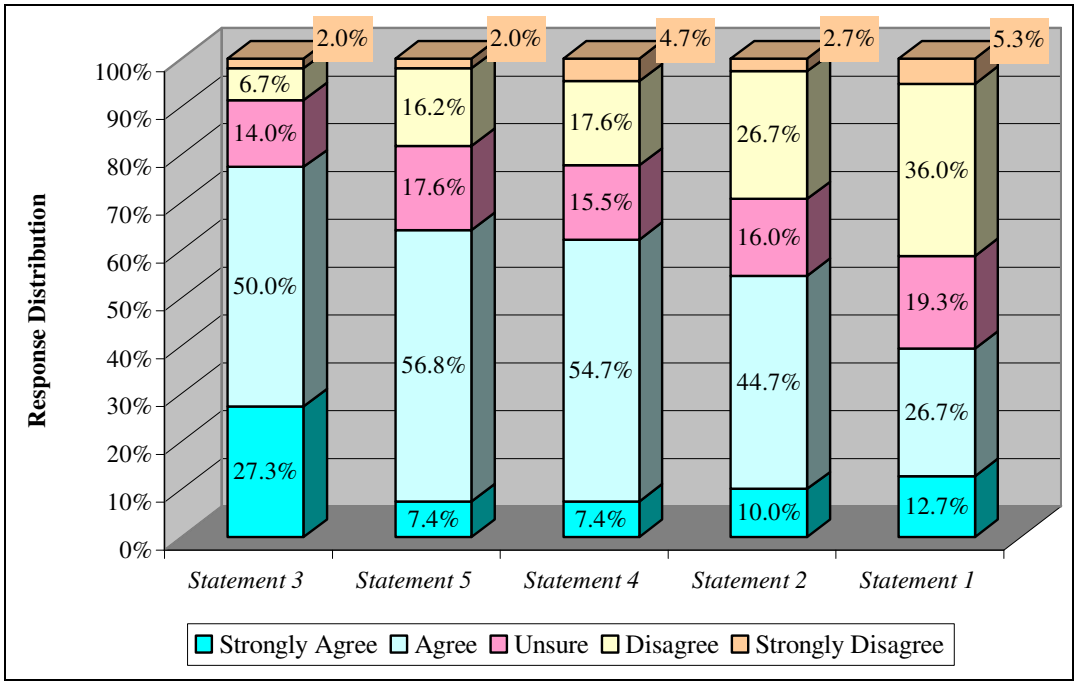


Figure VIII: Respondents opinions of educational studies 1 – Cohort 4B

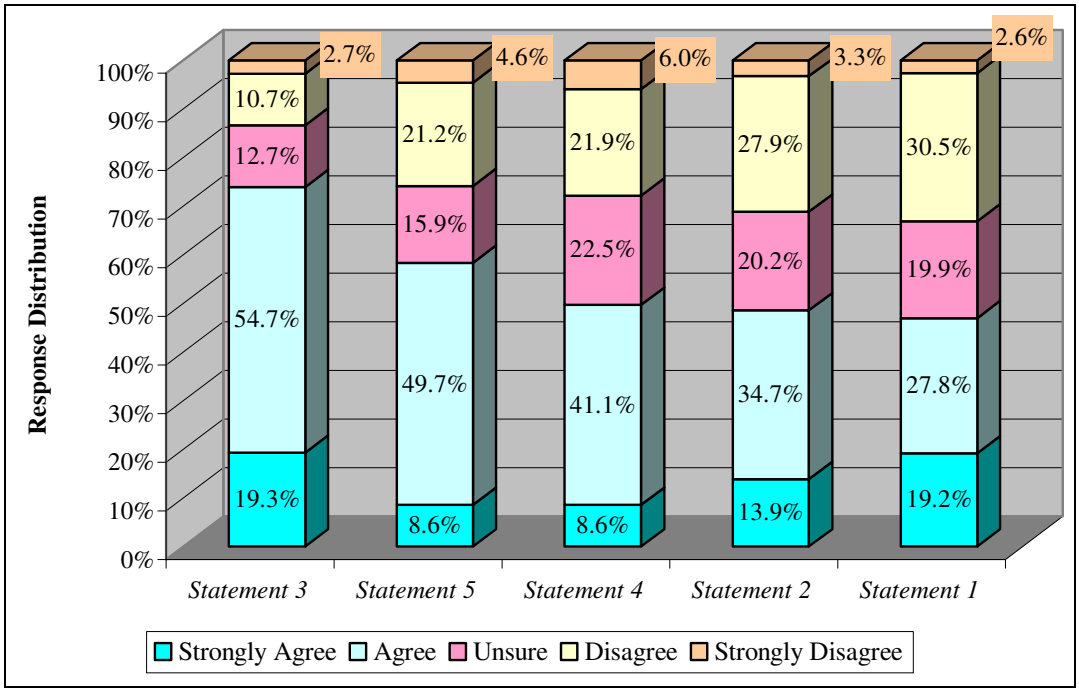


Figure IX: Respondents perceptions of educational studies 2 – Strand One

