

The Effectiveness of Using Paired Placements for Student Teaching

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Authors:

Dr. Brent Heidorn
Assistant Professor
bheidorn@westga.edu

Dr. Deb Bainer Jenkins
Professor
djenkins@westga.edu

Dr. Rachel Harvey
Assistant Professor
rharvey@westga.edu

Dr. Brian Mosier
Assistant Professor
bmosier@westga.edu

University of West Georgia
Department of Leadership and Applied Instruction
Health and Physical Education Teacher Education Program
Coliseum
1601 Maple Street
Carrollton, GA 30118

Abstract:

Student teaching is a vital part of the teacher preparation program, yet the lack of suitable placements limits its effectiveness and strains university supervision resources. This paper reports our experience placing two student teachers with one cooperating teacher as an alternative to traditional solo placements. This evaluation describes the advantages, disadvantages, and levels of satisfaction of the student teachers and cooperating teachers involved with these paired placements.

Background: The Importance and the Perils of Student Teaching

The student teaching experience is widely recognized as the most influential aspect of preservice teacher education programs (Rodgers & Jenkins, 2010; Wilson & Readence, 1993). However, this field experience and the way it is supervised are criticized for a variety of reasons. Concerns include the lack of cooperating teachers able to provide meaningful experiences and feedback for student teachers (Meade, 1991), the disparity in perceptions of effective teaching between cooperating teachers and the programs that prepare student teachers (Rikard, 1990), the large size of classes, especially physical education and music, in many schools, and the geographical distance between field sites (Rodgers & Jenkins, 2010).

In spite of these challenges, the value of school-based experiences in teacher education is “accepted almost on blind faith” (Johnson, 1994, p.199). Guyton and McIntyre (1990) point out that little is known about the effectiveness of various models of delivering and supervising field experiences. Too often, field experiences, especially student teaching, are developed and implemented for convenience or tradition. Others point out that there is a growing need for experimentation with student teaching configurations and for the generation and evaluation of new models to determine their effectiveness (Bullough, Young, Erickson, Birrell, Clark, Egan, Berrie, Hales, & Smith, 2002).

This seems especially true in the growing complexity of today’s schools. Increasingly, teaching is a collaborative rather than isolated endeavor. This requires new understandings of what teaching is and what effective teachers do. Howey and Zimpher (1999) point out that it is vital to the improvement of teacher education that preservice programs prepare future teachers to collaborate effectively. Unfortunately, many educators are “too set in old images of what it is to be a teacher” (King, 2006, p. 239) and unable to recognize the potential benefits of collaboratively working to achieve student learning.

One alternative model for student teaching that addresses this concern is the use of paired placements. In this model, two student teachers are assigned to a single cooperating teacher in a school setting. The student teachers, in essence, share the placement. In paired placement situations, university supervisors have observed student teachers who are more confident and are taking more risks by trying new instructional approaches than student teachers in solo placements (Smith, 2004). Bullough and his colleagues (2002) observed that student teachers in paired placements filled a wider range of roles in the classroom including more tutoring, group work, and interaction with individual students.

Paired student teachers preferred paired placements to solo situations (84%) (King, 2006), were more positive about student teaching, and felt they were better and more realistically prepared for future teaching (Bullough et. al., 2002; Jenkins, Heidorn, & Weaver, 2010). Paired student teachers applauded the social and emotional benefits of the supportive environment, shared problems, and reduced stress and isolation. Paired student teachers invested in each other and in one another’s success, providing a greater kind and quality of support than was available to solo student teachers (Bullough et. al, 2002). Professional benefits included shared resources and content knowledge and receiving specific, constructive feedback from a peer who had the same language and understandings of effective teaching from university courses. Paired teachers stated that they could focus more on content when teaching because there were fewer management problems with a peer there, ready to assist if the class became restless. All the paired student teachers who worked with Smith (2004) stated that they learned more easily from their peers than from their cooperating teachers because they could understand and relate to the thinking and decisions made by peers, especially after an unsuccessful lesson (Smith, 2004). The

experience of learning from watching and discussing teaching with a peer provided expanded opportunities for reflection and self-analysis for paired student teachers (Wynn & Kromrey, 1999).

