Valuing Teachers in the Irish Context: Lessons from London

Mary Isobelle Mullaney

***Abstract*—The contribution teachers make to quality educational systems is well established. Consequently, there has been a growing emphasis across many countries on attracting and retaining good teachers. There has been a crisis in attracting second level teachers to work in certain schools and areas in the United Kingdom. There are currently some concerns regarding teacher recruitment in the Republic of Ireland (RoI). This was a report and small-scale, qualitative study interviewing two Irish teachers who went to teach in a London school and their school Principal. The researcher sought to gain insight into the phenomenon of Irish teachers teaching in London and the challenges and rewards of this experience. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis techniques and the insights gained were discussed in the light of findings from previous research and the author's international experience. The findings support that of larger studies. Teaching in the London school was found to be difficult and highly bureaucratic. This led to excessively long working hours, poor work/life balance and burn-out. The participants reported feeling supported and well mentored in the school but teaching was perceived as 'easier', more manageable and attractive in the RoI.**

***Index Terms*—Assessment, induction, professionalism, role of the teacher, teacher recruitment, teacher retention.**

I. Introduction

Engineers make Bridges
Artists make Paintings
Scientists make Rockets
But Teachers make them All (anon).

The above quote while trite, is nonetheless true. The contribution teachers make to quality educational systems is well established [1], [2]. The McKinsey Report [3] claimed effective teachers were the single most important element of a child's development, while Slater et al. [4] also placed teacher effectiveness at the heart of pupil achievement. 'Student achievement has been found to be strongly related to teachers' preparation in both subject matter and teaching methods' [5]. Consequently, there has been a growing emphasis across many countries on attracting and retaining good teachers [6]. Finland, which produces highly effective teachers, offers models of initial teacher education (ITE) which are highly selective of the best candidates and then offer them high degrees of independence in curriculum and assessment to meet pupil needs. Their ITE is University based, research led and informed while having large school based components [7].

As a teacher educator for over 25 years, preparing teachers for second-level teaching, I have observed many changes to the role of a teacher. I taught in the United States and have also been a visiting lecturer to a teacher education program in the University of Helsinki as part of the Erasmus programme. In the academic year 2016-17, while working as an honorary senior lecturer in the Institute of Education in University College London, I experienced teaching in London first hand. Reflecting on these interview findings and my varied experiences I would like to strike a warning note, we in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) should not take for granted what we have when it comes to teachers because the quality we have depends to a large degree on the environment in which they work and on the agency and respect they are afforded. The working conditions of the teacher, regarding curricular change, responsibilities, assessment and paperwork need to be managed in such a way that the job remains 'doable' and attractive in order to enhance recruitment and retention.

II. Background

Despite what public commentators may say about long holidays and short days, teaching is not an easy job, it is a complex professional activity [8]. It is often undervalued as due to everyone having served an 'apprenticeship of observation', with thousands of hours spent watching teachers teach, this can lead to the assumption that everyone knows how to teach [9], [10]. Teachers need to master what Shulman (1987) identified as three types of knowledge; knowledge of their subject, of how to teach it (pedagogical knowledge) and of their students [11]. The teacher's job description has broadened unrecognisably over the last 50 years, to meet the needs of an ever changing society. We are in a culture of rapid change and teachers in the RoI are experiencing what has been described as 'innovation overload'. Students demand stimulation, engagement and, to coin Kounin's word, with-it-ness. With societal demands for quality and inclusive education, the job of the teacher to differentiate in order to meet the needs of a broad array of learners is indeed a challenging one.

The General Teaching Council of England (GTCE) began operation in 2000, lasting only 10 years, despite being an aspiration of teachers for more than 150 years [12]. It was abolished with criticism from all sides, for on the one hand being toothless and ineffective at dealing with teacher incompetence, while on the other, being seen overly bureaucratic and invasive; interfering in teachers' personal lives. In systems where teachers have more professional

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M. I. Mullaney is with the National College of Art and Design, 100 Thomas Street, Dublin, Ireland (e-mail: mullaneyi@staff.ncad.ie).

