

Peer Field Placements with Preservice Teachers: Negotiating the Challenges of Professional Collaboration

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Abstract

Peer placements, pairing two preservice teachers with a cooperating teacher, have been shown to provide a more supportive and collaborative context for learning to teach than the traditional student-cooperating teacher, single placement model. In some cases, however, tensions existed. This qualitative study seeks to expand the extant research by identifying and analyzing the challenges 24 preservice teachers experienced in their peer placements. While virtually all preservice teachers viewed their peer placements positively, results indicate that all preservice teachers negotiated challenges that pertained to the act or perceived value of collaboration in practice. Specifically, preservice teachers' prior experiences had not prepared them for in-depth collaboration, and their tendency to view teaching as an autonomous profession that one gains entry into by "sinking or swimming" influenced their perception of the role of collaboration in professional learning. Recommendations are provided to guide the development or refinement of peer placements.

Peer placements, pairing two preservice teachers with a cooperating teacher, have been shown to provide a more supportive and collaborative context in which to learn to teach than the traditional student-cooperating teacher, single placement model (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002; 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). To date, research has largely been exploratory in nature, seeking to understand the impact of peer placements (also referred to as "partner" placements). While studies have consistently shown positive benefits for preservice teachers' professional learning, in some pairings, tensions existed. Yet, insofar, delving into areas of tensions has not been a focal point.

Seeking to understand how and why some preservice teachers struggle with peer placements is an important next step. Collaboration can enhance learning; however, research on professional collaboration indicates that productive collaboration can be challenging to attain, that tensions between collaborators are inevitable (Achinstein, 2002; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2003; John-Steiner, 2000), and that preservice teachers' prior experiences typically do not prepare them to be effective collaborators (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Therefore, if peer placements are to be a sustainable field placement model, a deeper understanding is needed to intentionally support preservice teacher collaboration.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to extend the extant research by understanding and identifying the challenges that 24 early childhood education preservice teachers (PSTs) encountered as they collaborated with a peer in a field placement. Results indicate that while most PSTs viewed peer placements in highly favorable terms, reflecting research describing the complex work of professional

collaboration (Achinstein, 2002; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2003; John-Steiner, 2000) all reported negotiating hurdles pertaining to the act of and perceived value of collaboration in practice. To inform those seeking to implement or refine peer placements, recommendations are provided so that benefits can be maximized; tensions and trouble spots more quickly identified; and timely, judicious, and proactive interventions instantiated to circumvent or mediate problems.

Conceptual Framework

Collaboration and Learning

Learning is a social enterprise that is enhanced through collaboration (John-Steiner, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Collaborative relationships provide a context for members to draw upon one another's intellectual, experiential, and emotional resources (John-Steiner, 2000) and, subsequently, accomplish more collectively than individually (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Wenger, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, current reform literature in teacher professional learning emphasizes the importance of collaboration as a means to transform educational practices and the culture of education (Achinstein, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman & Wineburg, 2000; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2003; Little, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

However, collaboration is not synonymous with professional learning, and it can be challenging to foster and sustain (Achinstein, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman & Wineburg, 2000; Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Little, 2003; Wenger, 1998). Several factors need to be present for collaboration to enhance learning: trust, parity, a balance of similarities (to connect), and differences (for divergent perspectives and experiences) (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; John-Steiner, 2000; Wallace & Loudon, 1994). Collaborators also need sufficient time to collaborate; a commitment to sustaining their joint work; and a willingness and ability to analyze, evaluate, and deliberate upon complex events and ideas (John-Steiner, 2000; Wenger, 1998). Patterns of tension typically stem from a lack of time to collaborate (John-Steiner, 2000); insufficient commitment to each other or the joint work (John-Steiner, 2000; Wenger, 1998); and not having shared norms for communication, such as how to agree, disagree, and provide feedback (Grossman, Wineberg, & Woolworth, 2003; John-Steiner, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

Additionally, collaboration is a learned skill that needs to be supported and developed (Johnston & Johnson, 1975; Wenger, 1998). So not only do the preceding factors need to be in place, but successful professional collaboration means that those behaviors and factors need to be taught and coached. This is particularly salient in education, as pre- and inservice teachers' prior school experiences do not prepare them for sustained and substantive professional collaboration (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Peer Placements

