A window into our soul: supporting the inclusive teacher, standards for initial teacher education in Ireland

Uma janela para dentro da nossa alma: apoiando o professor inclusivo, padrões para a formação inicial de professores na Irlanda

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Abstract: In 2020 the Teaching Council in Ireland published CÉIM (the Irish word for step): Standards for Initial Teacher Education in Ireland. In this article these standards are reviewed as set against an understanding of what it means to be an inclusive teacher with particular reference to the Inclusive Teacher Profile European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education1. In Ireland today, we still have the scandalous situation where families of children and young people, with special educational needs, have difficulty in finding a school to enrol their child. Recent commentary on inclusive education in Ireland sadly remains focused primarily on accessing placement or on the setting for learning; be it mainstream, special class or special school. This is understandable when you have no school place for your child but in turn we must keep a focus also on the quality of learning experienced by young people in such a setting. For the latter to be discussed we need to talk about the quality of teacher and teaching in our schools. In Ireland all teacher graduates can be employed in any school setting. This paper seeks to return the focus of our gaze to the quality of the teacher graduate emerging from our preparation programmes. It draws in particular on the Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion study2 to establish how CÉIM advances support for inclusive practice by all teachers for all learners irrespective of setting. Findings suggest that the CÉIM document does support student teachers to be inclusive practitioners through, for example, the promotion of adaptive expertise3. That said, some areas are given more emphasis than others and of note is the realization that standards require a collective ecosystem of engagement by teacher educators and schools. Some suggestions are also offered on emerging good practices that will assist with the implementation and realization of CÉIM standards and support the inclusive teacher across the continuum of teachers' professional learning.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Teacher training; Educational Policies.

The Irish Policy Context: Towards greater inclusive learning

Of Ireland's one million young people, 99% attend mainstream schools with 1% attending special schools. Within the mainstream schools an additional 1% of students attend special classes. Stated policy recognises the central role that teachers play in influencing students learning while also

acknowledging the key role of leadership. "It is generally accepted that the quality of school leadership is second only to effective classroom teaching, in having a crucial impact on student learning"[4].

Teacher preparation programmes in Ireland are charged with preparing all teachers to teach all learners in all settings. Additional professional learning as set against particular contexts are supported by the state and by Higher Education Institutions. It is on this basis that the CÉIM[5] standards for initial teacher education programmes were published by the Teaching Council of Ireland, the national accreditation body for teacher preparation programmes. A year previous to CÉIM being published the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published commissioned research to explore just how well teachers were prepared by their programmes of study to be inclusive teachers[2]. The NCSE requested that the *Inclusive Teacher Profile* European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education[1] be used as a guiding tool in the research undertaken. In turn this paper uses the same EASNIE criteria to determine how well the CÉIM standards support the concept of the inclusive teacher.

Teacher preparation programmes in Ireland are accredited by the Teaching Council where course entry requirements place teaching in the top percentile of professions as captured by entry requirements to university. Student teachers can follow a concurrent or a consecutive programme of study with the former lasting approximately 4 years while the later can range from 5-6 years. Government policy favours the concurrent model and, in all cases, it is expected that all graduates are prepared to teach all students in all settings. Following the first Sahlberg report[6] which addressed the structure of teacher education in Ireland, the number of publicly-funded teacher preparation course providers was reduced from 19 to 7 centres. The reduction sought to concentrate effort and resources to create centres of excellence to meet the needs of the educational system. While not making overly specific reference to inclusive education, the Sahlberg reports[6] and the subsequent publication of the second Sahlberg Report, on *The Structure of Teacher Education in Ireland: Review of Progress in Implementing Reform*[7] stress the importance of campus/school relationships in supporting teachers at the beginning and throughout their teaching careers.

Irish educational policy states that it seeks to promote inclusive education as per international agreements and accords such as UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[8], Salamanca[9] and more recently the UNCPDR[10]. In 2018 the Irish Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which as captured by the NCSE[11] "obliges States, inter alia, to ensure that children can

access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live"[12]. The Education Act of 1998[13] highlighted access, participation and benefit as the key concepts associated with inclusive education. The subsequent Equal Status Act[14] legislated against discrimination on nine grounds, including disability while the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act[15] declared exclusion from mainstream settings should be the exception rather than the norm. The EPSEN Act saw the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) with the goal 'to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children"[15]. The EPSEN act is very much rooted in a medical/deficit perspective and defines disability as a condition and:

> a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition[15:6].

Significantly, the EPSEN Act set the tone in establishing subsequent and dominant perspectives and actions which sought to promote inclusive practices by adopting a continuum of supports and settings as outlined previously. The Act in turn influenced the prevailing 'within child' view of special needs as opposed to more socio-cultural interpretations of special needs and how best to promote inclusive learning. Such a view is captured by the following statement in the 2019 NCSE report.

> The NCSE last advised the DES on the future role of special schools and classes in February 20114. At that time we emphasised NCSE's commitment to the principle enshrined in the EPSEN Act 2004 that a child with special educational needs should be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of the child's is such that to do so would be inconsistent with: (a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or (b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated[11:12].

Only of late is the NCSE now questioning if, what might be best described as 'segregation within a continuum', is advisable and it is now, inspired by the ratification of the UNCPRD, looking to other jurisdictions such as New Brunswick in Canada which would appear to have a more inclusive education provision where all attend the same school. That said it is clear that here too some students identified with special educational needs do not attend all classes all the time with their peers.