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recognition, such as the Finnish system, the outcomes for students are better. With the setting up of the Teaching Council (TC) in the RoI in 2006, there has been an increase in the professionalism of the role of the teacher. A TC was sought to be established in the RoI from as far back as the National Education Convention in 1994 where it was hoped that it would provide 'a distinguished future for the teaching profession' [13]. Fitness to practice procedures are now in place through the TC and it is important that they function well. No doubt it will take time for the TC to fulfil its mandate and get full teacher allegiance but the demise of the GTCE in the UK provides a salutary lesson. The TC needs to align itself more closely to the Scottish model rather than to the previous English one in order to promote professionalism. While the introduction of the TC sought to ensure the professionalism of the teaching body through focusing on the continuum of teacher education, it also heralded a raft of requirements and bureaucracy and introduced several simultaneous changes, making it difficult to assess the impact of any one change. One such example is raising the level and lengthening the duration of post graduate ITE provision while simultaneously introducing new induction requirements for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) prior to acquiring full registration. Since 2012/2013, all undergraduate programmes of ITE are at least four years in duration, and since September, 2014, all postgraduate programmes are of Masters level and of two years' duration. This followed by at least one year of induction, possibly more, depending on employment status, is needed in order to acquire full registration. This is a significant investment of time, money and effort on behalf of any individual and they would need a reasonable expectation of gaining secure employment, and the potential to earn a good living, in order to embark on it. These changes both delay career commencement for teachers and appear, in some cases, to be acting as a deterrent to recruitment. In its final chapter, the OECD *Teachers Matter* report makes the significant point; 'Experience from a number of countries indicates that unless teachers and their representatives are actively involved in policy formulation, and feel a sense of "ownership" of reform it is unlikely that substantial changes will be successfully implemented' [14]. Teachers' opinions need to be valued.

In recent years there has been an eroding of the autonomy and professional status of teachers in the RoI. This could have its beginnings in the 1990s, teachers' unions led strikes for better pay (2001) and a monetisation of work previously undertaken 'free' by teachers such as yard and hall duty, and class supervision, took place, it was as if good will was taken out of the system. Teacher morale suffered further during the recession in the RoI (2008) which arose out of the banking crisis, with the stripping away of middle management structures in schools and the reduction in teacher pay. All previous allowances for further qualifications were also taken away reducing the incentive to undertake continuous professional development. One of the most damaging things to the profession occurred as new inductees were paid on a lower pay-scale than their more experienced colleagues. While this is being redressed, current NQTs are facing accommodation shortages and the divisiveness in staffrooms caused by newer teachers, who are often more qualified than their senior colleagues, being paid less, for the same or often more or better work.

There are many factors that can lead to a negative view of teaching as a career. It could be suffering from a feminisation of the profession in that teaching is composed of a largely female workforce and this may lead to an undervaluing of the role, as women's work generally tends to be of lesser value and status [15]. In the UK teaching has become an increasingly difficult job with the demands for accountability and assessment, consequently teachers are leaving the profession and new recruits are not being found to replace them [16]-[19]. A lack of investment has compounded the problem. 'Overwork and lack of support are driving teachers across England out of the profession much faster than they can be replaced' [20]. In the RoI diminishing status, unequal starting pay and initial job insecurity due to the often part time nature of initial employment despite the need for a long and demanding ITE could contribute to a similar difficulty with recruitment, particularly in areas such as Mathematics and Science where career paths are more lucrative elsewhere. It is important that whatever salary is paid affords teachers the opportunity to pay for housing and living costs in the area in which they teach. In 2014, a report commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills in the RoI by senior counsel Peter Ward said that 'it is broadly accepted that matters have now reached a point where there is a danger that the teaching profession will be downgraded… The lack of full-time, secure positions operates as a significant disincentive to those considering entering the profession. There has been a loss of morale in the sector' [21].

III. Overview of Study

A qualitative study was undertaken in 2017-2019, exploring the experience of Irish NQTs teaching in a South West London coeducational, secondary, publicly funded school. The Educational Trust, which manages a group of schools, of which this school is one, actively recruits Irish teachers to teach in their schools. According to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the school had recently come out of the categorisation as a school requiring 'special measures' but it was awarded 'improving' during the 2017 academic year. It has since improved to 'good' in the rankings. Through this study I hoped to gain an insight into the teaching experience in London, and bring back insights to the RoI. Two Irish qualified teachers who taught for their NQT year in the school were interviewed and also for triangulation purposes, their Principal, who has many Irish teachers on staff. The teachers had each completed their ITE in Art & Design and Mathematics respectively, on concurrent ITE courses in two different higher education institutes (HEIs) in the RoI and their first full time employments were in this school in London. NCAD ethical guidelines were followed during this study. The interviews were semi-structured, of approximately 30-40 minutes' duration and took place by appointment at the convenience of the interviewees. The data were transcribed and themes selected using the thematic analysis approach of Braun et al (2019) [22]. Findings are discussed under the themes emerging and other themes selected from previous studies in this area [23],

[24]. All data were handled anonymously and teachers were given pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity. Mary & John taught Art and Mathematics respectively. While this is a small scale study and therefore it is not possible to generalise from it, it allowed for in-depth exploration of ideas and built on previous research and the researchers experience.