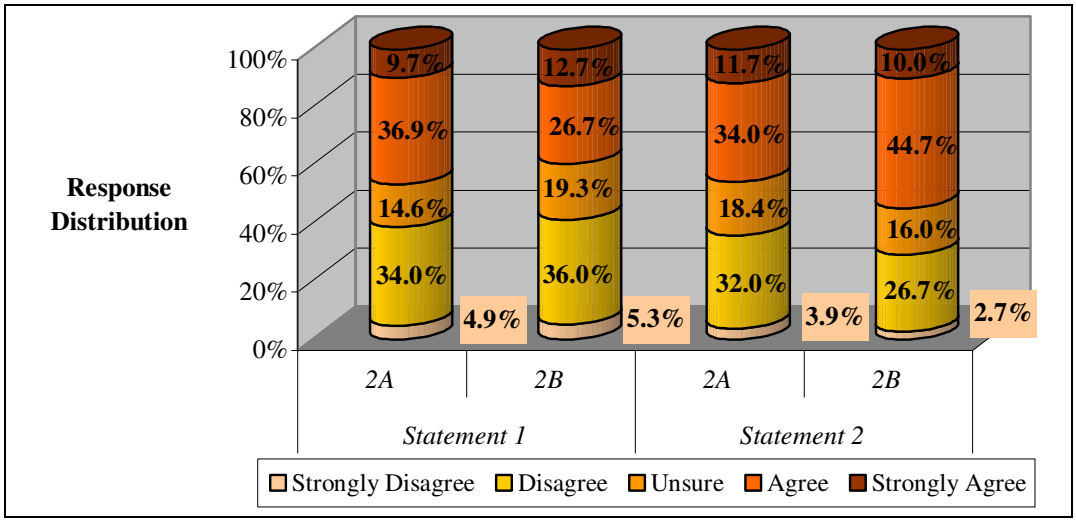


Figure X: Respondents perceptions of educational studies 2 – Strand Two

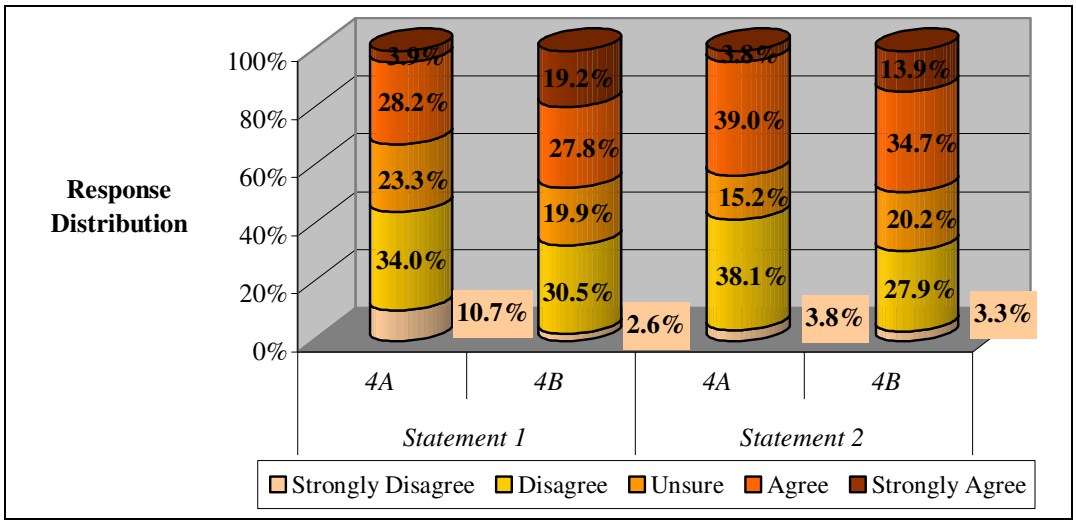


Figure XI: Respondents' perceptions of the inadequacy of their educational studies – Strand One

