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# Examining Expectations: Inspecting the Experiences of Student Teaching Interns in a Yearlong Paired-Placement at an Urban School

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Examining Expectations: Inspecting the Experiences of Student Teaching Interns in a Yearlong Paired-Placement at an Urban School

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### Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of student teaching interns in paired-placements in an urban school setting, specifically how the pairs experience collaboration between themselves, mentor teachers, and university field instructors. In addition, the paper will examine how the paired teaching interns are able to perceive instruction that the students received. Using data from two participant surveys collected from student-teaching interns in paired-placements, results were compared with studies from academic literature and my own experience as a paired teaching intern. A thematic analysis was carried out with the data, in which was found evidence that the teaching interns enjoyed the extra support a partner provided and that students in the classroom appeared to have benefited from the additional resource. The data provided additional evidence that there was a lack of clarity between interns, mentor teachers, and university field instructors. The paper will propose strategies that will work to avoid these issues in future implementations.

*Keywords: experience, paired-placement, collaboration, student teaching interns, clinical practice, urban*

At the time I was given my first student teaching assignment, I had expectations going in for how the placement would be experienced. The student teaching experience as a whole, is one that will bring about many emotions. This is often the first true teaching experience for a prospective teacher, and while s/he is excited to begin the path to becoming an educator, there are nerves that come with finding one's self in front of a classroom. *Will the students like me? What if I mess up? Do I know the content well enough to be teaching it?* These are a few of the questions that come to mind for new teaching interns, even myself, when I first signed up to take on my pre-student teaching for the fall 2015. Most of us were told throughout our courses in teacher education that student teaching will be a solo experience, where it is one teaching intern alone being put in charge of a mentor teacher's classroom. With this being the traditional way of training beginning teachers for decades, it is this experience that many of the incoming interns associate with the student teaching experience, and it is how they expect to experience it themselves.

What new interns often are not expecting is an e-mail from the university about a month before their placement begins asking if they would like to be a part of a yearlong paired-placement as part of a pilot program. This brings up a new assortment of expectations, as now there could be relief in that you can have a shared experience with someone who is on a similar path as you, or maybe concern that this will be in no way what it is like when you are given a job. Or perhaps it raises concerns that employers wouldn't want to hire someone who did not have a traditional internship experience. These concerns arise from a lack of understanding about how a student teaching experience should provide the prospective teacher an opportunity for

clinical practice. In 2010 the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Blue Ribbon Panel proposed rigorous overhauls to teacher preparation programs with an eye toward clinical practice. The paired-placement approach is just one way that institutions are choosing to introduce clinical practice to teacher training. The goal of clinical practice is to position teaching as a developmental process, with student teaching being the beginning of a prospective teacher's development, not the culminating act (Mau, 2013). In previous systems, there was more a focus on survival rather than learning to become a better teacher (Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell, & Hansen, 2008).

When experiencing something such as a paired-placement, expectations are going to be challenged by those participating. This paper will explore how my fellow student teaching interns and myself were given this unique opportunity and experienced the clinical model implemented at our placement. Do we embrace the new model and adapt, or do we try our best to hold onto the *status quo*? Is this similar to the experiences around the world at other institutions that have tried the paired model (Anh, 2013) and do the expectations for this model hold true? By examining the experiences of student teaching interns in urban paired-teaching placements and literature on implementation of paired placements the following research questions can be addressed:

1. How do student teaching interns in paired internships in an urban school experience their collaboration?
2. How is a paired placement perceived toward instruction?

The answers to these two questions will provide better insight toward the effectiveness of using a paired-placement, specifically, through the collaboration between the student teachers, mentor teachers, and field instructors by allowing for adequate practice for a learning teacher.

### Literature Review

In November 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education published their report from the Blue Ribbon Panel on clinical preparation and partnerships for improved student learning. The report addressed the need for teacher training programs that emphasize clinical practice that could be a greater benefit to prospective teachers and the students (NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel, 2010). The panel called for sweeping changes in teacher education and for placements in school settings that were structured to support teacher learning with increased rigor (NCATE, 2010). According to the panel, “We must place practice at the center of teaching preparation” (p. 2). As is true with learning any skill, the more practice that is allowed the better a person will become at that skill. As a result, in 2015 the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education launched the Clinical Practice Commission, which consists of a group of higher education and k-12 leaders across the United States whose task is to examine the state of clinical practice in teacher preparation (Thurman, 2015). This panel was formed based on the findings of the 2010 Blue Ribbon Panel and are charged with setting criteria that will define clinical practice in teacher training for years to come (Thurman). The State Superintendent of Michigan, Brian Whiston, has called for strategies that involve meeting the professional needs of educators and the ability to partner with employers in an effort to create an educated and highly skilled workforce (Ackley, 2016). The paired-placement, co-teaching model is an example of the type of clinical practice that is being used to satisfy the demands. The paired-placement model of clinical practice has previously been tested in in studies I will describe below.