IV. Crisis of Recruitment and Retention

While a career in teaching might not be linear and some may step in and out for family or other reasons. Teaching [in the USA] has long experienced steep attrition in the first few years of teaching, and about one-third of new teachers leave the profession within 5 years' [25]. This is also the case in the UK [26] but it has only recently become a phenomenon in Irish education. Teacher numbers in post-primary school in the RoI are required to grow in the coming years due to population trends Teaching has become less attractive as a career and in addition more teachers are retiring early. There is difficulty recruiting teachers in some specific subjects. [27]. The factors influencing recruitment and retention difficulties need to be addressed and perhaps lessons can be learned from the English experience.

'Probably the most important thing a school administrator at the school or district level can do to improve student achievement is to attract, retain, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed teachers' [28]. Teacher recruitment difficulties were experienced directly and identified clearly by the school Principal interviewed. The Education Trust actively recruits in Ireland in order to try to address their recruitment difficulties. In line with previous research into Irish teachers teaching in the UK [29]; the motivation of the two participant teachers, to come to London was partly economic, '*to secure a full time job'* (Mary, 2017), and partly for '*personal reasons'* (John, 2019). A study by Ryan and Kurdi (2014), found that 'the majority of Irish immigrants teaching in the UK had arrived since 2010, during the recession in the RoI. Many, like the two participants in this study, taught in London and environs. Most of the previous study participants had completed their teacher training in the UK [30] whereas these two participants arrived as NQTs. Mary, after a gap of four years having found it impossible, despite 11 interviews, to find employment in the RoI. The push and pull factors identified in the 2014 study for those who went to England to teach, as NQTs, were the same for these participants 'poor job prospects in Ireland … easy availability of teaching posts in England' [31]. Also similarly to 36% of the respondents in the 2014 study [32], both Mary and John found their posts in London through an agency. The Principal says in order to recruit and retain NQTs it comes down to '*remuneration …. particularly for younger teachers'... you think about it – I'm going to go home for the weekend and collapse, and Mum and Dad are going to look after me and cook and do my washing – that's a big expense [travelling] to Ireland… they're more stressed, … they've got to do everything'*. This indicates a real understanding of the plight of a young NQT and this reality was experienced by Mary who said she could only afford to go home at half term.

The Principal stated: '*if it weren't for our Irish colleagues, I don't think the school would still be open. That is how much I have been able to rely on them and what they've put in to the school. They've been outstanding, as a body, generally speaking'*. However, she finds the greatest problem with hiring Irish teachers is the transient nature of their tenure. There is very high staff attrition. Teachers come for one or two years in order to improve their employability at home. '*Another downside is inevitably they are less likely to stay…we've had a lot that have been one year and that is a real frustration for me, I would be looking for a good 2 years out of a teacher to make it worth their while and our while as an investment. And that really is… my only negative. The positives have been enormous'*. This presents challenges to management as it affects staff and student morale and can be very disruptive. The Principal stated that in order to retain teachers she wanted to have '*good accommodation available in advance'* and she was moving to having the Educational Trust purchase some houses so they could provide housing at cost '*not as a profit making concern for the school, but so that it's invested in education'*. The cost of housing in London is prohibitive and takes up a large portion of the teacher's salary.

She also planned to adjust the school calendar and to have shorter more regular holiday breaks so as to afford the teachers more opportunities to travel home to recharge their batteries. '*We are looking at shortening the school year and that is particularly because we have so many overseas teachers'*. She doesn't agree with long holidays. *'I'm not a holiday person. I don't like unstructured time and I think too long holidays, the children will just forget what they're doing…. Half terms which are eight weeks long… absolutely wreck people. They are exhausted. And particularly when you add… discipline problems, what we need is shorter terms and more frequent but shorter holidays'* (Principal, 2017). In response to what she viewed as obstacles to recruiting English trained teachers' the Principal referred to the burden of work. There is more teacher-pupil contact time in London than the RoI but this does not necessarily lead to better student outcomes.

The participant teachers exemplified the problem identified by the Principal as they both returned back to Ireland one after just under two years in the school and the other after one. Mary at the time of interview (2017) was excited to be going home to a full time job with permanent potential. She was returning to Ireland at the end of her second term of her second year in London. She stated that she found it difficult to resign her position mid-year as she knew she was leaving her employer with a difficulty replacing her and she was left in no doubt that this was the case. John left the school at the end of the academic year, 2017, after just one year in the school and returned to a full time position which has since become permanent (2019). The Principal indicated that NQT teachers need a lot of support during their first year and can achieve promotional opportunities very quickly. This was endorsed by Mary's experience as she was appointed as head of department after her first year in the school. The return home is in line with previous research findings [33].