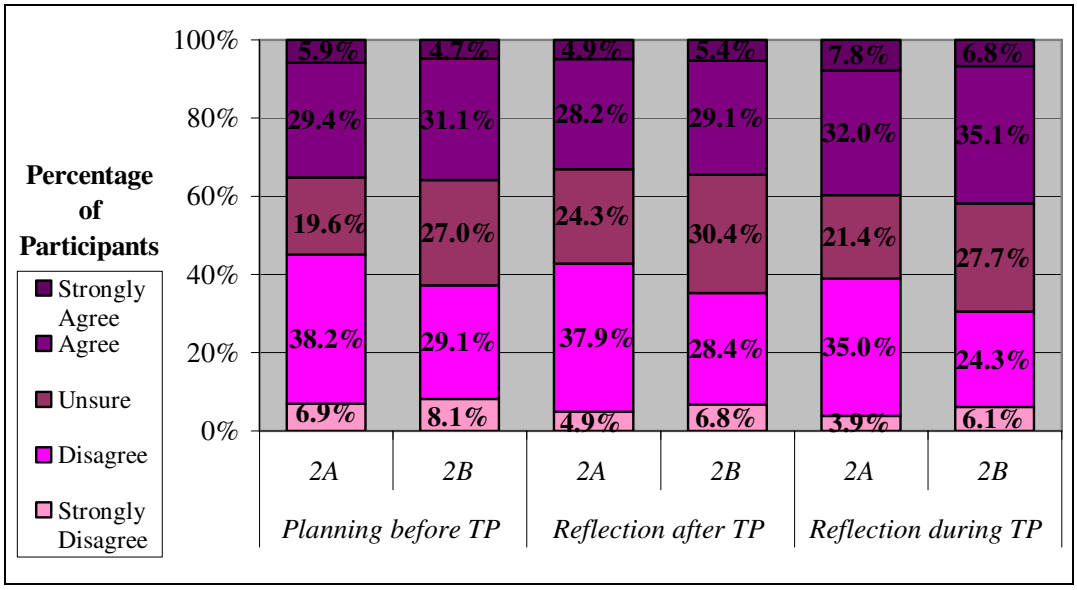
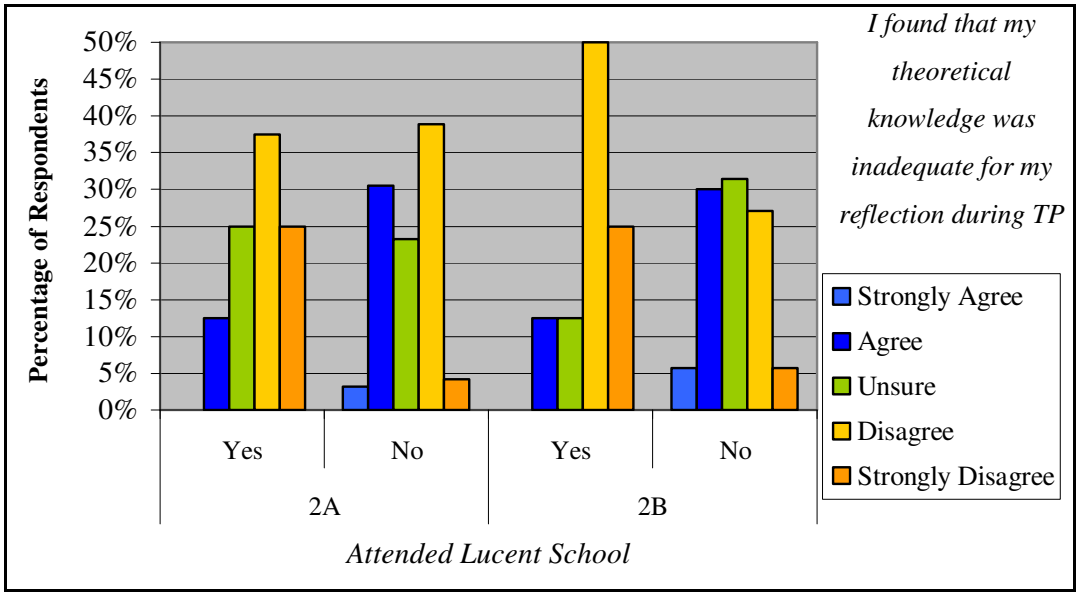