Every study laid out what it had hoped to see from the paired-placement, and then proceeded to conduct research observing multiple pairs in action. Smith (2002) hoped that the partnership could help meet the challenges of allowing students to become more involved in

active learning. One of the major problems he found were in terms of role conflict, ambiguity and territoriality by the pair leading to the assumption that better pairing arrangements were needed and they would ask for volunteers in the future. Lesson planning had the tendency to break down due to interpersonal problems between two pairs. It was apparent that the team teaching model was made unclear and Smith came to the conclusion that, with guidance, issues could be corrected. The second trial included guidance given to the interns and found that the interns enjoyed the extra support and the feedback from a peer, but were concerned about misplaced reliance where neither intern took control of a problem as they were depending on their partner to take care of the situation. Smith also observed that the personality clashes that resulted if there was a dominant partner persisted, convincing him that it would be beneficial for the partners to know each other beforehand.

Gardiner and Shipley Robinson (2009) had an expectation that paired-placements would increase collaboration and they conducted the study in an urban school setting. The researchers concurred with Smith (2002) about the support offered from a partner being the most notable benefit of a paired-placement. Preservice teachers engaged in more frequent and varied discourse with each other rather than their mentor teachers, and they felt that the presence of a partner helped make teaching more comfortable and in turn they were willing to take more risks. At the end of the study, a concern that the participants and their mentor teachers had was related to the authenticity of the experience as it related to an actual job, including the concern that an intern would be accustomed to having an extra body in the room with them at all times.

Nokes et al (2008) was looking for an alternative to the single-placements that have been widely used and looked toward the paired-placement in a secondary setting in order to view whether or not that setting allowed the co-teaching model to flourish and what patterns would

develop between paired teams. Witnessed during the observations were three different methods put into practice by the paired teams: the first group lacked collaboration altogether between the two interns; the second group practiced what Smith (2002) referred to as a weak form of co-teaching in that there was significant collaboration in lesson planning, but very little shown during instruction; and the last group demonstrated moderate collaboration during both planning and instruction. The first group had a mentor teacher who was not on board with the paired practice, stating that since he had never experienced it during his training and since his student interns would never experience it again, it would be unfair to force them to collaborate together. The second group found that they became much more reflective during planning, often discussing what worked well and what could be improved. The third group found their willingness to experiment in terms of planning out lessons increase. The overall strengths that the researchers found was that with two student teachers in a classroom there were fewer management problems and student test scores improved due to the students paying more attentions with more bodies monitoring them; weaknesses included participants declaring concern about the authenticity of the experience.

The paired-placement, co-teaching model was also enacted in Vietnam in order to view how the paired-placements effected a student teaching intern's professional identity (Anh, 2013). Anh described how a student teaching pair, like work and power relationships, encounter a division of labor where professional and cultural rules regulate co-working activity and social relationships between the pair (p. 49). The pair that the study observed planned each lesson by meeting each other face-to-face where, at first, the pair experienced an unequal division of labor when co-teaching, with tasks being unequally divided, as there was a clear dominant partner that made the other feel uncomfortable. For Anh, the study demonstrated that paired-placements



created environments fueled by tension, in part due to conflicting perceptions of student teaching by the interns, that he argues is a key element in teacher learning.

Ammentorp and Madden (2014) focused on paired-placements in early childhood and elementary education and further confirmed the trends seen in the studies already discussed. They found that the collaborative co-teaching model yielded higher risk-taking in lessons, both emotional and classroom management support, and learning through the observation of peers; but personality clashes and competition among partners could also negatively impact the experience. Overall, of the 120 pairs that participated in Ammentorp and Maddens' study, 90 of them found the placement to be successful.

The final study focused on the mentor teachers' viewpoint to paired-placements and how they compared to the more traditional single placement (Baker & Milner, 2006). An interesting fact that they found was that the paired-placement interns learned more from their mentor teachers than those in the single-placement. The researchers make the argument that the pairs are able to have more discussions on teaching and pedagogical growth and fewer on school policies and personal matters because the paired-placement helps divide up the non-teaching responsibilities that would all be under the control of an intern in a single-placement. The mentors who experienced the paired-placement in this study endorsed the practice, but there was still concern for competition and conflict that may arise through a paired-placement.