V. Status of the Teacher

The Principal considered that in London teaching *'is still a very well-respected profession. Certainly, amongst adults... [but] there's a kind of fear of it and I think that if people think about it as a career, they think it's going to be extremely hard work… The teaching profession in Ireland appears to me, from an outsider's point of view, to be respected more than this one here, so that teachers going in thinking "My goodness me, I'm dedicated to this, I really really want to be in this, to make it work".'* Mary found it hard to compare the status of teaching in London with Ireland as she had only done her school placement (SP) there, but she thought it '*probably did not have the same status'*. She prevaricated about whether or not she felt respected and decided that she did by some and not others but said she feels valued by management as '*they make a point of saying what you do well'*. John thought that he had been extremely well supported in his school by the senior management team (SMT) as an NQT and that he was respected and valued for his mathematics qualification. While he thought this he felt the system did not adequately support NQTs. There is high attrition in the profession and both teachers had seen colleagues give up teaching. John said this could be attributable to this particular school but he also said '*it's no accident the the UK have to recruit teachers from Ireland. It is perceived as an overwhelming job, and the perception is somewhat accurate*'.

We, in the RoI have always prided ourselves on our education system. We are lucky in the teachers we have and in teaching having retained much of its status, still attracting a high caliber of student to ITE though there has been a crisis of recruitment and retention emerging in recent times [34]. We need to protect the positives. If what the Principal says is true; '*If I'm going to make generalisations, I will say that Irish teachers have more dedication, more enthusiasm, more passion about their subject and are prepared to work harder'*, then we need to be making more efforts to retain these high caliber teachers in the RoI.

VI. The Need for Investment

The Principal stated that the standard of publicly funded education in the UK is not comparable to the European standard and she blamed lack of investment. '*For example in relation to Maths, where the standard is perceived as not high enough, the solution posed is to give them a harder exam.'* Rather: '*We need to be investing in Maths education. We need to be investing in the system. I don't think we do enough to recruit and retain good teachers… I am very pro state secondary education, comprehensive education, … I don't think enough has been invested in it. And I think that successive governments have fought against it… I'll give you an example… [I know a] private school… with 1,500 students in it, and we are a school of about 700, so about half [as many] … they have 27 qualified Maths teachers in their department most of whom have a PhD or a Masters. We have 1 qualified Maths teacher. We have seven Maths teachers within the department, but only one of them is a Maths specialist.*'

I have observed firsthand the investment in Finland in teacher preparation, where the student is paid while studying or on SP and their accommodation is provided and all fees including masters are free [35], a far cry from what current students on Irish Professional Masters in Education (PME) programmes with fees in excess of 5000 euro per annum. 'Many are forced to take up casual employment in order to pay their fees and living expenses, and hence are visibly exhausted and stressed in lectures. Levels of anxiety and attrition are considerable' [36]. Both teachers felt their salary allowed them to survive but was not a good salary by London standards. All NQT teachers are not paid equally and starting bonuses have to be paid to teachers of subjects where there are recruitment shortages, such as Mathematics. The Principal identified remuneration as the principal factor in recruitment. *'That's where the teachers go [the private schools] … they get the money. It's not an easier job but they think it is. On the surface of it, it's more rewarding because you are faced with children who want to learn, very focused. I wouldn't do it. There are flip sides. It's not an easier job but it appears less challenging*.'

VII. Preparedness, Support and Career Trajectory

The Principal said she was very happy with the preparation level of the teachers from Ireland and that some were exceptional but that they still needed support in getting used to the demands of the English system. She stated that if she had her preference '*all my new teachers would have been through UK PGCE [post graduate certificate in education] training'* and would therefore be familiar with the English syllabus. '*I think that they are given a very thorough grounding and they are more prepared. So they spend quite a bit more time in university before they go into schools and the way in which they are put into schools... eased in… they have a much better structure and support'*. However, there are just not enough indigenous UK recruits so it is necessary to import teachers from the RoI and then they need to be inducted into the English system. '*I think it's really just a subject issue in terms of the real difference for the Irish teacher, … they need training in the English systems, particularly in the examination system and then the curriculum.'*

Both teachers had few difficulties with the recruitment process and felt themselves needed. John had received several job offers in the UK and was being paid a higher salary than many of his colleagues as the only qualified Mathematics teacher in the school. However, they felt inadequately prepared for what greeted them though they had both been warned of the difficulties of teaching in London (perceived as poor discipline and too much paperwork [37]). They were shocked at how hard teachers had to work and how much responsibility they had versus the relatively low responsibility of students. John indicated that increased school based time during his ITE would have prepared him better for the role of a teacher '*the only thing that prepares you adequately for teaching is teaching'*. Mary concurred about the need for extended and varied placements and talked about the nature of her background with one of her rural based SPs having been quite different from her current

teaching situation. However, another SP had prepared her better; this she had undertaken in a socially deprived area of Dublin, where she had felt '*afraid*' while teaching. Currently both teachers ITE courses have longer SP experiences included in them as a result of changes brought in by the TC. The difficulties Mary's experienced in the challenging school shows discipline issues are not confined to schools in London. Neither do all schools in London have discipline problems.