While it is viewed as helpful, the feedback provided by cooperating teachers and university supervisors is perceived by student teachers as evaluative rather than supportive. Paired student teachers invested in each other and in one another's success, providing a greater kind and quality of support than was available to solo student teachers (Bullough et. al, 2002). The feedback and support they provided often led to a type of bonding and collegiality that could establish new ideas about how teachers do their work and develop professionally (Wynn & Kromrey, 1999) and could lead to the transformation of teaching called for by Howey and Zimpher (1999).

Cooperating teachers, who traditionally have the most influence on student teachers, overwhelmingly support paired placements (Bullough et.al., 2002; Jenkins et. al., 2010). All the cooperating teachers who worked with Bullough and his colleagues spoke positively about working with a student teacher, but those with paired student teachers talked more about the student teachers' impact on students and their learning. Some cooperating teachers withdrew sooner because the pairs were collaborating well, teaching effectively, and sufficiently confident; others tended to withdraw because they relied on the pairs to train each other (Smith, 2004). Some cooperating teachers with paired placements felt overtaxed, having insufficient time to help both student teachers with lesson plans, to provide them with feedback, and to complete university-required paperwork (Jenkins et. al, 2010; Wynn & Kromrey, 1999). Twice the student teachers, twice the work.

Cooperating teachers shared other concerns about paired placements. Sometimes one partner would dominate, intimidate, or undermine the other. Where a strong student teacher was placed with a weaker one, unequal workloads sometimes resulted (Jenkins et. al., 2010; Smith, 2004). Student teachers in paired placements echoed these observations. They added their concern that cooperating teachers tended to compare the paired student teachers and were too quick to evaluate and label them as strong or weak. Others shared concerns that they received insufficient feedback from the cooperating teacher (a common complaint even in solo placements) or that having another student teacher in the room was confusing and distracting to the students (King, 2006; Smith, 2004). Some paired student teachers (29% in the studies by both Jenkins and colleagues (2010) and King (2006)) felt they would have been better prepared for teaching in a solo placement because the cooperative, paired situation wasn't realistic – it wasn't "real" teaching. In contrast, the physical education teachers who worked with Jenkins and colleagues (2010) supported paired placements because it is a realistic model of the real world of teaching.

Evaluation Plan and Methodology

We recognized from a review of the literature and our own experience that there are good professional and educational reasons to pair student teachers in their placements in spite of traditional views of teaching and student teaching. Like others, we have a limited number of high quality school sites and highly capable cooperating teachers for our student teachers. Also like others, fiscal stress within our college compels us to reduce cost and travel time for supervision while at the same time increasing efficiency. Further, we recognized the urgency to promote professional dialogue and encourage a culture of collaboration among our students as they become professional teachers (MacGilchrist, Myer, & Reed, 1997; Fullen, 1999). Based on

Vygotsky (1987), we recognized that the basis for deep learning for our student teachers is cooperation and interaction with their peers in a student teaching setting. We recognized the value of feedback and evaluation from peers for our student teachers while they are learning to be teachers (Hawkey, 1995), and the improved job satisfaction and performance collaboration can afford them in their future roles as teaching professionals (Margolis, 2008).

These factors led us to assign some of our student teachers to paired placements over the past two years (2009-2010) and again this year (2011). In contrast to traditional solo placements ($n = 31$), in the paired placements ($n = 46$) two student teachers were placed with a single cooperating teacher (Table 1). We did not define a structure or roles for the paired placements as we wanted to see the organizational features that would emerge within each school context. All student teachers completed the same requirements and were supervised in the same way using the same university supervisors (six observation visits per student teacher). Student teachers in paired placements also completed two to four observations of their teaching peers. We had student teachers complete an online exit survey about their experience in a single or paired placement and the feedback they received from members of the triad. We conducted oral interviews with student teachers in paired placements during 2009 and 2010 when they finished the experience ($n = 30$) and with their cooperating teachers ($n = 9$). Thus, we obtained data on the advantages, disadvantages, and level of satisfaction with paired student teacher placements.