Peer placement research consistently describes favorable results for PSTs learning, and indicates that peers invest in and support each other's development (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). These studies explain that in peer placements, PSTs plan more innovative and dynamic lessons and ease the challenge of lesson implementation by assisting or redirecting students and managing materials. Researchers also speculate that the multiple perspectives peers bring forth help them design more creative lessons (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010;

Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008). Knowing that a peer is available to intervene during instruction helps PSTs feel more confident in attempting complex, student-centered instruction (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). Some studies indicate that due to peers' equal status and cooperating teachers' multiple responsibilities, peer feedback tends to be more thorough, frequent, and open ended than dialogue with cooperating teachers (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Smith, 2002). As a result, peer collaboration provides increased opportunities to reflect upon and analyze experiences and determine ways to improve teaching (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Smith, 2002).

While the research is overwhelmingly positive, drawbacks exist and many have reported concerns. The most frequently cited drawback is that some peers and cooperating teachers believe peer placements do not reflect the "real world" of teaching—a world of autonomy and isolation (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010). In the first year of a three-year study, Smith (2000) reported that problems arose because PSTs did not have a framework for how to interact and ended up stepping on each other's toes during instruction; this finding prompted Smith to implement a "lead and back up" approach in subsequent pairings in which one PST delivered instruction and the other provided support where needed, such as helping with managing materials and responding to students' questions. Research has also raised concerns pertaining to a balance of power or competition between peers (Goodnough et al., 2009; Smith, 2002), as well as the challenge to find sufficient time to collaborate (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009). Finally, Gardiner and Robinson (2010) describe a failed pairing stemming from insufficient commitment between peers and a wide gap in abilities, which resulted in peers maintaining a joint placement but performing their work individually.

Methods

Context

This qualitative study draws from data spanning 2007–2009. During this time a total of 24 PSTs were placed with a peer in a 100-hour urban practicum course called *Curriculum Methods* that occurred prior to student teaching. All students were enrolled in an accredited teacher education program leading to licensure in early childhood education at a liberal arts college adjacent to a large Midwestern city.

Curriculum Methods was considered a "high stakes" course. Admission into student teaching was predicated on successful course and placement completion. Contributing to the challenge of the course was that despite having prior field experiences, most students had not taught a whole class lesson, and none had prior experiences in urban schools.

Curriculum Methods met on campus three times a week for two hours and included a 100-hour field experience. Course content included lesson and curriculum planning from a student-centered stance. In particular, course readings and instructional expectations were grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009)—specifically, academic content would be rigorous and relevant. Course expectations were that PSTs co-plan and implement lessons in each subject area, as well as design and implement a two-week integrated science or social studies unit.

Before the term started, PSTs were asked if they preferred single or peer placements. Placements were generally random and based on matching grade level preferences. In a few cases, PSTs requested to partner with someone from the class and those requests were honored. Over the three-year period, 24 selected peer, and two selected single placements (data only represent those in peer placements).

Prior to placing PSTs in classrooms, cooperating teachers and principals were asked if they were

willing to host two PSTs. Before the start of the term, the instructor (one of the authors) met with PSTs and cooperating teachers to describe course expectations and discuss a range of options for PST collaboration during lesson implementation. The options included: 1) teaching independently while one's peer observed, 2) co-teaching, or 3) having one peer lead instruction while the other facilitated (e.g., helping with students, materials).

The 12 classrooms (grades K–3) used for the placements were in high-poverty, urban schools. Teachers were required by the district to employ scripted reading, math, and science curricula. Stemming from the pressure to raise student achievement in the areas of math and literacy, most teachers stated they lacked adequate time to teach science or social studies.

Participants

Participants included 24 PSTs in their junior year of an undergraduate teacher education program. There were four sets of peers in 2007, three sets in 2008, and five sets in 2009. In all, there was a total of 12 pairings. Twenty-one PSTs were female, and three were male. Reflective of the college population, most were of traditional aged, ranging from 21–26 years. All were Caucasian from suburban and rural backgrounds. Participation was voluntary, and all names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection & Analysis