Induction is a crucial phase as it is a phase where in other jurisdictions, many teachers become disillusioned or drop out of the profession [38]. As both teachers undertook their induction/probation year in the school in London they had interesting insights into the probation process. There is a highly formal system of induction in the school including support with planning, supervision and feedback, and the teachers both said that while they had a '*tough start'* they really improved their teaching through the mentoring process. A mentor teacher from the Educational Trust was assigned to each NQT and they were there to support them on their learning journey. Mentoring is an expectation of the job of a qualified teacher in London and not seen as an optional aspect. *'It's an expectation that at some point during your teaching career you will help to train'* (Principal, 2019). Mary described her mentor teacher as '*brilliant*' and said she couldn't have got through the first year without her. She also expressed regret that she had not been more supportive of her mentee in year two due to taking on head of department responsibilities. Help and advice were available through the Educational Trust as well as from the SMT and could be called on at any time. John said that he was given opportunities to video his classes and reflect with his mentor. Both teachers felt very supported in the school and were afforded time in order to observe and plan with colleagues. In-career development took place on an ongoing basis in the school also. '*In addition, … we have weekly training, rather than specific inset days'* (Principal, 2017) and the teachers found this relevant and beneficial though felt overloaded at times.

John expressed an element of surprise upon his return to Ireland about a lack of departmental meetings and collegial support in general which he had experienced in London. Teachers operated more autonomously. In London, '*There was an open door policy where colleagues and senior staff could come and observe your class at any time and you also could observe colleagues and learn from them'* (John, 2019). John described the whole staff '*as very collegiate with great camaraderie between them'* where staff bonded in their common mission of coping with the challenges presented. However, '*you had to be on top of your game to teach effectively, it shouldn't have to be such hardship and an average NQT is sometimes just not able for it, it felt like one of those army challenges where you are doing your best, it's a constant struggle and you keep killing yourself working and keep getting knocked back and given more to carry, it was exhausting'* (John, 2019).

In the RoI, the *Droichead* [meaning bridge in Irish] process is an integrated professional induction framework for NQTs. It builds on the SP undertaken by the ST, taking as its starting point the areas for further learning that have been identified by the NQT in collaboration with the HEI as part of the SP experience [39]. In the OECD publication *Teachers Matter* (2005) [40] integration between stages of the continuum and having the ST/NQT have ownership of their own learning journey is very important. Both participants found the school in London supportive of their learning journey and their probation was recognised by the Irish TC. For induction to succeed it needs to be into a real job. At present in the RoI few NQTs get full-time jobs and it may take several years to secure a full-time permanent position. The lack of permanent jobs and casualisation of the profession are deterrents to recruitment. In the RoI between 2008 and 2014 the number of teachers on temporary hours rose from 27 to 35 percent [41].

Mary liked the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) Art and Design syllabus and thought there were aspects of this she would like to bring back to teaching in Ireland. She also liked that in every lesson students' have practical tasks and they also do research '*The way they structure the classes. There is a set way to teach a lesson; starter, two set tasks and a plenary*.' However, the point emphasised most by her during the interview was that she was looking forward to going home to get to actually teach. She expressed a desire to have more control over what she teaches students and how she teaches them. Due to his classes being shared with other teachers, John also felt somewhat restricted and wished he could have his own class each day and be responsible for their improvement, he thought Mathematics was being taught as a series of steps rather than to achieve pupil understanding.

One overwhelming advantage of working in London which became evident was that having survived there makes one more employable in the RoI and both participants went home to full time jobs. Mary had found it impossible to secure one prior to going to London despite trying all over the RoI. Promotional opportunities were experienced as better in London as Mary was appointed head of the Art department after one year and John spoke about another colleague who was appointed head of English after one year. This they both considered would be unlikely to occur in the RoI.

VIII. The London Teaching Experience

From the experience of the participant teachers it was not enough that a teacher teaches and achieves good outcomes with students, there needed to be evidence of this fact. This creates an extra layer of work for teachers; documenting progress [42]. This viewpoint is endorsed by previous research on Irish migrant teachers in the UK [43], [44] and is well documented in the press [45], [46] where interviewees speak of pressure to show constant improvement and a lack of support to get there. '*There's a lot of accountability on the teacher…. It's not sustainable. It just isn't'* (Principal, 2017).

Autonomy and support of a teacher may be viewed as two intersecting continuums as shown in Fig 1, with support on one axis and autonomy on another. The Finnish system may be seen at one end of the continuums with teachers viewed as highly supported and autonomous controlling curriculum and assessment [47]. The London experience displays little autonomy as the teacher is monitored, highly accountable,

answerable to Ofsted, the Principal, boards of management, parents and students, though this school was improving with support for teachers evident from all the interviews. Teaching in the RoI appears exhibit high autonomy with low support but is moving in the right direction with *Droichead* and *Cosán* [48].