Another shift in thinking of late in Ireland since the Education Act of 1998 and the EPSEN Act of 2004 is an understanding that children at risk of not learning is greater than a 'condition' or a 'disability'

as referenced in the EPSEN Act. Teachers will quickly identify that migrant children, children from certain socio-economic backgrounds, those at risk of being bullied and a host of other life influences emerge on a daily basis in every classroom every day. Once more our gaze returns to the importance of the teacher(s) in these classrooms.

While the EPSEN Act was passed in 2004, only certain sections of the Act have, to date, been commenced. These include Section 2 which provides for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs and sections 19-37 which placed the NCSE on a statutory footing. Sections of the Act that haven't been commenced include those which would have conferred a statutory entitlement to an educational assessment; individual education plans; and the delivery of related educational services. Writing in 2019 the NCSE observed that the total number of Special Educational Teachers (SET) in mainstream schools has increased by 37 per cent since 2011, from 9,740 learning support and resource teachers in 2011, to c. 13,400 in 2019. The total number of teachers in special schools has increased by 19 per cent, from c. 1025 teachers in 2011 to c. 1224 in 2019. The number of teachers in special classes has increased by 229 per cent from 505 in 2011 to c. 1840 in 2019.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations in 2006, signed by the Irish Government 2007 and ratified in March 2018. Article 24 (2) obliges States, inter alia, to ensure that; people with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability. It adds that children with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live where children receive the support required, within the general education system to facilitate their effective education and where States are required to achieve progressively the full realisation of people's rights under the CPRD.

The NCSE interprets the UNCRPD to mean that States have a specific and continuing obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards the full realisation of Article 24. The UN Committee has been clear in stating that having a mainstream educational system and a separate special education system is not compatible with its view of inclusion and that parallel systems are not considered inclusive. However, the UN Committee acknowledges that significant change takes time to implement and accepts the concept of progressive realisation which permits countries to signal their policy intent and how the system will change over a period of time. The UNCRPD Committee issued a

General Comment No. 4[5] on the Right to Inclusive Education, which highlighted the importance of recognising the differences between exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion. The UNCRPD Committee Defined Exclusion, Segregation, Integration and Inclusion.

Exclusion is deemed to occur when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form. Segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or to various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities. Integration occurs when people with disabilities are placed in existing mainstream educational institutions with the understanding that they can adjust to the standardised requirements of such institutions. Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

The NCSE rightly contends that placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. As readers will attest, terms such as 'inclusion', 'inclusive education', and 'segregation' mean different things in different contexts, cultures and settings. Reports from the UNCRPD Committee are clear that this Committee interprets inclusive education as educating all children together in mainstream classes within their local school. In Ireland the NCSE observes that an inclusive education has been interpreted as providing a continuum of educational provision that encompasses mainstream classes, special classes in mainstream schools and special schools. In its 2019 report, the NCSE continues to use the terminology 'special' to describe separate settings as this is the term most commonly used in Ireland.

Of note in Ireland, and elsewhere, is the frequent interpretation of inclusive education as being overly associated with the place of learning rather than the quality of learning in any given location. Inclusion is often conflated with an understanding of inclusive learning. By this I mean that the focus should not just be on location and resources but should also address the by learning needs of all as set against the curriculum and identified individual/collective learning goals. By implication such a focus shines a light on the centrality of the teacher, and by implication the quality of teacher preparation programmes.

In tandem with the emergence of the NCSE in 2004, The Teaching Council of Ireland was established in 2006. It is 'the professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching. It acts in the interests of the public good while upholding and enhancing standards in the teaching profession'. These relatively new councils operate on a statutory basis and make up the triad of councils in joining with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The latter council was established in 1999 and 'advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood, primary and post-primary education and on assessment procedures used in schools and examinations on subjects, which are part of the curriculum'.

Within the contested ground that is inclusive education, the three councils work closely with the Department of Education, and on occasions with one another, to advance the inclusion agenda and continue to focus on the impact of their actions to support such a policy goal. In recent times the NCSE has recognised that the concept of inclusive learning impacts a wider range of learners than those traditionally associated with special educational needs and of late is questioning the role and function of special schools and classes in its 2019 document *Policy advice on special schools and classes: an inclusive education for an inclusive society?*

The NCCA have established more inclusive curricula and assessment practices to support schools in being more inclusive, as witnessed with the introduction of the lower secondary *New Junior Cycle Framework*[16] which supports accreditation of learning attainment and achievement for all learners. A review of Senior Cycle is near completion with similar attention being given to inclusive curriculum and assessment practices. In response to emerging developments this latter review adopts a broader interpretation of inclusive education than that of special educational needs only, and includes any young person who may be at risk of not learning for any given reason.

The Teaching Council in turn has adopted an all-encompassing interpretation of inclusive education with a focus on 'learning for all', and avoids specifics in return for emphasising the concept of being a professional and responding and adapting to the needs that present in each classroom each day. this attention has been deepened by the recent challenges posed by the Covid pandemic. The Teaching Council has engaged in a series of actions to support teachers' professional learning including the establishment of Droichead (the Irish for Bridge) which is a framework for supporting induction of teachers. Schools support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in a number of ways and have an identified

professional support team (PST) made up of school personnel to induct NQTs into the school but also into the profession.

The Teaching Council also offers a supportive framework for established teacher with *COSÁN* (the Irish for pathway) which is described as 'the National Framework for Teachers' Learning (CPD) and recognises that teachers are … engaging in life-long learning by publicly acknowledging the full range of learning activities that teachers undertake including formal, informal, personal and professional' collaborative and individual; school based and external.' The framework identifies Inclusion as one of the key learning areas and Mentoring/Coaching as one of the key learning processes.