Data collection occurred between 2007–2009. We aggregated three years of data to gain a larger sample size for identifying patterns of tension and understanding more deeply the peer placement experience. Data sources included observations, documents, and interviews. Bi-weekly observations, lasting approximately 45 minutes, were conducted in each classroom, and field notes were taken. Documents included PST lesson plans, journal entries, units of study, and cooperating teachers' evaluations of PST performance. Individual in-depth interviews (Seidman, 1998) were conducted with each PST at the end of the term, after grades were submitted. Interviews were recorded, and verbatim transcripts were completed. A semistructured interview protocol was developed and administered to understand the types and patterns of interactions PSTs had with their peer and cooperating teacher. Questions were asked about what collaboration with cooperating teachers and peers looked like during planning and instruction; the types and frequency of dialogue PSTs had with peers and cooperating teachers; the qualities and behaviors that facilitated or undermined collaboration; and the perceived benefits and challenges of peer placements. At the end of the term, cooperating teachers were also interviewed to solicit their perceptions of strengths and weakness of peer placement in regard to planning, instruction, classroom management, curricular innovation, and whether they would be willing to host two PSTs again.

A phenomenological case study methodology was employed because of the emphasis on inductive forms of data analysis, natural settings as data sources, and the emphasis of participants' construction of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 1990). For the first phase of our analysis, each of us independently surveyed the entire data set. Next, data were analyzed as three separate cases determined by year to observe if there were any patterns pertaining to year. To this end, data were color coded to reflect the year of study (e.g., 2007 documents were copied onto yellow paper, 2008 onto blue). Data were also organized according to peer matches (e.g., "Kelly and Beth" were peers in 2007, and their documents were grouped together and further color coded). Data from each year were analyzed through open and then axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To further represent the data (Miles & Huberman, 1986), a matrix was created to indicate 1) placement year, 2) names and

pseudonyms, 3) grade levels, 4) challenges of peer placements, 5) benefits of peer placements, 6) if participants believed peer placements should be offered for student teaching, and 7) if participants would choose to repeat the experience with a peer. With the exception of one concept discussed in the results section entitled “Making Time for Collaborative Work,” there were no notable patterns per year.

Next, we separately compiled and reviewed data across individual students and then peers to identify recurring and/or contrasting experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and to double-check the accuracy and credibility of our axial codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). At this point, existing codes included but were not limited to “seeking and maintaining parity,” “times and ways to meet,” “scaffolding or a crutch,” “role clarity,” and “challenge of compromise.” During this recursive phase, we made constant comparisons of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990): we met repeatedly, shared interpretations, refined existing codes, and discussed emergent themes. We returned to the data, reading and rereading, testing and narrowing our interpretations. We followed this pattern until we neared consensus on our interpretive themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Results

Reflecting the extant research (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith, 2002), most relationships were positive, collaborative, supported pedagogic risk taking, and helped PSTs broaden their perspectives on planning and meeting students’ needs. Indeed, 20 PSTs indicated they would repeat the experience with their peer. One indicated she would like to redo the experience with a different peer. Three stated that they would not want to repeat the experience, although two believed it should be an option. Of the three, one cited time constraints, the second indicated that peer placements were not “realistic” preparation for a profession predicated on individual accomplishment, and the third cited a combination of the two previously stated reasons. Importantly, all indicated that peer placements required substantial time commitment and adjustments to the way they work and/or communicate. PSTs also raised concerns about parity, accountability, and what is “real” in the professional world of teaching. The results below describe these challenges, adjustments, and concerns.

Making Time for Collaborative Work: “The Biggest Struggle”

Peer placements required intense time commitments beyond what PSTs initially expected; successful pairings required that PSTs find time and ways to engage with each other. Consistently, PSTs indicated that they invested significant time outside of class to plan lessons, work through the logistics of instructional delivery, and analyze and reflect upon experiences. PSTs stated that they needed to find multiple ways to maintain ongoing communication such as carpooling; meeting before, during, and/or after school (or class); texting; calling; and emailing.

Time appeared to be the greatest challenge in the 2007 study with some pairings stating that they regularly spent 4–5 hours per week to plan, reflect, revise work—on top of the individual work they were doing to plan, grade student work, and gather resources. Consistently, PSTs made statements reflective of Kelly’s: “The biggest struggle was finding meeting times.” Likewise, Lisa stated, the “biggest downside was time conflicts, trying to get together to plan. You can only do so much on your own, and you don’t want to take over.” Indeed, two PSTs (from the 2007 data set) stated that they would not want to repeat the experience, in large part due to the challenge of coordinating schedules.