Table 1. Student Teacher Placements for 2009 through 2011

Year	Total Number Student Teachers	Elementary Placements	Middle School Placements	High School Placements	Solo Placements	Paired Placements
2009	27	19	6	2	9 (33.3%)	18 (66.7%)
2010	24	14	5	5	11 (47.8%)	13 (54.2%)
2011	27	15	7	5	11 (40.7%)	16 (59.3%)
Total	78	48	18	12	31 (40.2%)	46 (59.8%)

Our effort to describe, evaluate, and better understand the nature and effectiveness of the student teaching experience for our paired versus solo placements was guided by four basic questions:

- 1) What organizational structures developed to guide the paired placement experiences?
- 2) What advantages and disadvantages of paired placements were perceived by student teachers in paired placements?
- 3) What advantages and disadvantages of paired placements were perceived by cooperating teachers?
- 4) How satisfied were participants with the paired placements for student teaching?

Results

1) What organizational structures developed to guide the paired placement experiences?

We found that five different organizational patterns emerged in the paired placements, based on the school context (especially length of periods) and the personality and strengths of the student teachers in the pair.

- **Alternated classes**
 - Rotated each hour all semester
- **Alternated grade levels**
 - K-2 vs. 3-5; switched levels as semester progressed
- **Alternated roles**
 - Lead and support; one week of full day
- **Alternated content**
 - Health vs. PE; switched at mid-semester
- **Alternated teachers**
 - Observed vs. Health vs. PE
 - ½ lesson each (shared time)

Table 2?

2) What advantages and disadvantages of paired placements were perceived by student teachers in paired placements?

At the end of the student teaching semester for 2009 and 2010, students in paired placements were interviewed. Of the 31 students in paired placements, interviews were obtained from 30 student teachers. One student teacher was removed from the program at the midpoint of the experience, so was not included in the interviews. Each interview was conducted by a professor within the department who was not the student's supervisor during student teaching. Notes from the interviews were transcribed then content analyzed for recurring themes in the students' remarks. All students provided a minimum of one response but, as the tables below show, most students provided more than one response to each question. The data suggest that student teachers were generally pleased with the paired placements. More students cited advantages than disadvantages, and more students cited multiple advantages than disadvantages of the experience.

Advantages of a Paired Placement

Student teachers in paired placements identified 11 themes or advantages to being in a paired placement (see Table 3). More than half the paired student teachers (60.00%) cited feedback provided by the peer as an advantage because it was honest, generally positive, encouraging, and often addressed things that the cooperating teacher or university supervisor didn't see. One student noted that peers know how to give "corrective feedback", something learned in the teacher education program. Several noted that the feedback was the same content as feedback obtained from the cooperating teacher or university supervisor. Yet the feedback was received differently, as one student noted: "Feedback was a definite advantage; it was very helpful. It was different coming from a peer than from a professor. We took each other's word for it and did not get mad. I got a lot of feedback from my partner, and he got a lot from me." Immediate feedback delivered by a peer enabled student teachers to make modifications "on the spot". One student shared that his partner's tennis lesson "was a bomb" but that he was able to give feedback about different approaches (drills, modified games, etc.) to rescue subsequent lessons in the unit.

Similarly, nearly half of the paired student teachers (46.66%) saw working collaboratively as an advantage. They commented that learning to teach with another teacher led to collaboration, reflection, and personal and professional growth. "Working with someone else makes you open to new ideas; to see things you might not have seen," explained one student. Another pointed out that it was easier to work with someone who was "on the same page" with teaching approaches and philosophy. That pair tended to discuss lessons with each other rather than with the cooperating teacher, whose approach varied from what the department advocated. "For example," the student elaborated, "with a 90 minute period, we were taught in the program that you need a warm up. My cooperating teacher said just to run 'em, but talking with the other student teacher, I got ideas about how you could do this, or this, or this instead." Another student noted that being with a peer enabled him to experience the different roles of a teacher – lead teaching, support teaching, and assisting with management.