### **Context and Design**

Single-placements traditionally have been the preferred method for training teaching interns over the years (Nokes et al, 2008). One intern is placed with a single mentor teacher, and after a number of weeks the mentor teacher turns over the classroom to the intern, handing him

or her a large amount of responsibility at once. In fields such as medicine, training is done in groups learning together. In this way the learner is receiving an approximation of practice, where interns are learning the important elements to be a successful professional instead of struggling to master the profession without peer support. A paired-placement for teacher training is a form of clinical practice that will offer teaching interns the practice to become better teachers with adequate time to learn, while understanding that it will not be relatable to the real job because as a trainee the intern is not ready for that step. Mau stated, “No one would allow a brand new certified public accountant do the taxes for General Motors entirely on her/his own” (p. 54), in which she argues that a paired placement would be similar to apprenticeships that many professions would provide in the first few years of their employment. The paired-placement also allows prospective teachers to work on their collaborative skills as part of their practice which is important in teaching where much of the work is done in isolation in classrooms, and teachers may have the tendency to become reactive and unanalytical without building those skills (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009). Even this statement is changing for in today's classroom environment there is an increase of professionals such as special-ed instructors and ELL support coming in and out of the class in which collaboration will need to be present to best support pre k-12 learners (L. van Belle, personal communication, April 17, 2016). The approximation of practice that a paired internship would offer would be beneficial in this regard.

When I enrolled in pre-student teaching for the fall of 2015 through the College of Education at a large urban University in metro Detroit, all the courses that had been preparing me for this next step led me to believe that I would be working alone with a mentor teacher. Then, after taking my pre-student teaching in the fall, I would enroll for student teaching for the winter of 2016. These would be two separate experiences with two different mentors. This

changed when about a month before the semester began, I received an email from the university's Office of Clinical Experiences regarding if I would like to try a new type of placement system. This would be a yearlong paired-placement in a single school with a single mentor teacher, meaning that the pre- and student teaching would all be done in one location with a partner intern. This intrigued me because I felt that it would be unique to share the experience with another intern who is learning, but at the same time, thoughts began to cross my mind as to how realistic of an experience I would have if I was with a partner splitting the workload all the time. I became concerned that I would not be marketable enough because I never controlled a classroom all by myself. Despite the concern, I signed up to participate in the program.

The student teaching interns, both single and paired, attended an orientation at the start of the semester where the concept of team teaching was introduced by the Director of Clinical Experiences. Several methods of team teaching were discussed with the group. Student teachers were assigned field instructors; my group had two different field instructors for the fall and winter and they would observe the student teachers three times per semester. Field instructors were provided with monthly team meetings and had six day of professional development from the university on co-teaching and instructional coaching (L. Van Belle, personal communication, April 25, 2016) The field instructors had both single and paired-placements in their charge, and observed each intern individually regardless whether or not the intern was in a paired or single placement. Following the observation, a coaching conversation between the field instructor and intern would take place. During the fall, the student teachers would meet for a seminar with their field instructor weekly to discuss teaching practice, and in the winter the seminars became monthly. The field instructors were also available to the mentor teachers regarding any concerns

about paired-placement co-teaching or the program in general. The mentor teachers who agreed to take on paired-placements were provided training through the university before the fall semester to discuss the paired-placements. (L. Van Belle, personal communication, April 17, 2016).

The placement for my group was at a high school located in the inner-ring suburbs of Detroit and, including my partner teaching intern and I, there were four paired-placements at the building and two single-placements. This school, while located in the suburbs, is a school of choice and they pull a majority of their students from the City of Detroit, in essence making it an urban school. A majority of the students that attend live in poverty and it just recently was granted the status of a Title 1 school (mentor teacher, personal communication, April 18, 2016). (Name has not been provided to protect the mentor teacher's confidentiality) I will be using the pseudonym Woodrow Wilson High School to describe the school of my placement going forward. For the 2015-2016 school year the school body consists of 450 African American students, three Hispanic students, three Asian-American students, one American Indian student, two White students and five ELLs; of these there are 254 female students and 205 males (Assistant Principal Woodrow Wilson High School, personal communication, April 18, 2016). I am a white male and was four years removed from my high school graduation at the time of the placement. Woodrow Wilson High School is also a college preparatory school, where according to the school's website, 90% of their graduates will go on to enroll in college. Seniors will spend four days a week during the first semester in a dual enrollment program taking their classes at the local University, where I was enrolled for student teaching, for college experience. In addition to the dual enrollment program, the University's College of Education and Woodrow Wilson High School have had their own partnership through the placement of student teaching interns at the

school. The 2015-2016 academic year was the first time that Woodrow Wilson High School has had paired intern placements with a single mentor teacher.