Figure 1. Graphic depicting the key elements of Cosán.
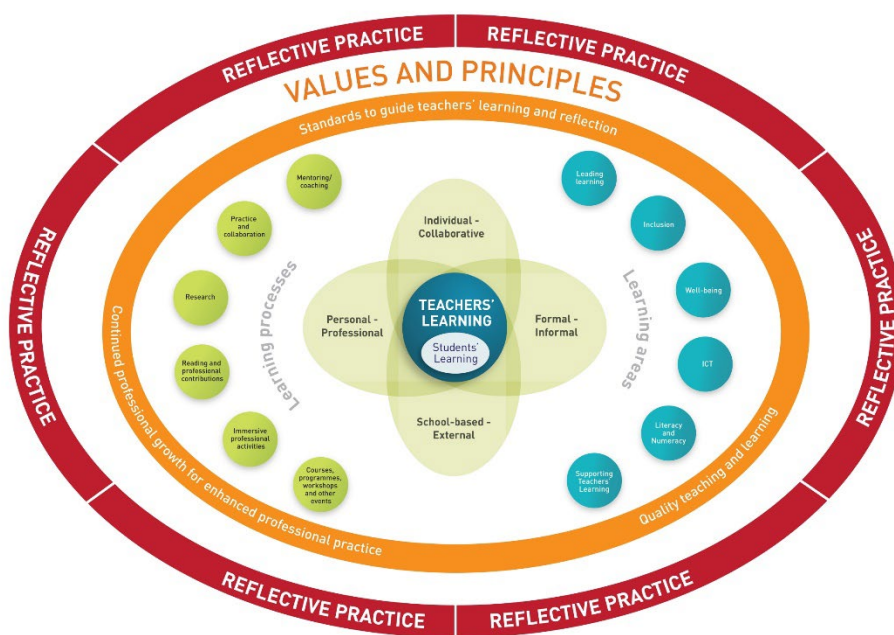
Fonte: The Teaching Council[18].

It is within such a context that the Teaching Council published *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*[5] and sets out the requirements which all programmes of qualification for teaching in the Republic of Ireland must meet in order to gain accreditation from the Teaching Council.

In this paper these standards are reviewed as set against an understanding of what it means to be an inclusive teacher with particular reference to the *Inclusive Teacher Profile* European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education[1]. The EASNIE *Inclusive Teacher Profile* identifies key attitudes, knowledge and skills associated with being an inclusive teacher. They focus on core values such as valuing diversity, supporting all learner, working with others and professional development.

A Review of Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion in Ireland

The review of Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion[2,19] commissioned by the NCSE sought to examine the impact of changes introduced in Ireland in 2012 to initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. These changes included the extension of the length of programmes and the mandatory inclusion of modules on inclusive education and differentiation. The changes also introduced a minimum of two placement settings for student teachers, which ideally should incorporate a variety of teaching, class and school contexts, and educational needs. The *Inclusive Teacher Profile* European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education[1] was used to capture key dimensions of the new programmes initiated in Ireland since 2012. The research was conducted with student teachers between 2016-18 across their final year of study and their first year as newly qualified teachers (NQT).

The origins of the profile itself stem from the EASNIE Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project which explored how all teachers are prepared via their initial teacher education to be 'inclusive'. The three-year project set out to identify the essential skills, knowledge and understanding, attitudes and values needed by everyone entering the teaching profession, regardless of the subject, specialism or age range they will teach or the type of school they will work in. Fifty-five country experts have been involved, from 25 countries: Austria, Belgium (both the Flemish and French speaking communities), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). The expert group included policy makers – responsible for teacher education and inclusive education – and both general and specialist teacher educators.

The Profile was developed as a guide for the design and implementation of ITE programmes for all teachers. "The intention is that the Profile should be considered as stimulus material for identifying relevant content, planning methods and specifying desired learning outcomes for ITE and not a script for ITE programme content"[1:2].

Specifically, the objectives of the document were to:

1 - Identify a framework of core values and areas of competence that are applicable to any initial teacher education programme;
 2 - Highlight the essential core values and areas of competence necessary for preparing all teachers to work in inclusive education considering all forms of diversity;

3 - Highlight key factors supporting the implementation of the proposed core values and areas of competence for inclusive education within all ITE programmes;

4 - Reinforce the argument made within the TE4I project that inclusive education is the responsibility of all teachers and that preparing all teachers for work in inclusive settings is the responsibility of all teacher educators working across ITE programmes.

Four core values relating to teaching and learning have been identified as the basis for the work of all teachers in inclusive education. These core values are associated with areas of teacher competence. The areas of competence are made up of three elements: attitudes, knowledge and skills. A certain attitude or belief demands certain knowledge or level of understanding and then skills in order to implement this knowledge in a practical situation.

Table 1. Relation between values and competences.

Value	Competence
Valuing Diversity Learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education	- Conceptions of inclusive education - The teacher's view of learner difference
Supporting All Learners Teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements	- Promoting the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners - Effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes
Working with Others Collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers	- Working with parents and families - Working with a range of other educational professionals
Professional Development Teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning	-Teachers as reflective practitioners - Initial teacher education as a foundation for ongoing professional learning and development

Source: Author's adaptation of CÉIM.