**Table 3. Advantages of Paired Placements Perceived by Student Teachers
(N = 30)**

2009 (n = 17)	2010 (n = 13)	Total (N = 30)	Percent of Student Teachers	Advantages
10	8	18	60.00	Feedback provided by peer
12	2	14	46.66	Working and reflecting collaboratively
8	5	13	43.33	Learning by watching my peer teach
13	0	13	43.33	Planning together
5	7	13	43.33	Assistance with management and equipment
7	4	11	36.67	Sharing ideas
9	2	11	36.67	Less stress
5	5	10	33.33	Carpooling
2	4	6	20.00	Relationships with K-12 students
2	2	4	13.33	Quality time with cooperating teacher
1	1	2	6.66	Less isolated
74	40	114		Total

Paired student teachers from 2009 (43.33%) cited planning together as an advantage, but no student teachers noted this during 2010 perhaps due to program changes. One student noted that planning together enabled him to teach more within his comfort level. The same percentage of student teachers (43.33%) said that learning to teach by watching a peer was a distinct advantage of paired placements. They commented on the value of seeing different teaching styles. Many commented that they vicariously learned to avoid mistakes; that they learned by seeing non-examples of good teaching. One student observed that his partner did not speak loudly enough, so he was sure to project and to speak clearly when he taught. Some paired student teachers shared the feedback they received from cooperating teachers and university supervisors to “prevent the same mistakes.” An equal number of student teachers (43.33%) shared that having assistance with management and setting up equipment was an advantage of the paired placements. They talked about having “another pair of eyes” in the gym or classroom. Some commented that having help with managing and monitoring students freed them up to focus more on teaching without worrying so much about management. Another thought that having two student teachers involved with the lesson gave more authority than in a solo placement, especially when the cooperating teacher was gone.

Paired student teachers also expressed their advantage in sharing lesson ideas (36.67%). They perceived a paired placement to have less stress because of the split load and shared responsibilities, everything from running photocopies to watching the class if a bathroom break was needed. Carpooling to save money was seen as an advantage (33.33%). Twenty percent (20.00%) of student teachers saw relationships with the K-12 students as an advantage. Specifically, with two student teachers present they could “reach more” students. Some K-12 students had better rapport with one student teacher while other students related more to the other student teacher. This was especially evident when a male and a female student teacher were placed together. Some student teachers (13.33%) perceived the relationship with the cooperating teacher as an advantage. Some said they got more feedback from the cooperating teacher in a paired placement and more one-on-one time. Some described the experience of standing with the

cooperating teacher as she critiqued the lesson that the partner was teaching; this “live” feedback on a lesson in progress was very helpful. Finally, two student teachers (6.66%) stated that paired placements reduced isolation. Especially early in the placement, it was nice to know someone else in the school building and to have someone to speak with who was in the same boat.

Disadvantages of Paired Placements

The content analysis of the interviews of student teachers in paired placements suggested 12 themes or disadvantages to a shared placement (see Table 4). In retrospect, we can identify one placement that had three male student teachers during 2009 and three pairs in 2010, each with a strong student teacher with a weak student teacher, which did not function well. The three strong personalities paired in 2009 spent half of the semester in conflict. In the 2010 pairs, two of the stronger student teachers in the troubled pairs expressed frustrations with an unreliable and overly dependent partner. We suspect that these five individuals are strongly represented in the comments in Table 4, which shows disadvantages perceived by student teachers in paired placements. Also notable is the fact that nearly a quarter of the student teachers (23.33%) could identify no disadvantages to being in a paired placement.