My partner in the internship was a familiar face to me as we had previously worked together on a project in another course. After we met our mentor teacher, we found out that we would be teaching world history and geography to seniors. I was looking forward to teaching seniors due to the possibilities of the discussion based activities that I like to implement, but I knew it would present challenges as the year progressed and the students' motivations would suffer being so close to graduation. My mentor teacher was very optimistic about the year, however, as he believed with three of us in the classroom that any issues related to management could be quickly handled. We were the only pair that taught seniors so therefore we were their only experience with the paired-placement.

The first semester in the fall was one in which my partner and I did a lot of observing of our mentor teacher as well as some other teachers in the building. He would often teach the first hour of the day and then allow us the opportunity, if we felt comfortable, to repeat what he did for the other hours. My partner and I would usually have one of us lead, alternating every hour, but for the most part we both put in our input on the subject was that we were discussing. The second semester saw control of the classroom turned over to my partner and I, where we tried to use one of the team teaching strategies discussed in the orientations we attended. We each had two classes where we were the lead teacher who instructed the class and handled the grading of assignments, while the other person would circulate the room and help students in one-on-one interaction or handled management issues. There were other times that we would do stations where the three teachers in the room would each have a station to teach. All lessons were a collaborative effort between my partner and I in which we would meet once a week.

Following the first semester, we were satisfied with our placement but found that other interns and mentor teachers in the building did not seem to be enjoying the same success. This brought about the creation of the following study to see how expectations may have differed between the other interns and myself, by seeing how effective collaboration is between pairs and whether or not it is having a positive impact on instruction. The literature review provided positive results for paired-placements so the next step was to look closer at the experiences in the building.

### **Research Method: Data Collection and Thematic Analysis**

To acquire the information, I sent a survey featuring open-ended questions to the partnered interns. I designed this survey via Survey Monkey ([surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)) to provide answers to my two research questions on page three and it consisted of six questions:

1. What strengths do you see in a paired-placement, co-teaching model for training teaching interns?
2. What are some of the challenges in a paired-placement, co-teaching model for training teaching interns, based on your experience?
3. How do you think secondary students experience having paired interns co-teaching in their classroom?
4. How do you think mentor teachers experience having paired interns co-teaching in their classroom?
5. What impact do you think a yearlong paired-placement has on co-teaching and collaboration?
6. What suggestions do you have to improve the paired-placement, co-teaching model for training teaching interns, if any?

After this survey was sent out, six of the eight participants involved in the paired-placements completed the survey anonymously by answering the questions above. The responses provided insightful data on the thoughts of my colleagues but many of the answers provided were brief.

The respondents only scratched the surface with their responses and left out detail that could

provide me with information to fully answer the research questions. I took the responses that were received and looked at initial themes that were evident in the survey. Three weeks later I sent everyone, regardless of whether they had completed the first, a second follow-up survey I had designed. This survey was set up the same way as the previous survey, but had four questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being satisfied and 1 being unsatisfied, how do you feel about your placement experience?
2. Explain your rationale for choosing the number you picked in the first question.
3. Did your expectations of student teaching differ from what you actually experienced? Why or why not?
4. If a single placement were not an option, what are some specific ideas you may have to make the paired-placement, co-teaching model for training teaching interns, work to the benefit of all parties?

For this survey I received five responses. Upon further review, I was made aware that these questions in the follow-up survey did not actually support my research questions and were poorly worded, making them invalid, focusing on the placement as a whole and not the paired experience. I therefore ignored the responses I received and invited the student teaching interns to meet in my mentor's classroom after school to take the first survey a second time. All but two of the interns came to the meeting to complete the survey. This occurred around one month after the release of the initial survey and I gave more implicit instructions to be specific as possible in answering the questions again. This would allow me to assess whether the pairs felt differently about any of their first responses and would allow for more complete data with additional detail. The results were collected that afternoon and I once again looked to find themes that were present among the respondents. The thematic analysis of the interns' response paired with my responses to the questions allowed me to construct some answers to the research questions.

### **Results: My Response**

The first survey question addresses the strengths of co-teaching paired placement, in which I thought its greatest strength was the collaboration. My partner and I worked well together, often engaging in healthy debate when creating the lessons that would be engaging for the students. Another added benefit was being able to have a conversation with our mentor teacher together, as it allowed for problems that only one of us were experiencing to be shared with the both us, presenting opportunities to learn new teaching methods.