Based upon the 2007 data, partners set aside class time in 2008 and 2009 for peer planning. PSTs valued and consistently recommended that we continue to embed time in class for collaborative

planning, as evidenced by Julie's statement, "The biggest thing to keep doing is having time in class. It's huge." Even with this class planning time, PSTs continued to indicate that peer collaboration required substantial time investment (in already heavily scheduled days). Tom explained, "[Even with] using class time, we'd still meet in the library or the computer lab for hours on end...before school and once or twice over the weekend." Similarly, Sonia described, "We talked every single day. We planned until the library closed at night, sometimes until 2:00 in the morning." Indeed, with the exception of one, each PST pointed out the necessity of scheduling ample and frequent time to meet, plan, and discuss and reflect upon teaching and learning. Cathy's statement reflected a consensus that successful partnerships "depend on partners making time to meet with each other."

Collaboration in Practice: "A Delicate Dance"

A vast majority of PSTs described one outcome of peer placements as "learning how to collaborate better." Yet, this was a benefit that came with varying degrees of challenge. Most PSTs indicated that they had not previously experienced such intensive collaboration, and that building and maintaining successful collaborative relationships required that they make unanticipated adjustments such as compromising on ideas and adjusting to different work and communication styles. Melissa's words reflect her peers' interview statements and journal entries:

Collaborating was something I struggled with this quarter. We've worked in groups on projects before, but nothing like this. This quarter we were kind of thrown together and had to figure out how to make it work... Understanding how to work with a partner, how to compromise, how to not be overbearing. I had just never done that before.

Learning to compromise was a frequently described hurdle. While the vast majority of PSTs noted that through "brainstorming" and "bouncing ideas around" they came up with more creative plans, many also noted that "finding the middle road wasn't always easy" and it was a learned process that required careful communication and the willingness to let go of favored ideas. Several made statements similar to April's: "I love my ideas, but sometimes my ideas aren't the best, or my partner has another approach... Hearing that was hard at first." Others discussed trying (and not always succeeding) to strike a balance between advocating for ideas without being "too aggressive or pushy." Two PSTs reflected that they were *too* quick to let go of their ideas. Leslie recalled, "Even though we're good friends, sometimes his ideas overpowered. I didn't really feel like putting up a strong fight, and his ideas were good, so I just went along with them."

Observations and interviews indicate the most prevalent difference in working style reflects Little's (2003) research describing the tension collaborating teachers experienced between "getting things done" and "figuring things out." Seeking a balance between "task orientation" and "big picture thinking" was one that at times created tension. Ellie recalled the challenge of honoring her peer's thinking and creativity with her own need to respond to deadlines: "I'd say, 'Well that's great, and those are great ideas, but let's talk about tomorrow, because we need to have tomorrow ready before we have next Friday ready.'" Ellie's statement reflects the process more than half the PSTs went through of first identifying a tension in working style, naming the difference, and then finding (or "attempting to find") a way to productively negotiate that difference.

Along the lines of "learning to [productively] communicate," several PSTs noted that they needed to adjust the way they provided feedback, or challenged or shared ideas as their partners'

communication style was quite different—a recognition established “the hard way” for some. Consistently, PSTs reflected that communicating effectively “[was] a lot of work.” Becky observed, “It’s a delicate dance, knowing your relationship, how to state things, how to address a concern or get a point across in a not aggressive or demeaning way.” In fact, a recurrent pattern PSTs expressed is reflected in Elizabeth’s statement: To get the most out of the peer placement experiences means “being flexible” with the way one works and communicates.

Parity and Accountability: Just Be “Fair”

While a majority of peers discussed the importance of parity, it was only in one pairing that a lack of parity and accountability become a significant problem—one that led to the instructor and classroom teacher determining that while the pair would remain in the same classroom, they were to plan and instruct independently. Reflective of the concern over “fairness,” one PST suggested that peers assess each other’s level of collaboration.