Table 4. Disadvantages of Paired Placements Perceived by Student Teachers
(N = 30)

2009 (n = 17)	2010 (n = 13)	Total (N = 30)	Percent of Student Teachers	Disadvantages
6	7	13	43.33	Less teaching time
3	4	7	23.33	Had to compromise
5	1	6	20.00	Cooperating teacher compared STs
3	2	5	16.66	Peer distracted class or undermined teaching
3	2	5	16.66	Conflicting personalities
2	2	4	13.33	Unequal workload
1	3	4	13.33	Different expectations or standards
4	0	4	13.33	Less feedback from cooperating teacher
4	0	4	13.33	Scheduling conflicts
3	0	3	10.00	Shared space and equipment
1	1	2	6.67	Boring to observe peer teaching
4	3	7	23.33	None – no disadvantages
39	25	64		Total

The biggest disadvantage expressed by paired student teachers (43.33%) was that they had less teaching time than in a solo placement. Only one student said the lack teaching time made it an unrealistic situation and hindered his development during student teaching, however. Most students simply explained that they would have valued as much teaching time as possible. About a quarter of student teachers (23.33%) said that a disadvantage of paired placements was that they had to compromise, especially when jointly planning or sharing resources. “Sometimes there were different opinions about things and we had to compromise. I couldn’t always do what I wanted to do,” one paired student teacher explained. Six student teachers (20.00%) thought that a disadvantage was uncomfortable relationships with the cooperating teacher. Sometimes the

cooperating teacher favored or got along better with one of the student teachers than the other. In one situation, the relationship between the student teacher and cooperating teacher, a weak partner, was “awkward” and this negative tone affected the stronger student teacher.

The next three disadvantages identified by paired student teachers were related to conflicts between the partners. Five student teachers (16.66%) said that conflicting personalities was a disadvantage. An equal number (16.66%) said that a partner sometimes was a distraction. One student teacher explained that the “peer teacher was a distraction, talking to students when I was trying to do something. Usually that was a one-way street, but sometimes I was also a distraction.” Another student teacher complained of that his credibility and authority were undermined when the peer and cooperating teacher corrected him during a lesson. Relatedly, four student teachers (13.33%) cited as a disadvantage an unequal workload. Students described lazy assisting, over-dependence, and different work ethics.

Other disadvantages shared by student teachers were differences in expectations or standards between the two student teachers, especially related to management or disciplinary styles (13.33%). One student teacher noted that “not having consistency resulted in repercussions for poor student behavior.” Another student said that alternative teaching days and using different cues was sometimes confusing to students. Some student teachers (13.33%) perceived that they received less feedback from the cooperating teacher in a shared placement. Others noted scheduling conflicts (13.33%) and having to share gym space and equipment (10.00%) as disadvantages. Finally, two student teachers thought peer observation was a disadvantage as it was “VERY boring.”

In summary, based on the number of comments provided and the nature of those comments, it seems that student teachers in paired placements saw more advantages than disadvantages to a shared placement. The most cited advantages – Feedback provided by the peer; Working and reflecting collaboratively; and Learning by watching a peer teach – match the goals we had for scheduling paired placements and reiterate the strengths of paired experiences cited in the literature. The main disadvantage, Less teaching time, seems to be the trade off for many of the advantages noted, specifically Less stress and Less isolation and the experiences of working collaboratively, receiving immediate and on-going feedback from a peer, and learning from observing a peer previously cited. You can’t have it both ways. Several of the other disadvantages mentioned by student teachers – Having to compromise; Sharing space and equipment; Unequal workloads; Favoritism by supervisors; Distractions; Differing expectations – are, unfortunately, a part of teaching, schooling, and life. While some student teachers and cooperating teachers wove these challenges into a positive professional development experience, other student teachers and cooperating teachers seemed to focus on them and, because they could not move beyond them, seemed to have a diminished experience.

3) What advantages and disadvantages of paired placements were perceived by cooperating teachers?