In regards to weakness, there is still concern from me about how the paired-placement will translate to my own job. I understand how this is an approximation of practice, and my mentor teacher has done an excellent job of reminding my partner and I of this fact. My concern is more related to how comfortable my partner and I have become teaching together. It will make the transition to being in a classroom by myself all day difficult. There are many benefits to having the two people in the classroom, not only in terms of classroom management, but being able to get students who were absent caught up or even providing extra help. These are items that I have to figure out how to handle by the time I am hired.

The third question focused on how I felt the students handled the paired-placement. Initially, I was concerned how the students would react to so many adults in the room at one time as it could have caused confusion. In my experience, those concerns were ended quickly as the seniors we had seemingly enjoyed having multiple teachers present. Regardless of who served as the lead teacher for a particular class, the students treated both of us with a mutual amount of respect. Since my partner and I have taken charge of instruction, grades have risen for all four classes, in part because of the extra support we were able to provide to them.

While the students seemed to benefit from experiencing the paired-placement, I wondered how the mentor teachers felt. This is a new experience for all of the mentors at



Woodrow Wilson, with many used to the traditional single-placement. In regards to my mentor, he has told me that he is very pleased with the paired-placement. He has enjoyed seeing how my partner and I have worked together, and has bought into the experience being an approximation of practice. My mentor did not have a positive student teaching experience, as he felt that his mentor did not give him any opportunities to practice the craft, and was constantly being burdened with work that stymied the process of learning. This has helped him view the benefits of pairs.

The impact of being placed in a year-long placement was, in my opinion, crucial to the collaboration and co-teaching process. The participants are more comfortable in their assignments and are able to better create relationships with their students. It is easier to be a successful teacher if there is a good relationship established between the teacher and student. Management is better when the students are on your side. In terms of collaboration, the more comfort that is had between the paired-interns, their working relationship should improve as more constructive dialogue can be given to one another.

### **Results: The Paired Interns' Experience Round One**

Using the questions from the survey, it was clear to me that the other interns' in the building, with the exception of one, did not have as much of a positive experience as I had after viewing the responses from the first survey. To start on a positive note, there was a common theme among the response to the question on strengths making note of how many of the interns enjoyed being able to watch and discuss strategies with a peer. Respondent #1 discussed how a partner made the experience less lonely and that the two of them could relate to any success and/or difficulty they were having:

Having another person who can relate to successes and difficulties. Less lonely!  
Teamwork!

Respondent #3 appreciated being able to watch another teaching style consistently which allowed this person to compare their growth with their partner's growth:

I think that being able to see another individual's teaching style is very helpful. I am able to see her growth and compare my own growth.

In addition to the support the paired-placement was offering the response from respondent #2 stood out to me as they talked about the paired-placement using a scaffold type approach to progressing a teacher toward primary instruction, which is a goal of implementing clinical practice:

It allows for a scaffolded approach to integrating teachers into primary instruction.

Respondent #2 was the exception in the group that stayed positive through the responses in survey one.

There was a larger variety of responses regarding the weaknesses of the paired-placements. Respondent #2 claimed:

The challenges are with meeting with your teaching partner. Sometimes it is hard to make schedules work.

This is a minor but valid concern when working in a pair. A few of the interns shared my experiences in regards to the reality of a paired-placement versus their professional career. This concern was similar to mine, in that having a partner made it difficult to fully grasp what it would be like to be alone all the time. A concern brought up by respondent #1 was the aspect of competition:

Competition. It can be hard when one person is excelling while the other struggles. Different teaching styles or personalities. Can be useful to learn from each other, but also confusing for students who may need more consistency. Less time to practice lead

teaching, which is very important to become a good class manager. Sharing management responsibilities is difficult for students and students who are not as assertive may be robbed of opportunities by more outgoing co-teachers.

This was a familiar thread found during the literature reviews, such as in Smith (2002) and Ammentorp & Madden (2014), and was discussed here through the context of there being less time to practice teaching, especially when one partner may be at a higher level and becomes more domineering. Respondent #5 had several weaknesses listed:

3 way lines of communication between interns and mentor teachers can lead to inconsistency both on the teaching team and in messages/instruction with students.

Getting fixed on doing certain tasks around the room because overall it helps the "team" function better. This is good but your development may suffer. This one is tough because (hopefully) your natural instinct is just pitch in where needed.

Mentor teacher gravitating towards one inter or the other. Exclusion.

Included was a competition related concern, voicing that a mentor teacher may gravitate toward an intern leading to a feeling of exclusion. One of the other concerns was how three-way communication between the two interns and the mentor led to inconsistency of instruction. This may indicate that respondent #5 and his/her partner did not collaborate much.