The final report of the study on Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion[2] commissioned by the NCSE used the Profile to map the following observations and recommendations. Analysis of documentary analysis indicates that the core values and areas of competence identified within the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers are generally evident within ITE programmes in Ireland. Some areas are more strongly represented, such as teachers as reflective practitioners, while others are less evident, such as working with parents and families.

Valuing Diversity: Learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education The study found that "there is broad evidence of a commitment to inclusive teaching and the core values of the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers across ITE programmes in Ireland. Diversity of learners in

schools is a common theme, variously described in terms of special educational needs, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, language, ability, religion…"[1:11]. The report noted:

> It appears that there is no uniform conceptual framework evident across, or indeed within, institutions with evidence to suggest that learner difference is often framed in terms of being a deficit rather than a resource[1:xi].

It is clear that NQTs increasingly recognise and value the importance of inclusive education in relation to its impact on pupils' lives rather than simply as an ideological concept. NQT2/D2 (PP) explains:

> I mean I always knew that it was, that's what you should be doing in your class, that you have to kind of include everybody and get everybody at different levels working together as much as you can, but I think I've kind of become more aware of it or more aware of the benefits of it, because I've seen it in practice and I've been able to kind of use things from inclusive education to kind of bring students on or you know when you actually see it working, it kind of brings it home for you… Um, so maybe I'm a bit more of an advocate for it now than I would've been just when I was doing the theory of it.

In its executive summary of the study it was noted how important school culture and context is in the development of student and newly qualified teachers.

> The authors argue that the quality of school placement and the extent to which partnership between schools and ITE providers aligns with the student experience in relation to inclusive practice, *is as important as specific curriculum content or organisation* (*my italics*). The findings were echoed as the students become NQTs and highlight the central role that the school context and culture plays in the development of NQTs as inclusive teachers.

One is reminded of the work of McDermott[17] (who argues, in the context of children with special needs, "that you can only learn that which is around you". McDermott has spoken critically of the cultural construction of disability and 'the acquisition of a child by a disability'. As identified by Hicks et al. (2019) team-teaching has the potential to buck such a trend and set the conditions for 'the acquisition of a child by a class' in that the students form a team of learners with their teachers. McDermott, Goldman and Varenne provocatively ask: What are the classroom conditions that make educators desperate to label children LD (learning disability)? Instead of more data on individual LD students, why not search for data on conditions that make LD look promising as a way to save children"[18:13].

It would appear the same applies for teachers entering the profession. In turn our understanding of change informs us that changes in attitude occur after actions and not the other way around. If such

is the case then CÉIM and its goals are very dependent on where student teachers are placed, for how long, for what purpose, and in the case of team teaching, with whom?

This observation returns us to the importance of leadership within schools, and not just senior leaders, but rather those in middle leadership roles (both by position and by actions) such as cooperating teachers. In seeking to support all learners it requires all teachers.

On a related note, and one not discussed by CÉIM is the under-representation of certain sectors in the teaching profession including those with disabilities and those from certain socio-economic backgrounds[19,20]. It is encouraging to see that a new Irish Sign Language Bachelor of Education programme (primary school teaching) for deaf students was established in 2019. In turn, the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) was made available to support initial teacher education providers to develop access programmes and routes to teacher education for currently underrepresented groups in initial teacher education, including students with disabilities.

Supporting All Learners: Teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements.

The EASNIE profile identifies teaching in the heterogeneous class as a key component of supporting all learners. It also speaks of promoting "the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners"[1:13]. The NCSE review found, not surprisingly, that those new to teaching found a significant difference between the agreed rhetoric versus challenging reality of differentiating while maintaining high and respectful expectations. The review observed that:

> Student teachers typically reported that they felt well prepared for inclusive teaching in terms of developing appropriate values and attitudes, but relatively under-prepared in terms of confidence in their knowledge and skills to implement inclusive practices in school contexts[1:6].

The student teachers surveyed appeared at times not to make connections between academic progress and the other aspects of learning identified as practical, social and emotional learning. As one student observed:

> And especially I suppose I've found that in the Irish curriculum, social and communication skills aren't standardised in a way…so therefore there isn't a lot of emphasis put on them. But yet in my…I suppose in my own professional opinion, I think communication and social skills are top of the list priority-wise. So, I've been trying to like put a lot of emphasis on those, even though on paper it's not viewed as relevant[1].

While such might be perceived as an isolated comment, and possibly because of the context of a highly academic focused school other evidence from the report is more worrying. In particular the consistent finding that newly qualified teachers do not perceive "the curriculum as a tool for inclusion that supports access to learning" as outlined in the EASNIE profile[1:14].

In the context of standards for initial teacher education, it is clear that there is much that requires attention in supporting the concept of the inclusive teacher as set against the ambition of teaching all learners. In the next section devoted to working with others, the message is starker and made quite clear that a lot more needs to be done to advance this third core value.

Working with Others: Collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers.

This core value highlights the importance of collaboration and teamwork with specific reference to two areas of competence; working with parents and families; and working with a range of other educational professionals.

All NQTs identified collaboration between resource and classroom teachers as crucial. Major factors cited in relation to enabling inclusive practice were support from resource/learning support staff, participation in team teaching, ways of communication, and shared time for planning opportunities. One NQT identified that working with a team teacher had an immediate impact on his teaching experience:

> I suppose I was trying to be as inclusive as I could, and the experience I had mostly were schools that were well supplied in the school. I felt really out of my depth at times and really unprepared […] and like the days that I had a team teacher in there with me were the best days you know (NQT1/S12V-PP).