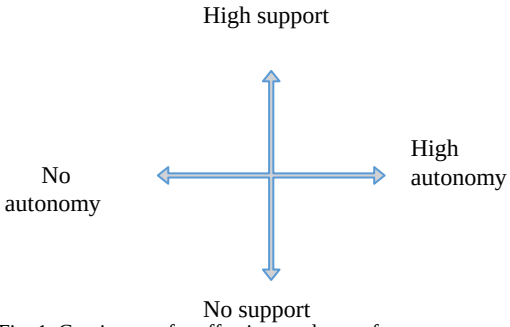

Fig. 1. Continuums for effective teacher performance.

In the USA, in my experience, the teaching role is similar to the London experience described here, where the status of teaching is low due to having little autonomy over content and how it is delivered, while having a high degree of responsibility and being subject to continuous monitoring. The UK and US systems function at the low autonomy end of the spectrum with supervisory systems similar to the Foucauldian notion of central surveillance and the panopticon [49], or worse; 'where once surveillance was temporal, focused on specific times and activities, teachers now work within an environment of normalised visibility' [50]. 'Where once control was achieved via the potential of being watched – the panoptic uncertainty, schools and colleges are now metaphorically (and often quite literally) "glass organisations" where surveillance is continuous and visible, with teachers aware that they are being surveilled at all times' [51]. Page posits that whereas the former produced teaching "fabrications", the current state of surveillance produces teaching "simulation"' [52]. Both participants did feel monitored with weekly inspections but contrary to findings from some other studies, they saw this as positive and helpful in the main. The need to produce evidence of planning and assessment data did lead to a further layer of accountability not experienced in the RoI. Similar to findings from previous research [53], [54], both the Irish teachers interviewed, talked about having experienced a lack of autonomy in their teaching and just wanting to be able to '*get on with teaching'* (John) and '*I'm looking forward to get home to get to teach'* (Mary), instead of dealing with the crippling bureaucracy. While they both said the support was there from the SMT, they both felt the pressure to show improvement, sometimes where none was occurring. There is a much higher demand for data gathering and entry within the UK system than the Irish one. '*We have a lot of data to do…checking student levels, inputting into spreadsheets…the levels are just crazy…. mark once a half-term, marking of book [copies] and tests'* (Mary, 2017). Students were allocated expected performance levels and the teachers had to document if the students were meeting their estimated grade level. Both teachers saw that as a waste of teacher time as the student level could be different in different subjects and this was not recognised by the system and the system tended to reduce student effort, as students stopped trying when they reached their expected level even if that was a low D standard whereas they may have not reached their actual potential. The requirements for continuous work assessment necessitated a lot of time-consuming administrative work for teachers. It is not just a case of testing and retesting. John saw it as; '*a great idea, in theory. When you do a test with students, you mark the test, you bring the test back in, you do a DIRT lesson; dedicated improvement reflective time… You identify areas they need to improve in… things they got wrong and you teach them again, how to fix that particular question that they got wrong. You choose different questions for different students, so one may be working on one area and one on another… when that is done on a particular piece of yellow paper and stuck into their book [copy] and it shows improvement, supposedly, but you have spent two/ three weeks teaching them something, they have failed [to grasp it], then you go in in one lesson and you are supposed to fix what you spent three weeks teaching. It just doesn't work'* (John, 2019).

The teacher unions in the RoI have fought against teacher based assessment for some time and it resulted in a standoff at the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Certificate with strikes and industrial action [55]. The reason many teachers are against school based assessment may be the extra workload and maybe that is justification enough based on the experiences described in this paper. Perhaps, instead of teachers and students working toward a common goal of assessment together (predominant situation in the RoI currently), when the teacher becomes the assessor it changes the relationship thereby making teaching itself less attractive.

The professionalism of teaching has been a debate for some time, some say this may be 'a red herring' as there is no longer such a thing as a profession [56]. 'The real issue is the degree to which teachers can resist deskilling and maintain some measure of autonomy within the school bureaucracy' [57]. The pressures (from Ofsted), stress, long hours and paperwork by comparison to the Irish situation was commented on by Irish migrant teachers in previous studies in the UK [58], [59]. The system is seen to make teaching more difficult. One respondent in the 2014 study said that 'Ofsted is the worst thing about education in Britain. It does far more to undermine standards in education in Britain than it does to support them' [60] compared with the Irish Inspection system which looks for strengths and ways to improve rather than ranking. The Principal did not concur even though she noted that school management were under pressure to improve from Ofsted; '*we were put into "Special Measures" and we have since had another inspection which has moved us up into RI [requires improvement]… we're looking at the next full inspection which will be at some point next year to move to 'Good'… the experience I've had first hand with Ofsted, and it's been quite some experience, my previous school went through the Special Measures process, got out of it… I actually think they do know what they're doing and they're very good at putting a school in its context'* (Principal, 2017).