All but two of the respondents believed that the paired-placement was beneficial for the students. The common theme was more support with the extra teachers who were in the classroom. Even respondents #1 and #5, who were not completely sold, saw the benefits of the added support. They both voiced concern about consistency for students, pondering whether having two teachers who are at different levels could cause confusion. Respondent # 1 had this to say:

More support for the students. Able to do more tutoring, question answering, etc.

Sometimes confusing who is in charge. Consistency may be an issue if interns have different personalities or teaching / management styles.

Based on the responses regarding the feelings of the mentor teacher's it appeared that it was difficult for the interns to get a read on their mentor's thoughts. Most seemed to not be very convinced that the mentors enjoyed having pairs, with the exception of respondent #2 who thought that while it seemed difficult to manage their mentor thought the paired-placement had been successful:

I think it is difficult for them to manage two student teachers but if they can collaborate well it can be advantageous.

Only respondent #3 was completely negative claiming:

I think it's a huge pain for them. It's more work and mentoring that they have to do.

Respondent #5 thinks that their mentor would prefer to just have one student teacher but acknowledges that the mentor has been able to get more work done:

It is an opportunity for them to get a lot of other work done but that may be true with just 1 intern. Without really knowing I believe our mentor teacher would prefer having just one.

The response to the effect of the yearlong placement were varied. Respondents #2 and # 4 shared an experience with me in seeing the opportunity it has to foster relationships within the school, with respondent #2 saying:

Relationship! Building a relationship with students has been crucial for classroom management.

Respondent #5 stated an opinion that could be true with almost any experience:

Depends on your situation. You either get closer with the people you work with or you get further apart. Overall I think as long as you are flexible and professional your relationship with your co-intern should continue to improve over the course of the year.

Respondent # 1 admitted that their pair did little co-teaching:

We didn't do much co-teaching. Divide and conquer.

Respondent #3 had an intriguing response as it appeared to be contradicting:

I think it's beneficial in terms of learning and growth over the course of the year. Although, the paired placement halves the realistic workload that the student teachers will eventually have.

The person states that the yearlong paired-placement was great for learning and growth, which is what practice is supposed to build, but then the response goes on to criticize the placement in that it halves the realistic workload that a teacher would have. While this is not untrue, it is missing the point that was first stated in that learning and growth is promoted.

The final survey question asked for suggestions on how improve the paired-placement program for the future and the results show that three of the respondents made it clear that it would be better to go back to single placements. Respondent #3 said:

Overall, I just think that the traditional single placement is more beneficial for student teachers than paired placement.

Respondent #1 was a part of this group, but they were at least open to the idea of having student teachers occasionally go and observe the other interns and give them feedback, as this was mentioned as a strength:

I think putting students in their own classrooms is better. You could pair interns up with a buddy in another classroom of similar subject to observe each other and get feedback, critique lesson plans, and talk about shared experiences. I think this could be effective in providing the reflection, support, and collaboration of a paired placement without the negatives related practice time, competition, and class management.

Respondent #2 thought that a more organized program would be an improvement:

A more organized program would put less stress on student teachers and mentors.

This response is more than likely a response to the first semester where there were seemingly weekly changes in regards to the expectations. Respondent #5 suggested more notice to interns about a paired-placement, suggesting that s/he was not asked as I was before being placed.

Notice to the interns. Some sort of interview with (College of Education) to see if you even want to be in a paired placement. To the degree possible an opportunity to select who you would like to be paired with.

### **Results: The Paired Interns' Experience Round 2**

After collecting the results for the second round, I looked to observe if there was a change in opinion displayed by the interns over the course of a month. What was found was that many of the same opinions were shared for a second time, occasionally using almost identical phrasing as in the first survey round. This round did witness an expansion of detail in a few cases to help build on the themes that had been previously established but not as much as I would have liked. The respondents continued to largely believe that the mentor teachers were either irritated or overwhelmed by the prospect of having multiple interns. This is from respondent #7:

I think that it might be challenging or even irritating to have multiple student teachers to mentor. They have to complete several evaluations. However, they have no prep or teaching hours, so that's a relief for them.

During this round, several of the respondents did add that the mentors did seem to like how the students were given extra resources in the classroom with the extra teacher as respondent #8 said:

I think it was overwhelming at times, but I think they also liked their students having so many resources in the room.

This could indicate that the mentors' issues may stem from the extra workload rather than how it affected the students.

The student benefits were still persistent in the responses received, with respondent #8 adding:

I think they benefited having so many resources available to them. I also think they benefited in having different people able to answer questions/explain things in different ways.