Figure XII: Respondents' perceptions of the inadequacy of their educational studies – Strand Two

Figure XIII: Lucent attendance & perception of educational studies – Year Two



Appendix V Feelings about TP: accompanying figures & tables

Figure I: **TP Grade and students need for support & guidance – Cohort 2B**

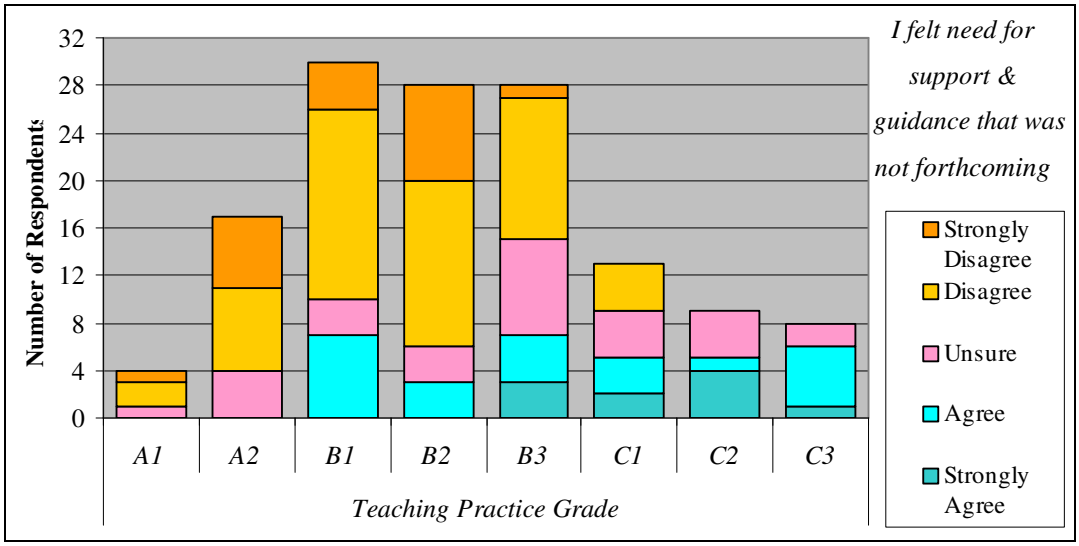


Figure II: **TP Grade and how respondents managed during TP – Cohort 2B**

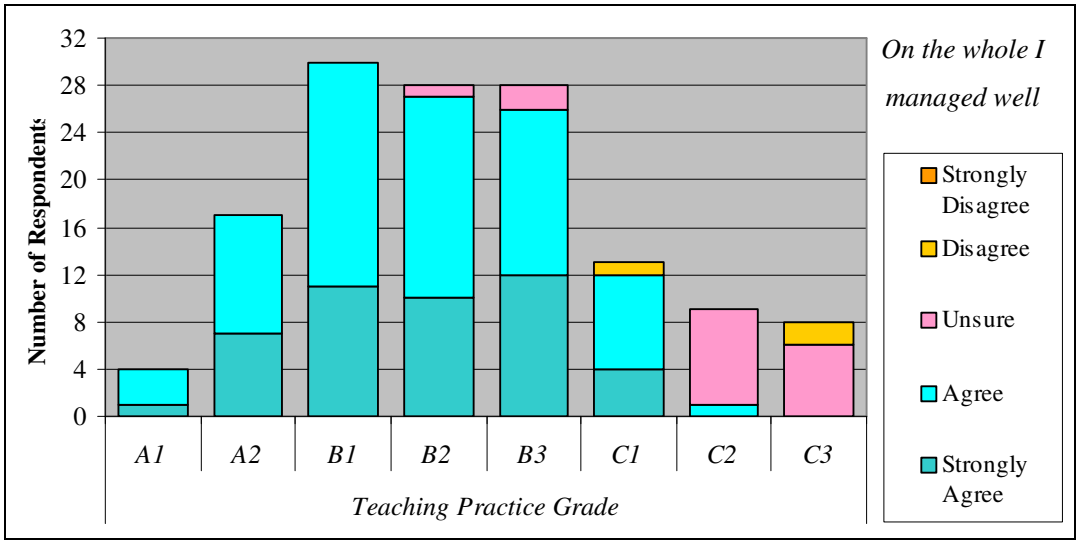


Figure III: **QCA and student teachers perceived need for support – Cohort 2A**