At the end of the semester, supervisors interviewed cooperating teachers who hosted paired placements of student teachers via telephone. The interview questions sought input on the advantages and disadvantages of this arrangement, its effectiveness, their satisfaction, and if we should continue with paired placements in the future. Across 2009 and 2010, 14 cooperating teachers worked with paired placements. **How many were repeats, so how many total, different teachers have worked with paired placements?** We succeeded in interviewing nine of them. The information provided by cooperating teachers was content analyzed for broad

themes. Because they shared less than did the student teachers, their comments are collapsed into broader categories as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Advantages of Paired Placements

A total of 22 comments were identified in the content analysis, which suggested four advantages to paired placements (Table 5). Nearly half of the comments about advantages provided by cooperating teachers (9 comments, or 40.90%) related to feedback provided to student teachers. They emphasized the value of gaining feedback from more than one person, especially from a peer. One cooperating teacher said, “The peer was able to give better feedback using the terminology, lesson plans, instructional approach... knowing what was the focus of the university class work.” With a peer, they learned from each other and were able to make immediate changes in lessons and teaching approaches. One teacher thought that learning from peers was especially important at the beginning, while the cooperating teacher was still getting acquainted with the student teachers and their abilities. Another teacher echoed comments heard from student teachers that it was an advantage to be able to give feedback to one of the student teachers while the other was teaching.

Table 5. Advantages of Paired Placements as Perceived by Cooperating Teachers

Number of Comments	Percent of Comments	Advantage
9	40.90	Feedback from peer and cooperating teacher
6	27.27	Realistic experiences
5	22.73	Benefits for K-12 students
2	9.10	Less stress
22	100.00	Total number of comments

More than a quarter of the cooperating teachers’ comments (27.27%) focused on the realistic experience provided by the paired placement. A few comments stressed that collaboration is the reality in today’s schools. One teacher commented, “It provides a realistic situation for student teachers because, at least around here, there will be multiple HPE teachers in most buildings, so they need to learn to work with others – especially those who don’t share the same philosophy or work ethic.” Paired placements made the student teachers work as a team; they shared ideas daily rather than just during the on-campus weekly student teacher seminar. Because their time was more flexible they had time to get to know other teachers in the building. For example, one student teacher was adept at using technology so the peer and other teachers in the building saw new ideas and could incorporate them into their own lessons.

Another quarter of the comments (22.73%) showed benefits for the K-12 students from the paired placements. The K-12 students experienced different teaching styles. Having two student teachers enabled them to work with smaller groups and to give students more individual attention. It also gave student teachers time to get to know the students, and a better learning environment was established because of “another set of eyes” during lessons.

Two comments (9.10%) noted the advantage of a more relaxed, less stressful environment because of the shared load in a paired placement situation.

Disadvantages of Paired Placements

As with the student teachers, fewer disadvantages were provided than advantages to paired placements. A total of 14 comments showed five disadvantages to paired placements (Table 6). Two cooperating teachers (22.22%) could identify no disadvantages to paired placements compared to 23.33% of student teachers who saw no disadvantages.

Of the comments provided by cooperating teachers, about a third of them (5 comments, or 35.72%) addressed the disadvantage of an unequal workload between the paired student teachers. This could be the result of an overly dependent student teacher, an overly assertive student teacher, or conflicting personalities. As one teacher stated, “The main disadvantage, not on purpose, is that one person can be more responsible and take on more of the workload than the other. Then the one just feeds off the other.” But another cooperating teacher saw this a different way, and said, “It’s like that (unequal workloads) in the workforce when two teachers have different work ethics, so it (unequal workloads during student teaching) can turn out to be a plus.” Most of the workload issues seem to have been resolved after discussions among student teachers which sometimes involved the cooperating teacher.

Three comments (21.42%) noted less teaching time as a disadvantage of paired placements. One teacher had small classes that year, so three teachers was excessive. Two comments (14.29%) cited relationship issues as a disadvantage in paired placements. One of those comments related to conflict between the two student teachers; the other to the fact that the cooperating teacher’s “personality fit better with one over the other.” Similarly, two comments (14.29%) spoke of the difficulty of giving feedback in paired placements. One teacher felt he was always giving the feedback to the wrong student teacher while the other felt that he was unable to give enough feedback. Finally, two comments (14.29%) noted that having two student teachers took more time and more paperwork, which was a disadvantage of paired placements.