In terms of collaboration between pairs, the support was still discussed but some more detail was provided about the specific type collaboration that occurred. Respondent #11 discussed:

Easing into the transition of teaching all day was very helpful. Honestly, the best part was 1) having the support of someone who sees your "school life" every day, and who can help you work through your daily reflections 2) have someone to collaborate with when designing lesson plans, and 3) having someone to help work through grading with. Not so much help with the volume, but figuring out what an A is or what a B is etc. I don't know why this is so hard in English, especially with a rubric, but it is!

This example of collaboration shows a pair of learning teachers having a constructive conversation on an important element of the teaching profession.

The weaknesses touched upon by the respondents again discussed how a few of them did not feel like a real teacher. Respondent # 10 made two statements that indicate problems:

Not learning to be alone in class. Falling into a routine where you are not exposed to every task or experience. Inconsistent treatment from mentor teacher.

This response showed that after two surveys that the message of a teaching internship being an approximation of practice is not fully understood and that the mentor teacher was not providing the proper collaborative mentoring for this particular intern. New suggestions to improve the program in this round included from respondent # 10:

Screen mentors about whether they understand what they are getting into.

The suggestion respondent #9 was intriguing because the respondent makes note that schools feel ignored by the placement program:

Listen and trust input from the placement schools. Schools often feel ignored when they express their concerns.

The respondent does not provide evidence into why he/she believed the school felt that way.

## Discussion

The two surveys found that while the student teachers acknowledged several benefits, such as collaboration and student success, there were several problems that the interns as a whole faced. A few appeared as if their relationship with the mentor teacher was not productive, which makes development difficult when there is not acceptable communication. The other main theme was that the student teachers themselves did not seem to understand the progression of training for a professional job. With several student teachers writing that they would prefer to be alone, it appears that they expected to simulate the exact experience of a teacher from the onset. Not being taken into consideration is Mau's (2013) statement about the student teaching placement being a first step in the developmental process, not a direct simulation. Over time, this way of thinking should lessen as paired-placements become more prominent. Familiarity breeds expectations and in the meantime steps can be taken to help reshape the common expectations.

Organization is key. This was the first attempt to implement this model and it showed as the mentor teachers and the student teaching interns felt they were not given clear instruction on how to run a paired-placement. I have made this inference based on our first semester in the program. Our field instructor, who is supposed to be the representative from the program to guide both the mentor teachers and interns, would often complain during the weekly seminars that information was changing and made it appear that he was not even aware how the paired-placement worked. He had mentioned to us that he was not sure how he was supposed to observe individuals if they were co-teaching with a partner. While there was an improvement during the second semester with a new field instructor, whom the university changed due to the original field instructor's negativity and Woodrow Wilson's concerns this attitude impacting interns and the model, the damage in the first semester seemingly turned off many of the mentors and interns to the paired-placement. If the field instructor is not on board, it will be difficult to get the



mentors on board, and then ultimately the student interns. It was Baker and Milner who stated that mentor and intern discussion was one of the most positive aspects of the paired-placement, and at Woodrow Wilson High School there was not enough of it. While there were the additional meetings offered to the mentors to explain the program, there still seemed to be confusion. My mentor teacher speculates that stubbornness may be a factor, and that several of his colleagues refuse to buy in because it was not what they experienced.

Referring back to my experience, I remember the co-teaching strategies that were given to us at the orientations, but not much else. The field instructor did not provide much guidance for those crucial months early on, which is why there appeared to be a couple of groups in the survey implying that they did not co-teach together. With the single-placements also in the same building as the pairs, it possibly created a situation where attending to the paired interns' concerns was not a priority since it was not the sole focus.

### **Implications: Suggestions for Future Implementations**

My first suggestion would be to have a building that solely consists of the paired-placements and a field instructor that handles only pairs. This would allow for the field instructor assigned to a building to only have to observe as specific placement system. For the field instructors who are placed in the building with pairs, they can receive more training and will be more versed in how to assist and observe the pairs and their mentors. This would require cooperation from placement schools and field instructors, but mine and the other interns' experiences indicate this would have been helpful.