The report noted that NQTs, especially in their 1st year of teaching, recognise that team-teaching is 'invaluable for any teacher' (NQT1/D3 – PP), but they mainly focus on how it helps them to develop their skills, or supports them in their teaching. It is only later in their second-year that insight is gained, however limited, into a perception that team-teaching can advance learning for all learners and create learning environments that are more inclusive.

While collaborative practices among teaching colleagues and special needs assistants were evident from the study there is little or no reference to engagement or decision making with any other identified professional that one might reasonably expect to engage with the school. The Profile of Inclusive Teachers proposes that new teachers should be familiar with 'the language/terminology and

basic working concepts and perspectives of other professionals involved in education', and have the ability to draw on the support of external resources[1:16]. The report found that that NQTs appear to have limited opportunities and knowledge of the system to access external professionals and to work with them. Many NQTs commented that they do not feel confident and that they lack knowledge of the processes for communicating with external professionals.

Collaboration with parents was raised frequently including the recognition that parents have an important role in contributing to the learning process. Parents were seen as both as a resource for developing inclusive teaching, and as a potential barrier if teachers were unable to establish common ground. For example, one interviewee observed that parents may also be in need of support: "No matter what kind of inclusivity that was set up in the classroom there was no way they were going to be supported (the pupils) – the parents had to be supported first" (NQT2,S9V (P)).

That said participants, be they student teachers or NQTs alike, felt that they were not well-equipped to work with parents effectively. This was supported by survey data and documentary analysis, which showed that working with parents was an area that received less coverage in ITE programmes. The same was said with regard to working with SNAs.

Professional Development: Teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning.

With regard to reflective practice, the EASNIE Profile of Inclusive Teachers portrays reflective practitioners as engaging in evaluating their own practice in a systematic way by recognising teaching as a problem-solving situation. As discussed earlier, NQTs do reflect on their practice and collaborate with others for solving specific problems in their classrooms, so that reflective qualities are evident in their thinking and practice.

With regard to the Teaching Council's 'second pillar' of teachers' engagement with research to support learning and practice[21], the authors of the survey concluded that they found little evidence, at an individual or collective level, of the promotion of an inquiry-based or action research focus to support NQT's own development or that of the school. As referenced previously, team teaching practices offer possibilities for professional reflection and action, and this is recognised by NQT1, E3 (PP): "There's a lot of team teaching goes on. And I think that's a great way to kind of include students,

and I think from what I've seen as you know the main class teacher and then being the team teacher, it kind of makes me think twice".

However, it appears such collective practices are for the most part *ad hoc* and not part of a systematic approach to support reflective teaching for NQTs or the wider school community.

There are, however, many instances of reflection on values and beliefs about what is educationally worthwhile and on NQTs' roles in the educational system. Such reflection can be seen in relation to constructing their professional identity in ways that go beyond the 'practicalities' of teaching practice. NQT1, S9V (P) reflects:

> And then establishing what education is to see if what you're teaching them is actually relevant for their life. Yeah so the big challenge was actually trying to figure out in my own head what education is and how that should be realised for each child, and how like education is different for you know some children who have very specific learning needs, and that like academic mightn't be actually their main priority.

The study concluded that shared professional learning opportunities that might be explored by PSTs are rarely mentioned by NQTs. It seems that the role of a 'significant other' supporting ongoing professional learning for NQTs ranges from the informal, but powerful, engagement with SNAs, to more focused engagement with senior teachers. "It adds 'the support offered by class teachers and/or subject department coordinators may be less formally planned, but nonetheless seems to provide effective engagement in promoting inclusive teaching… one potential area for mutual professional learning between established teachers and NQTs lies in the development of team teaching".

All interviewees seem to appreciate the concept of lifelong learning at a formal postgraduate level or in the context of online courses**.** However, what NQTs perceive as the role of school in that learning process is not clear. Cosán[22] introduces teachers' professional learning as legitimising work-place learning. The calibration of on-site and off-site learning and/or in-class and in-school learning is only emerging in the context, but appears to be an important aspect in supporting teachers' developing inclusive practices. Where in-school support is referenced, NQTs are generally of the view that it adds a contextual dimension to the learning experience and offers the possibility of a continuum of engagement and problem-solving, notwithstanding little reference to best or indeed any research practices.

The next session explore the CÉIM standards as set against our understanding of the EASNIE Profile.

CÉIM: Standards for Initial Teacher Education that support inclusive teaching

CÉIM[5] describes itself as setting out 'the requirements which all programmes of qualification for teaching in Ireland must meet in order to gain accreditation from the Teaching Council. It is also a benchmark for anybody seeking to register as a teacher in Ireland'. The standards are positioned in the context of a continuum of teacher education from initial teacher education through to induction and to that of established teacher. They are also situated in the interplay between schools where school placement takes place and teacher preparatory courses provided by Higher Education Authorities (HEIs).

The intention here is to review the document using the EASNIE profile, while recognising throughout that some aspects of the document will have discrete references to inclusive practices and others will be fashioned by a more embedded interpretation of standards that support inclusive learning. CÉIM offers a range of learning outcomes are set out under three broad headings of Professional Values, Professional Skills and Practice as well as Professional Knowledge and Understanding. Such headings mirror those referenced by the EASNIE profile, namely attitude and beliefs, knowledge and understanding, as well as skills and abilities.

Valuing Diversity: Learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education.