Table 6. Disadvantages of Paired Placements Perceived by Cooperating Teachers

Number of Comments	Percent of Comments	Disadvantage
5	35.72	Unequal workload
3	21.42	Less time teaching
2	14.29	Relationship issues
2	14.29	Giving feedback
2	14.29	More time and paperwork
14	100.01	Total comments

In summary, the nine cooperating teachers interviewed who worked with paired placements during 2009-2010 saw more advantages than disadvantages to the format. The most cited advantages were the amount and type of feedback provided to student teachers, the realistic nature of the experience, and the benefits to K-12 students of having two student teachers. This reflects the main advantages cited by most student teachers: feedback and collaboration in the workplace. Most of the other advantages expressed by student teachers focused on self and their survival concerns as student teachers (e.g., sharing ideas, planning together, help with management, etc.). Cooperating teachers, however, could see beyond student teachers’ self concerns to see the advantages for the K-12 students – they received more one-on-one

instruction, saw different teaching styles, and shared a more task-oriented yet relaxed learning environment.

The main disadvantage cited by both student teachers and cooperating teachers was less teaching time compared to solo placements. Cooperating teachers were aware of relationship-based challenges (e.g., unequal workload, personality conflicts), but did not express them as disadvantages as strongly as did student teachers. This, again, may reflect the self and survival mindset characterizing student teachers. The disadvantage of double workload expressed by some cooperating teachers may reflect both their need to adjust to a new system and our need to refine the structure of the paired placements to reduce nonessential paperwork and maximize cooperating teachers' efforts.

4) How satisfied were participants with the paired placements for student teaching?

As we debriefed with student teachers and cooperating teachers involved with paired placements, we wanted to understand their perceptions of the effectiveness of the experience as well as their level of satisfaction.

Effectiveness of Paired Placements

When asked whether they were a better prepared for teaching as a result of their paired placement during student teaching, most student teachers (22, or 73.3%) said yes (Table 7). Nine of those attributed the effectiveness to feedback provided by a peer; eight said it was because they learned vicariously from observing a peer who provided examples and non-examples of good teaching. One student teacher commented on the dilemma of less teaching versus receiving more feedback and ideas, and decided that the latter was more important to her development as a teacher.

Five student teachers (16.7%) thought they would have been better prepared in a solo placement because they didn't perceive the paired placement experience as a realistic teaching situation, they didn't get along with their partner, or they did not see the value of observing and giving feedback – teaching was more important. Interestingly, of the three dysfunctional pairs in 2010 that combined a strong student teacher with a weak student teacher, two of the strong student teachers thought they were not as well prepared as if they had been on their own while the other members of those teams felt better prepared as a result of the pairing.

The three undecided students were positive about their paired placement, but unsure if it was more effective than a solo placement. One student teacher thought that “it's the cooperating teacher that matters, not a partner” in making the student teaching experience successful.

Table 7. Effectiveness of Paired Placements Perceived by Student Teachers
(N = 30)

Year	Yes	No	Not Sure
2009	11	3	3
2010	11	2	0
Total	22 (73.3%)	5 (16.7%)	3 (10.00%)

Cooperating teachers also thought paired placements were effective at preparing student teachers for their future roles as teachers (Table 8). One teacher commented, “It's hard to get student teachers ready for the real world, but paired placements are VERY effective – and not

just for physical education teachers!” Of the six cooperating teachers who provided usable responses, four (66.67%) thought paired placements were effective or better because they provided more experiences (e.g., teaching, observing, giving feedback, filming, collaborating, interacting, reflecting). Others thought that paired placements were a more realistic model of today’s schools with multiple teachers teaching concurrently and sharing space and equipment. One noted, though, that, like in a solo placement, a lot depends on the cooperating teacher.

Two cooperating teachers thought paired placements were not as effective in preparing future teachers mainly because they did not have as much time teaching. While collaboration is important, they need more teaching. “One (student teacher) is better because they get so much more,” one teacher noted. Paired placements were “a cake walk for the student teachers,” one teacher noted. The other observed that “they were not able to be as responsible for the setting because they relied on each other too much, and therefore did not develop as they should or could have.”