Assessment and measurement in general plays a large role in the English educational system, sometimes to the detriment of learning. 'Data is often used too much for

monitoring and compliance, rather than to support pupil learning and school improvement. This audit culture can lead to feelings of anxiety and burnout in staff' [61]. Professional responsibility is difficult to develop in an environment where the language of accountability is pervasive [62]. A parliamentary briefing paper [63], research [64], and much public commentary [65]-[67] deals with the crisis of teacher retention and recruitment in England and talks about the 'lack of agency' of teachers contributing to stress [68]. Constant changes and greater demands lead to the workload becoming unmanageable and teachers need to be trusted and want support. Occupational stress may be viewed as the tension between responsibility and control; jobs with high responsibility and low control are the most stressful and vice versa. So air traffic controllers have higher stress jobs and parking wardens have lower stress ones. On this scale supervision and increased demands on teachers when coupled with deteriorating pupil behaviour and a lack of support leads to a high stress job. Stress leads to burnout and poor morale and recruitment and retention issues [69], [70]. The impact of special needs inclusion the varying approaches to teacher preparation in the UK are not within the scope of this paper but do have an impact.

The findings of this study indicated teaching in London was overwhelming with overloading of planning, assessment and data management. All the participants in previous studies shared the view that teaching in Britain was generally a more demanding job than teaching in the RoI [71], [72]. 'Well, teachers here definitely work a lot harder. They definitely do, there's no comparison. There's more pressure on teachers here' [73]. '*I think where a school is flourishing and doing extremely well, students work harder than the teachers. Where that isn't the case, the teachers absolutely work harder than the students. Here, we work harder than they do… Not without exception'* (Principal, 2017). While she recognised the burdensome workload, she did not suggest a solution. She saw the problem as *'lesson preparation and marking… In the old days, when you were a teacher, you went in and you knew what number page, book, you were on and you did a lot of marking. And then it moved to more planning and less marking, and then it's come full circle and teachers have to plan a huge amount and mark a huge amount.'*

Mary stated that there is '*loads of paperwork'*. Both teachers describe struggling under the sheer volume. This concurs with previous research and commentary [74]. John described that as students in London had no textbooks, all work had to be prepared and printed for them by the teacher; worksheets, classwork, DIRT work, tests, homework. '*There was a rush and panic each morning to get to the printer and copier to print off the days' work.*' He finds is much easier in the RoI where students have a text book and can be referred to extra work in the book or homework or practice. '*The book can be supplemented by handouts but you are not wasting time printing off what is found in a textbook'*. Both teachers found technology was used effectively in the school to promote pupil learning. Due to behaviour difficulties, there was a need to follow up with parents after school and this contributed to the length of the school day. Then planning and preparation went on well into the night and at weekends. These both contribute to volumes of paperwork but interestingly it appears to be the planning that might be going to be centralised rather than considering eliminating the focus on assessment. '*It'[assessment] is improving the quality …. However, there is a big move amongst teachers' unions, amongst the start teaching agencies and amongst multi-academy trusts to say – we should stop this planning… we should be doing central planning… have central banks of plans.* Assessment appears to have become so embedded in the English system that it is accepted as necessary without question. However, the Principal *'wouldn't [see central planning as the solution] I haven't done [used someone else's plans] … in over 20 years of teaching, and when I do, I don't like it. You know if somebody else says this is my lesson, I don't like it'* (Principal, 2017). She is probably reacting to what in effect would be a further diminution of teacher agency which has been shown to be the distinguishing attribute of successful systems but she appeared fully committed to assessment as it is currently carried out.

'There were many differences between teaching in Ireland and in Britain. The curriculum, the school hierarchy and structure, the diversity of students, the pressures associated with Ofsted inspections, the longer school day and shorter holidays, etc. But one of the key issues which many of the teachers mentioned was discipline' [75]. John thought that learners were not held sufficiently accountable for their learning and behaviour and though supplied with everything, many valued nothing. The Principal acknowledged the discipline issues found in London's publicly funded schools. *'people think secondary education… if it's a state school… you spend your time dealing with awfully behaved children and firefighting… It [that] certainly happens in a lot of places… I think it depends on the school… But that is the nature of a school that it is not yet 'Good', that we are doing a huge amount of work and it's not all necessarily going in the right direction'* (Principal 2019).