The standards in CÉIM rarely reference the word 'special' and do so only on two occasions. One reference refers to special classes and the other to the Special Education Teacher. Diversity is captured more frequently including in the definition of Inclusive Education:

> The term inclusive education refers to any aspect of teachers' learning aimed at improving their capacity to address and respond to the diversity of learners' needs; to enable their participation in learning; and remove barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school[5:4].

The document continues with an elaboration on this definition. It speaks of a diverse range of needs, regardless of setting and while adopting a broader interpretation than special education, it nonetheless leans somewhat towards a deficit interpretation of inclusion than that captured by the EASNIE profile which speaks of difference as a resource and an asset to education. The CÉIM document also speaks of additional learning needs in place of special educational needs, which may be an effort

to broaden the concept of inclusive education. That said, not all might agree that autism of itself is a learning need. In turn students at risk of not learning due to a range of other factors are not necessarily clearly captured by this definition i.e. students suffering trauma, students who are deemed exceptionally able and gifted, students who are isolated/bullied due to their sexual orientation…

> The Council's view of a truly inclusive approach to professional practice recognises that teachers encounter a diverse range of needs in the course of their teaching, regardless of setting. This will include additional learning needs (e.g. autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia) and learning needs associated with diverse linguistic, socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic (including Traveller community, Roma) backgrounds[5:4].

Commentary later in the document speaks of the following:

> Inclusive Education: With reference to Inclusive Education as outlined in the Glossary, this includes the fostering of appropriate learning environments, including digital ones, that support the development of student teachers' ability to provide for the learning needs of all pupils by utilising, for example, a universal design for learning framework.

Again, the spirit of the document is that all pupils have a right to learn and that all teachers have a responsibility to ensure all students learn in their company. While sharing views such as "good inclusive teaching is good teaching"[5:18] is welcome, greater clarity on what is understood by a universal design for learning framework would also be both welcome and helpful.

The standards encourage that the "identification of learning needs should not conclude with a label"[5: 18]. Such an interpretation while admirable could also be interpreted as being somewhat dated and focused on individual diagnosis and a medical model rather than capturing more socio-cultural advances in our understanding of inclusive learning and inclusive teaching. While in keeping with the EASNIE profile such commentary falls short of the profile's more ambitious view. "Inclusive education is an approach for all learners, not just those who are perceived to have different needs and may be at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities"[5:12].

Supporting All Learners: Teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements.

The CÉIM standards seek to promote the EASNIE competencies associated with supporting all learners in the spirit of teaching effectively in the heterogeneous classroom and succeeding in promoting the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners.

In documenting the requisite Professional Skills and Practices the document speaks of integration and application of knowledge in relation to planning, teaching, learning and assessment

skills (in complex and unpredictable educational classroom and settings). It specifically mentions the need to:

> Apply knowledge of the individual potential of pupils, dispositions towards learning, varying backgrounds, identities, experiences and learning styles to planning for teaching, learning and assessment…engage with pupils in order to develop effective, creative and imaginative strategies that promote individual and shared learning[1:22].

CÉIM also references evaluation of pupil outcomes and the holistic assessment of pupil needs, though it does not refer to pupil strengths as explicitly as the EASNIE profile. In highlighting Professional Knowledge and Understanding attention is given to the factors that promote or hinder effective learning with reference to differentiated pedagogical approaches. This resonates with the EASNIE profile's attention to differentiation of curriculum content, learning process and learning materials to include learners and meet diverse needs[1:14].

The standards mention the role of teachers as leaders of teaching and learning who "contribute to creating and sustaining learning communities in their classrooms, in their schools and in their professional networks"[1:24]. Such commentary chimes with the EASNIE profile and which include 'employing classroom leadership skills that involve systematic approaches to positive classroom management[1:14].

In short, the commentary here identifies that the rhetoric in CÉIM does align overall with the EASNIE profile. That said, CÉIM standards will only become embedded when the challenges revealed by Hicks et al.[2] are addressed collaboratively by school and HEI personnel.

Working with Others: Collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers.

CÉIM emphasises repeatedly the importance of collaborative practice among teachers as set against achieving desirable outcomes for learners. Such collaboration is in keeping with the EASNIE profile and reference is made in CÉIM to the concept of teacher-to-teacher collaboration in the form of team teaching where "Team teaching involves a group of two or more teachers working together to plan, conduct and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of learners. It generally involves teachers teaching the same learners at the same time, although this is not always the case"[1:6].

The standards also define collaboration as "when those involved in teaching and learning work together as partners to achieve the shared goal of developing the knowledge, skills and competencies which student teachers need while ensuring the best outcomes for learners during the process. This is

underpinned by the sharing of knowledge and learning, the building of consensus and the improvement of skills critical to the success of school placement"[1:3]. Of note here is the focus of collaboration is mainly between school and HEI personnel.

The EASNIE profile identifies collaboration to include parents and families. The CÉIM standards, while frequently mentioning parents, places such engagement more in the context of school placement and less in HEI course provision. It appears parental engagement is seen to take place via school placement but to be acknowledged by HEIs in their assessment of student engagement.

> Programmes shall prepare student teachers for teaching, learning, reflective practices and assessment in their schools. They will be prepared for entry to their professional role in the context of a collaborative, inclusive, dynamic teaching profession, helping them to engage with colleagues, co-professionals, pupils and parents and understand their respective roles[1:10].