In what we would consider the one “failed” pairing over the three years, there was a definite asymmetry in parity, accountability, and skill level. In this pairing, one PST, Megan, consistently cancelled planning meetings leaving her partner, Anna, to shoulder a disproportionate share of the work. The norm that became established early on was that Megan expected Anna to tell her what each of them should do that day. Anna described the “frustration” she felt over the lack of parity and mutual accountability. Interestingly, Megan had a different conception, stating, “Anna and I did a lot of work together” and that she appreciated the “support” in getting the work done. However, classroom observations and interviews with Anna and the cooperating teacher indicated that while Anna initially attempted to collaborate with Megan, Megan’s lack of follow through and the low quality of performance (in the field and classroom) led to Anna undertaking a disproportionate amount of the work. (Ultimately, Megan was not permitted to register for student teaching.) At the end of the term, Anna reported that she would not want to repeat the experience with Megan but would want to repeat the experience with a peer who had more similar “outlook and priorities.” While an outlier, this situation caused significant tension between peers and the cooperating teacher, required substantial time investment, and raised the concern of what to do when a pairing is failing.

Without exception, PSTs discussed how hard they had to work to plan and implement student-centered, culturally responsive lessons and units of study. In interviews after the term ended, a majority of the PSTs explicitly stated that it was essential to “share work fairly,” “be responsible to your partner,” “not let your partner down,” and in short, “just be fair.” As Julie stated, “When [you both] put in the same amount of effort, it works great.” Emma recommended having peers evaluate each other in terms of overall effort and ability to work well together. She stated:

If you had the partners evaluate each other, that would be a very valuable tool... Lanie and I worked really well together, and we would give each other high evaluations, but then you would also get a picture of who wasn’t doing as much work as their partner.

Scaffolded Experiences or “A Crutch”: What’s “Real” in Teaching?

As previously indicated, prior to taking this course, PSTs had not taught a whole class lesson and had no prior experiences in high-poverty urban schools. To bridge the gap, between previous experiences and student teaching, 23 believed peer placements should continue to be offered for this course (but not student teaching). Yet, many were concerned that the immediate support offered by

their peer might ultimately hinder their professional development. Additionally, each year, PSTs and cooperating teachers raised concerns as to whether peer placements were a “realistic” means to preparing PSTs to teach (a reason two PSTs provided for not wanting to repeat a paired experience).

Virtually all PSTs indicated that peer placements were a helpful transition into greater classroom responsibility. Interviews and observations reflect collaborative learning theories (John-Steiner, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978) in that peers distributed risk, responsibility, and intellectual resources. Still, about half of the PSTs expressed the juxtaposition between appreciating the support their peer provided during instruction, such as redirecting students, answering questions, managing material—with their concern for their ultimate capacity to provide effective, independent instruction. Reflecting other PST experiences, Lanie recalled, “They would start to get noisy ... Emma would jump in, and it was good [in the moment], but I need to know I can do it when I’m on my own.” The concept of “need to be able do it [teach] on my own” was repeated by most PSTs and appears to reflect the pervasive mythology of learning to teach as an independent activity in which one either “sinks or swims” (Britzman, 1991; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). As one PST framed it, working with a peer is “a crutch you are not going to have.” The concept of a “crutch” was repeated the following year when one PST stated, “It helped me in the short run ... but it’s [peer placements] a crutch forestalling reality.”

As such, none of the PSTs thought student teaching should be a paired experience. PSTs explained that peer placements for student teaching would not prepare them for independent practice or let them know if they could effectively teach independently; teaching with a peer did not reflect the professional settings in which they would ultimately work. Leslie explained, “So it [peer placement] was like a step into the door, where student teaching ... should be more of what actually is going to happen.” This statement was echoed by a cooperating teacher who said, “They need to rely on themselves to build a successful teaching environment and to plan lessons. In reality, when they become teachers, they need to do this on their own.”

The concept of what is “real” in teaching was mixed—with the edge toward individualism. As one second-grade teacher stated when asked about the benefits and drawbacks of peer placements, “Unfortunately, the American model of education isn’t set up for teams. It is set up for individual success.” That statement was also reflected by Melissa, the PST with whom she worked, “[You] usually don’t work with anyone when it comes to teaching in a school setting.” Yet, a few other cooperating teachers and PSTs indicated beliefs similar to Allison’s: “In the real world, we will work a lot with teachers in the same grade levels and team teach.” Molly also noted, “A friend just had an interview, and the importance of collaboration was really stressed.” However, interview and observational data positions Allison and Molly’s perspective as the minority view.