Table 8. Effectiveness of Paired Placements Perceived by Cooperating Teachers
(N = 6)

Year	Yes	No	Unusable Response
2009	0	2	3
2010	4	0	0
Total	4 (66.67%)	2 (33.33%)	3

Satisfaction with Paired Placements

Of the 25 student teachers who made a direct statement about their level of satisfaction with paired placements, most were either satisfied (44%) or very satisfied (40%) with their paired placement assignment (Table 9). Four student teachers (16%) were dissatisfied because of unequal workload, lack of professionalism of partner, different personal and professional standards, or the belief that it was not a realistic situation.

Table 9. Student Teachers’ Levels of Satisfaction with Paired Placements
(N = 25)

Year	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
2009	4	7	2	0
2010	6	4	2	0
Total	10 (40%)	11 (44%)	4 (16%)	0

In spite of the disadvantages cited, all cooperating teachers across 2009-2010 were satisfied (80%) or very satisfied (20%) with paired placements (Table 10). While all cooperating teachers expressed eagerness or willingness to work with paired placements in the future, three stated that they would prefer to work with a solo placement.

**Table 10. Cooperating Teachers' Levels of Satisfaction with Paired Placements
(N = 10)**

Year	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
2009	1	4	0	0
2010	1	4	0	0
Total	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	0	0

Note: One cooperating teacher worked paired placements and was interviewed both years, hence N=10 respondents.

In summary, both student teachers (73.3%) and cooperating teachers (66.67%) perceived that paired placements were effective in preparing student teachers for their future roles. Similarly, most student teachers (84.0%) and cooperating teachers (100.0%) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the paired placement experience.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

It comes as no surprise that, based on the information provided for this evaluation, there are no easy answers and there is no one perfect way to accomplish student teaching. However, we note that the advantages of paired placements cited by both cooperating teachers and student teachers align with our original intent and interest: to enable deep learning for our student teachers through cooperation and interaction with their peers in a student teaching setting. Our belief in the value of feedback and evaluation among peers to stimulate professional growth in our student teachers was reinforced. Based on comments provided by cooperating teachers, we anticipate that the graduates who participated in paired placements will work more collaboratively in their future roles and thus experience greater job satisfaction as teaching professionals.

Equally important are the lessons learned and next steps from our on-going efforts to improve our teacher education program.

- 1) We need to give more consideration to matching students in pairs. These data provide insights in the need to consider personalities and the strength or neediness of the individuals when making paired placements.
- 2) We need to consider class size when placing pairs. Small schools with small classes may not provide enough students and “work” for paired placement.
- 3) We need to consider placing all students as pairs because of the increased feedback they receive, the reduced isolation and stress, the philosophical and methodological match, and the benefits of learning to work collaboratively with other teachers. The very limited number of schools and cooperating teachers who “do a good job” with physical education further supports the need to consider paired placements for all, or at least most, of our student teachers to ensure their professional development.
- 4) We need to work more consistently with student teachers so that they realize and are experienced with the collaborative nature of today’s schools. For example, in our area many schools strongly encourage physical education teachers to reinforce content (e.g., math or science) in their physical education lessons. We need to help teacher education students understand and gain experience with the different roles of the health and physical education teacher. They must be able to teach, to lead, to support, and to manage with teachers across the school.

- 5) We need to continue to work with our preservice teachers on how to give quality feedback to peers so they are both comfortable with and adept at that role by the time they get to student teaching.

As with all evaluation efforts, many questions arose as we reviewed to information gathered about paired placements. Do student teachers in paired placements really have less teaching time, or is that a perception based on the way those experiences are structured? If paired student teachers experience less teaching time, is that trade off worth it based on the benefits they gain from a collaborative experience? While paired placements may effectively prepare future educators, are they more effective than solo placements? What variables are crucial when considering how to pair student teachers? How can we better prepare cooperating teachers to work with paired placements – how do their roles change? These questions will guide our on-going efforts to continue to strengthen our teacher education program.

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