The EASNIE profile extends the interpretation of who may be engaged in collaborative practices and opens up the conversation to personnel external to the school, or at least to the regular classrooms. Such personnel may include visiting psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, social workers and these and more can form a multi- and inter-disciplinary team with teachers. Engagement with these professionals and indeed with special needs assistants is an implied rather than an explicit feature of the CÉIM document.

As with promoting engagement with parents, it appears that the standards document is placing the emphasis on schools as the location for engagement in relation to external personnel. While this is understandable in that it is the site for such interaction, it also stands to reason that HEI engagement with such personnel would also prove relevant and complementary to school-based interactions.

A summary of the standards required is captured by the following segment from CÉIM. During every module of school placement and as appropriate to the student teacher's stage of development, the student teacher shall, through the use of their Taisce (portfolio):

- Demonstrate an understanding of inclusive education as applicable to that context.
- Demonstrate an understanding of working with parents.

The programme provider shall provide evidence of the approaches they are utilising to enable the student teacher to demonstrate the above. The Council holds the view that good inclusive teaching is good teaching. The identification of learning needs should not conclude with a label. Professionally agile responses to learners' needs, informed and supported by ongoing professional learning, are at the

heart of good inclusive practice. It is important that in identifying needs, teacher education should support teachers in fostering a love and joy of learning in all learners, regardless of background and identified needs. While one might argue about the implied deficit view of 'needs' it is encouraging to read that 'The Council holds the view that good inclusive teaching is good teaching'. This is at the heart of the CÉIM standards and is further developed in the next section.

Professional Development: Teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning.

CÉIM strongly promotes the twin values of EASNIE which seek to promote the teacher as reflective practitioner with initial teacher education as a foundation for ongoing professional learning and development.

Attention in the standards is given to teacher identity which is seen as both a concept and a process. CÉIM contends that "teachers are always becoming and being teachers. At all stages of their learning, they have a sense of who they are as people and professionals, while at the same time being open to learning, growth and development. This is closely linked with the importance of reflective practice"[1:4].

The EASNIE profile does not speak of identity but does state that "teaching is a problem -solving activity that requires on-going and systematic planning, evaluation, reflection and then modified action[1:16]. The concept of "modified action" is given attention by CÉIM where it draws on Timperley's work with regard to *Adaptive Practice* where, while a footnote in the CÉIM document is a very significant contribution:

> Adaptive expertise can be best understood by contrasting it with routine expertise. Both kinds assume teachers learn throughout their lifetimes. Routine experts learn how to apply a core set of skills with greater fluency and efficiency. Adaptive experts, on the other hand, continually expand the breadth and depth of their expertise and are tuned into situations in which their skills are inadequate. Teachers with adaptive expertise, therefore, have the capability to identify when known routines do not work and to seek new information about different approaches when needed[3:12].

Professional learning and learning conversations pepper both CÉIM and The Profile. Of note initial teacher education is seen in the profile as mirroring the goals of CÉIM as "the first step in teachers professional lifelong learning"[3:17]. CÉIM speaks of teachers' professional learning with an emphasis on the collective as captured by the apostrophe 's'. "It is described as "all the learning which teachers

engage in to support their professional practice and to address the needs of all pupils in their care. The teacher as a reflective professional is able to draw on an integrated knowledge base to improve practice through inquiry"[3:16].

The standards call on a range of core elements of ITE programmes with Inclusive Education as the first identified element as referenced earlier. Global Citizenship is also referenced as a key element and includes social justice and interculturalism. It is framed in unison with Inclusive Education under the banner of care for others. Creativity and Reflective practice are also identified to include fostering a creative mindset among student teachers, teachers as reflective practitioners; teachers as innovators; teachers as researchers; teachers' relationship with the school as a learning community and the development of *Taisce* to support the process of portfolio-based learning.

The standards also note that "appropriate staff development policies should be in place to ensure that staff continue to enhance their knowledge and expertise including that relating to reflective practice, research, curriculum development, inclusive education and professional development"[1:15]. This latter point recognises the wider landscape in which CÉIM operates and in which it ultimately depends upon to be implemented.

In summary the CÉIM document supports the inclusive teacher. Some of the documents easily identifiable strengths, as set against the EASNIE profile, lie in its recognition of the importance of inclusive education as being synonymous with improvement, it's emphasis on reflective and collective practices and its recognition of the central role of the school across all teacher learning. Areas where a greater focus may have been offered within CÉIM are those associated with collaborative practices with external professionals and a more explicit commentary on the evolving concept of inclusion where diversity is seen as a resource would also have been welcome. Of more importance is how might some or all of the goals captured in CÉIM be best achieved. That is the focus of the final section of this paper.

Discussion: Possible Next Steps

The CÉIM standards state "school placement is considered to be the fulcrum of teacher education. It includes teachers from all phases of the continuum – experienced teachers who support and guide the student teacher, and who learn from the process themselves; student teachers who are learning about being teachers; and placement tutors"[3:7]. Of note is that the standards state "fulcrum of teacher

education" which implies all teachers and not just student teachers. One way of looking at the implementation and realisation of CÉIM as set against the profile and observations of NCSE report, is to look at the interplay across the continuum of teacher education in the context of the temporal continuum of daily school and classroom life.

Three possible steps are selected here, to support the good work undertaken to date, and are situated in the 'fulcrum' that is the school. Each step is in rhyme with the other and focuses on the promotion of the inclusive teacher. Step one attends to collaborative practices, step two addresses leading improvement and step three. All three steps are in keeping with Wenger's Community of Practice[23] and all honour the spirit of Freire where: "Ninguém educa ninguém, ninguém se educa a si mesmo, os homens se educam entre si, mediatizados pelo mundo"[24:7].