Discussion

Overall, tensions seemed to arise from both the act and perceived value of collaboration. Specifically, PST prior experiences had not prepared them for in-depth collaboration, and their tendency to view teaching as an autonomous profession that one gains entry into by “sinking or swimming” influenced the way they perceived the role of collaboration in professional learning. Reflective of collaborative learning theory (John-Steiner, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), PSTs negotiated the challenges of finding adequate time for collaboration, compromising, and aligning work and communication styles. Despite mostly appreciating a scaffolded entry into teaching—each

PST indicated that peer placements were temporary scaffolding and that teaching is ultimately an individual act.

PSTs indicated that they had not previously experienced such sustained and intensive collaboration. Therefore, they were learning to collaborate as they were learning to teach. We firmly believe that preservice teacher preparation is the optimal time to develop skills of and favorable dispositions toward collaboration. However, to maximize the potential for peer placements to provide a more supportive and collaborative context in which to learn to teach, teacher educators need to understand where and why PSTs struggle in their collaborative relationships and assist them as they learn to collaborate professionally. To this end, when initiating peer placements (or other sustained collaborative endeavors), teacher educators must explicitly frame the salience of collaboration; understand, identify, and proactively respond to patterns of tension to be proactive; and foster the skills of collaboration. Without such intentionality, some of the time PSTs could spend wrestling with the complexities of teaching and learning would be diverted toward wrestling with the complexities of collaboration. For our colleagues who are implementing peer placements or seeking to support and develop their students' collaborative skills, we offer the following recommendations:

To begin, unpack the reasons for professional collaboration and peer placements. Explicate upon the changing landscape of teaching (moving from isolation to collaboration) as one way to redefine what is "real" in teaching and teacher education. Then, describe the benefits of and potential sources of tension in peer placements. In this manner, PSTs will have a shared understanding of *why* they are engaging in peer placements, and are, hopefully, better prepared to address tensions as or before they arise.

Prior to making placements, explicate that peer placements require intensive levels of collaboration and that successful collaborations entail finding ways to maintain ongoing communication. Brainstorm a range of methods to communicate from virtual to face-to-face, such as using Google Docs, texting, carpooling, or communicating via Skype. Have peers coordinate schedules and commit to common planning times. Then, provide consistent time in class for collaborative planning.

Throughout the term, coach and support peer collaboration. Glazer and Hannafin (2006) explain that teachers are often unaccustomed to collaborative learning and, therefore, need to develop an "awareness of how to be a social learner" (p. 190). Peer placements ask PSTs to work in ways they most likely have not. Furthermore, collaboration is not necessarily modeled in the field. To support PSTs, be explicit about the factors that foster collaboration, such as trust, parity, mutual accountability, and critical dialogue. Also, help PSTs develop their own norms for engagement to preemptively address potential sources of tension, such as differing work and communication styles. When necessary, be prepared to coach PSTs on the social skills needed to foster collaboration.

Finally, develop a protocol to use as formative and summative assessment of the quality of peer relationships. As City and colleagues (2009) state, "Part of having a professional practice is holding each other accountable" (p. 149). At the beginning of the term, provide a peer and self-assessment protocol to PSTs. We recommend a Likert scale to quickly reveal the quality of relationships; the degree of mutuality; and areas of strength, weakness, and real or potential sources of tension. Inform PSTs that the protocol will be administered on a formative basis to facilitate peer collaboration. Also consider using a summative protocol to determine if there was a lack of parity. We note that research does *not* indicate that imbalanced or failed pairings are common phenomena (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al. 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith,

2002); nevertheless, they *do* occur (Gardiner & Robinson, 2010). Additionally, throughout this study, PSTs registered a lack of parity as an expressed concern.

Research indicates that peer placements can provide a supportive, collaborative context in which to learn to teach (Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009, 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). While peer placements provide a structure for collaboration, the structure alone does not guarantee that successful collaboration will occur. As Wenger (1998) states, for professional collaboration to support learning, a context must be created in which the collaborative process is intentionally guided and fostered. Given that teachers typically have insufficient experiences to prepare them to be effective collaborators (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Putnam & Borko; Wenger, 1998), and the prevailing belief about teaching as an individual accomplishment (Britzman, 1991; City, Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Goodlad, 2004), it is imperative that we proactively design structures and embed processes to prepare PSTs to collaborate and support them in the complex work of collaboration. In this manner, not only can we provide a more supportive and collaborative context in which to learn to teach, but also prepare PSTs to be effective collaborators who are ready, willing, and able to transform educational practices and the culture of education.

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