It was Smith (2002) that felt that volunteers were the best options when placing teaching interns into pairs. While my partner and I volunteered and had known each other from a previous

engagement, respondent #5 from the first survey who had the largely negative experience implied that they did not volunteer for the program. His or her suggestion was to interview candidates and allow them to pick partners. While picking partners appears to be a great idea, not everyone would know each other so there would still have to be random assignments. The interviewing also seems as if it would be more than is necessary, as long as the candidates are asked permission first through email then candidates would be given the opportunity to decide if they would like to participate. I do agree with respondent #5's thoughts about choosing partners and would recommend it if it were practical, because if you are able to know the person before the placement then it already can help assure a comfort level when collaborating. The practicality may be the major challenge in the insertion of these interviews. According to the Director of Clinical Experience, our University serves a large body of non-traditional students who take longer to complete their degrees than other institutions. Many of the students have families of their own and may need to take a semester off sometimes for financial reasons, therefore it would be difficult to ask many of the students entering their field placement to give time to go through a series of interviews. As I suggested above, if the single and paired placements are kept together but implemented in separate placement schools, it could serve as a solution to this. Those who have limited time could go through with the single-placement, whereas those willing to commit the time at a few interviews can accept or decline through the initial e-mail that asks for participation in the program. The second survey respondent who recommended that mentor teachers be screened beforehand was another good idea, because it would greatly benefit partnered interns if their mentor is fully on board and open to the program from the beginning. This can avoid having mentors who believe that they should treat a paired-placement as if it were

still a single-placement. Even doing this with field instructors would be helpful, as it would create consistency.

These recommendations put into consideration that both mentor teachers and field instructors did have professional development on the topic of paired-placements. Speaking with the program director, I was informed that the Woodrow Wilson High School principal asked for the University to provide the extra instruction to the teachers on how to mentor paired interns. This professional development was provided by the university and occurred at least twice more after the initial meeting at the start of the year. Whether all the mentors attended is not known, but it is also critical that the role of the field instructor is acknowledged in this situation. The program director confirmed with me that there was negativity about the paired-placements from the first field instructor, meaning that the most accessible guide to the mentors is not going to prepare them properly. This will cause a chain reaction of negativity down through the interns. The field instructor was replaced during the second semester, but the damage was done. The University was giving the professional development to a degree, but there needs to be more for both parties so that the negativity can be excluded from the beginning.

Due to the AACTE Clinical Practice Commission and the growing body of research supporting co-teaching, there is no doubt that the paired-placements are not going anywhere. In order to frame the expectations of a paired-placement and give mentors a better understanding of what they signed up for it would be beneficial to hold more orientations in addition to the ones already offered that are exclusive to the field instructors, mentor teachers, and student teaching interns that are participating. There needs to be greater understanding of what works well and how this is part of a developmental process that is not going to churn out a master teacher the moment the semester is done. There needs to be at least three sessions: one for the interns, one

for the mentor teachers, and another for field instructors, with at least one follow-up session with all three groups present. Through the orientation sessions, the results of the studies conducted on paired-placements could be shared and the goals of how to run or be a participant in a paired model are made abundantly clear to all parties. This could include guidelines that are as simple as just suggesting one co-teaching model, as this could limit confusion if the participants believe that there is one proper way to implement co-teaching. Confusion can be a huge detriment to a paired-placement, and the more training that is provided, the confusion should be limited.

Another item that should be brought up in orientations was the benefit that the paired-placement model gave to students. Not a single respondent believed that the students were not benefitting in some fashion, as extra support in the room appears to allow for the students to be better engaged, in terms of both extra eyes and minds. With many of these students coming from challenging backgrounds, the improvements seen from the students provided excellent motivation to continue with the paired-placements. Student success was also confirmed by Nokes et al (2008). Even the support showed between pairs was a strength that several respondents mentioned. While collaboration through instruction was lacking, the pairs seemed to collaborate in terms of providing feedback to their partners.

### **Conclusion**

Looking back at the two research questions, both provided answers after taking in the results of the survey. In regards to how a yearlong paired-placement effected collaboration between student teaching interns, it depended on the interns' relationships. My partner and I had great collaboration in both instruction and in providing each other feedback on performance. We also were able to have meaningful discussions with our mentor teacher, who is a proponent of the paired-placement. Other interns, who possibly had mentor teachers that were not proponents

of the paired-placement, seemed to shy away from collaborating on instruction together but were still able to have meaningful growth discussions with each other. Ultimately, their hesitation due to lack of knowledge was matched by many of the mentor teachers at Woodrow Wilson High School who encouraged separation from their partner. This is where the increased guidelines and orientations can provide a scenario where all the mentor teachers and field instructors can buy in and the collaboration aspect would increase. The second question about the effect on instruction is seemingly a positive answer if the improved grades are considered. All respondents saw the students benefitting from having multiple teachers in the classroom at one time. The year-long placement also allowed for a better establishment of teacher-student relationships, which is critical to classroom management and student success. If the communication is present on the onset, and all participants' expectations for the purpose of a paired-placement are in agreement, then the program should yield positive results for the students, interns, field instructors and teachers.

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