The first step, collaboration, begins on the HEI campus but is brought to life in schools and classrooms. It merits exploration to see how peer support might be further encouraged on campus so as to promote professional collaboration once qualified. Team teaching during placement and before placement offers one step to achieve such a goal. CÉIM seeks to promote collaborative practice with cooperating teachers but collaborative professional interactions based on peer collaboration could begin earlier among student teachers and add to an understanding of the focus of teaching being on the learner and not just the student teacher. In that regard, a collective understanding by HEIs of how to assess students on placement ie Pass/Fail over Grading merits discussion. A recent change in focus where 'school placement' replaces 'teaching practice' has succeeded in raising the level of ambition associated with school placement and the invitation here is to consider new and aligned assessment arrangements that might better support the goals of CÉIM being realized.

Collaborative actions with newly qualified teachers is evident from the work of Hicks et al.[2] but more intentional undertakings in the context of Droichead and the Professional Support Team (PST) work with Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) would allow for such collaboration to include the student teacher. The ecosystem of the school offers a chance for a collaborative climate to be promoted. Research (forthcoming) indicates that already NQTs are 'promoted' to the role of mentors of student teachers which while fraught with possibilities and pitfalls reveals the reality of school life and the nuances associated with professional collaboration. When such cohorts new to teaching are supported by more established teachers then the sphere of influence is extended and opportunities to engage in initiatives and decision making can be made available.

Recent work by Ni Choistealbha and Ní Dhuinn[25] confirm previous findings by Hicks et al.[2] highlighting challenges faced and opportunities lost by those new to teaching in 'dealing with parents'. Again, the potential role of established teachers here as pertains to parents of children with identified needs is worthy of consideration as is the role of colleges in supporting student teachers to 'work with parents' to support pupil learning[26]. Schools, teacher preparation colleges and the wider community working together, where the agenda is set by the community, is an emerging outcome of a fledgling project initiated by the Teaching Council BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for Communities on a National Scale).

Greater collaboration, within and outside the classroom, can be undertaken in tandem with greater exposure to understanding the concept of leadership and leading an initiative to promote learning. Leadership is the second proposed next step. In the context of CÉIM and the student teacher, leadership means access to decision making and insight into initiatives. Schools are charged to self-review to advance school improvement, and student teachers' research can add to the quality of the review and subsequent actions. Such collaborative leadership offer symbiotic learning for both student teacher and established staff. Where promotion of inclusive learning is linked to school improvement many opportunities come into view including offering students an insight into problem solving and decision making within a class or indeed across a school. Student teachers research practices can assist schools in self-evaluation of their actions as set against the outcomes for their pupils.

The previous two actions combine to create opportunities for collaborative leadership and support the achievement of the third step which is to promote more intentionally what we mean by adaptive practice. It is through collaboration and leadership that a student teacher can be supported to adapt their practice in relation to each pupil before them. Such adaptations allow us to 'reinvent the game (of teaching)' across a day and across a teaching career. Again, the concept of Praxis[23] where action and interaction are continuously evolving to best enhance the learning and life chances of each pupil. CÉIM is strong on the promotion of reflective practice. This thread of reflection stretches across the continuum of teacher induction and COSÁN where established teachers continue to learn and adapt.

A community of adaptive practitioners guided by student outcomes opens up opportunities for learning at all levels, for both teachers and pupils. Working in communion teachers can make CÉIM a reality but also address areas such as collaboration with parents and with other professionals in a

manner that is accessible for student and new teachers and in turn allows them have a voice in improving the learning and life experiences of their pupils, themselves and their colleagues.

Conclusion

Ireland submitted its *Initial Report under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* to the UN in December 2020. The UN Committee will consider the report and make conclusions and recommendations. The Committee may conduct a review following this which will involve a country visit. The NCSE[11] observes that "there are reputational ramifications for countries where the steps taken towards implementation of CPRD are considered insufficient and not in keeping with the spirit of the Convention"[11:18]. Ireland has not as yet ratified the Convention's Optional Protocol but has indicated its intention to ratify at the earliest opportunity following completion of Ireland's first reporting cycle. The protocol establishes an individual complaints mechanism for the Convention for individuals who consider their rights under the Convention have been violated.

Of note is the Irish Governments report is section 3.19 which is devoted to what is described as *Teacher Training*. It contends that

> Ireland is committed to training teachers who provide quality, inclusive teaching. Teachers undertake professional learning in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. CPD is provided for teachers to support the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms. All initial teacher education in Ireland that leads to registration must have professional accreditation from the Teaching Council whose role is to promote and regulate professional standards in teaching[11:42].

Notwithstanding the use of the term *teacher training* over *teacher preparation* this response fails to capture the importance and nuance of teacher education in Ireland within the context of inclusive learning. It doesn't capture ongoing efforts to prepare and support teachers from their initial teacher education throughout their career, to be inclusive teachers.

Thankfully the Teaching Council's CÉIM document attends to such ambitions and while it has its own limitations as a document, as set against the EASNIE profile, the more serious limitation is the required synergy of action across a range of stakeholders, most notably among HEI and school personnel, to make the document a reality in our lives. Overall, this author remains optimistic that CÉIM is a significant and helpful step to realising our goal of supporting inclusive teachers and will inspire

collaborative practices that benefit all learners in all classrooms. It is hoped that this paper will assist in such honourable endeavours.

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