She also recognised the fact that teachers were working harder than students and their energy was going into classroom management rather than teaching. She acknowledged that at *'a school where behaviour can be really challenging… you are planning for behaviour and worrying about it, overdoing it because they're not going to listen… [thinking] how can I do this? You are permanently being over creative and that in itself is tiring... You are not looking to say – how do the students make progress? which is what you should be planning for. You are looking to say how can I keep these students engaged?'* (Principal 2017).

Both teachers described experiencing '*culture shock*' when they first arrived in the school at the behaviour of the students and what was considered acceptable. '*It was much tougher than I expected'* (John, 2019). He was observing the first day and having witnessed the student behaviour, he found himself questioning his choice of school in London. The '*difficulty of it [the teaching situation] and the behaviour of students… their attitude to school was poor… very low ability, wouldn't do any work, had to be pushed and dragged by a very good teacher to make them do anything. This was not like the easy teaching I had seen and done in Ireland'*. This he acknowledged was partly to do with the type and profile of the school and efforts were being made to improve

it. Mary pointed out that there was no discipline policy in the school at present, it was being worked on and yet that was the first thing she was given in preparation for her new teaching position in the RoI. Learning is an active process and the teacher cannot do it for the student. There needs to be more onus put on the parents and pupils for learning and less pressure on the teacher. Too much learning time is wasted on discipline issues and increased indiscipline and the lack of consequences for this or back up for the teacher are a disincentive to teaching as an occupation [76].

IX. Conclusion

It would appear that the Irish teachers who taught in London found it an enriching experience which consolidated their learning. Further research would be necessary to compare how NQTs who taught in the RoI found their first experiences in order to compare them and in a wider variety of school settings. However, it is noteworthy that the teachers interviewed returned to teach in the RoI and this concurs with the views of the Principal interviewed who finds it difficult to retain Irish staff. The indications are that teaching in a state funded school in London was challenging and the system and paperwork so onerous as to make the job undesirable. The status of the job and how the role of a teacher is perceived and enacted differs in London from the RoI and the oversight and emphasis on assessment has de-professionalised the job to the point that the teachers are functionaries in a system. The culture of assessment is so embedded in England that the teachers think they are not autonomous or getting adequate time to teach. There appear to be lessons for the Irish system as we move to change the nature of the profession through the TC and in a time where there are signs of recruitment shortages in certain subject areas in the RoI.

We need to learn from others' mistakes and value our teachers, pay them fairly, respect their autonomy and professionalism and don't put so many requirements on them that the job becomes undoable, particularly around assessment and measurement of teacher performance. We need, like in Finland, to attract good candidates, educate them to a high standard and then value them and let them do their job in an autonomous way, not checking on their every move which demeans their contribution and leads to a reduction in morale. Teaching remains an attractive career choice in the RoI with high achieving students choosing it as a career path. This cannot be taken for granted. The state must continue to fund high quality, research-based teacher education. The media must not denigrate the teaching profession and scapegoat teachers for all the wrongs of society while perpetuating the notion that they have an easy job. Communities and parents need to continue to value and respect teachers and not let some of the cynicism and lack of value on expertise that is guiding thinking in society today lead to an undervaluing of the good work teachers do.

Meeting the needs of 21st century learners is not easy. We only have to reference the English experience to see what has happened as the value on the teaching profession has fallen. They are finding it extremely difficult to recruit people to become teachers. The retention rate within the teaching profession is falling. Good teachers continue to leave. There is a dual system where privately funded schools can attract the best students and teachers and the others are often taught by inexperienced and unqualified staff. Successive governments have failed to adequately fund education. Teaching in the England has become overly burdensome. The neoliberal notions of quality and competition force measurement and record keeping to the exclusion of teaching time. While challenging schools also exist in the RoI, learners are broadly offered the same curriculum by equally qualified teachers in all schools and the opportunity to sit for the same examinations, so learners have a chance of social mobility, a chance to escape socio-economic deprivation. If we lose quality teachers, we lose even this aspiration and education becomes an agent of social reproduction instead of an agent of liberation. I urge all to learn lessons from the London experience; the TC and government to support teachers throughout the continuum of teacher education, HEIs to act as effective gatekeepers, teachers to have faith in their own professionalism and the public to value them.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

M. I. Mullaney was the sole author of this paper.

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Mary Isobelle Mullaney was born in Galway, Ireland. She attended Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, where she received her B.Ed (Hons), 1986., M.St., (1997) and PhD (2008) degrees in education. She has lectured in teacher education since 1992, currently holding the position of School Placement Director in the School of Education at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. She previously lectured in St Catherine's College of Education. She was an Honorary Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Education, University College London (2016-2017). She is published nationally and internationally with research interests in initial teacher education, in the areas of the role of the cooperating teacher in student-teacher formation and the importance of preparation to teach learners with special and additional educational needs. Dr Mullaney is a member of the Association or Art Teachers of Ireland and is registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland.