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PEDAGOGY

Exploring the Use of Triad Student Teaching Placements in Physical Education

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Abstract

This study explored the use of triads (a mentor teacher and two student teachers) in physical education. Wenger's (1998) communities of practice provided the theoretical framework for this study. We used the constant comparative method to code the interviews (n = 33) and field notes of the 11 triads and their university supervisors. Two global themes, benefits and drawbacks, emerged from the data. Benefits consisted of three subthemes: quality feedback, support, and collaboration. Drawbacks consisted of four subthemes: unrealistic experience, laziness in preparation, lack of quality feedback, and personality mismatch. Recommendations include providing in-service training about how to optimize the triad experience, ongoing seminars specifically designed for triads, and a hybrid model of triad placement and traditional solo student teaching.

Within the traditions of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, Wenger (1998) observed that either formally or informally, teachers work and *learn* (increase in knowledge, expertise in application, and ability to navigate in the educational culture) within communities of practice (CoP). CoPs are "groups of people who share a concern,

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a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Wenger's view of social learning theory proposes that *learning* takes place through social participation characterized by active engagement in the professional communities (including preservice student teachers) surrounding their work as educators.

Traditional models of student teaching practices typically involve the placement of a single novice with an experienced mentor teacher. However, because of the ever-decreasing number of quality placements, teacher educators have begun to explore alternative models. For example, several researchers (see Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008) have examined the placing of two student teachers with one classroom mentor teacher. Wilkinson et al. (2014) subsequently explored triad relationships and member satisfaction with the paired placement student teacher model in physical education teacher education (PETE).

A CoP perspective may provide a useful theoretical lens for the examination of the paired student teaching model operating in a triad (Goodnough et al., 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2014) CoP.

Characteristics of Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) suggested that for learning to occur, CoPs operate on three key elements: (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. Interactions among these key elements ideally result in *learning* from which members develop *meaning* (once abstract ideas become more concrete, providing value, understanding, clarity) and *identities* (development of self-images and adoption of roles within the context of the CoP). However, the quality of learning and the appropriate adoption of identities, largely depends on (a) participant choice to contribute actively to the overall enterprise of the CoP by making creative use of their respective repertoire (Wenger, 1998).

Mutual Engagement

Mutual engagement is the meaning people negotiate with one another through shared experiences. It is sustained relations of engagement organized around the purpose of what they are there to do (Wenger, 1998). To participate in mutual engagement, it is critical

that teachers are viewed by other members of the CoP as active participants; otherwise, they can formally or informally be left out of the CoP.

Joint Enterprise

Joint enterprise is the process in which people are engaged *and* working toward a common goal. Although there may be much in common among the members of the CoP, it takes specific and consistent coordination of sustained effort for there to be a joint enterprise. Wenger (1998) made an important point that sustained interpersonal engagement can create its fair share of conflict and tension, challenge, and disagreement within a CoP. A joint enterprise is the result of negotiated mutual engagement reflected in shared repertoires, mutual accountability among its members, and complex conditions that shape the CoP. Joint enterprise may be viewed as a CoP response to an outside mandate (e.g., being placed in a paired student teaching placement triad) as the result of an ongoing process not necessarily defined by a specific event.

Shared Repertoire

A shared repertoire is the way in which a learning community does things (e.g., tools, routines, common professional language, and shared resources) that are a reflection of past mutual engagement. It is an ongoing, dynamic, and fluid outcome of negotiated meaning in which shared beliefs are not set in stone.

Collaborative Action-Based Research

Strategies intended to facilitate a successful experience in student teacher triads included three collaborative, action-research based ideas: (a) peer coaching, (b) coteaching, and (c) cogenerative dialoguing with the intent to facilitate the interaction of these three key elements that may produce learning and meaning.

Peer Coaching. Wynn and Kromrey (1999) described this teacher training method as pairs of teachers observing each other and providing feedback to help one another apply effective teaching strategies and proposing alternative solutions to identified instructional needs. The use of peer coaching has been found to be effective in both in-service teachers' and preservice teachers' growth in planning and organization, instruction, and classroom management

(Hasbrouck, 1997; Morgan et al., 1994; Pierce & Miller, 1994; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000).

Coteaching. Tobin and Roth (2005) proposed that preservice teachers are aided in becoming professionals through the support and involvement of cooperating teachers, supervisors, preservice teachers, and researchers via coteaching. More salient to this study, Goodnough et al. (2009) suggested the value in student teachers working collaboratively in pairs (planning, lesson implementation, reflection, debriefing; i.e., learning from one another through practice) but teaching individually (Roth, 2001).

Cogenerative Dialogue. Cogenerative dialoguing (i.e., all colearners meet to discuss specifics of lessons, general pedagogical approaches, or any other aspect of the teaching and learning process; Roth & Tobin, 2002; Tobin & Roth, 2005) is a strategy to examine the strengths and areas for improvement. This collaborative process within a group of professional educators allows for different perspectives to enhance the learning of all involved, not just the learning of the student teachers.

In PETE, Jenkins and Veal (2002) studied the development of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) with preservice teachers during peer coaching. Findings indicated that preservice teachers' growth in the teaching role resulted initially from interaction of two knowledge components (i.e., students and pedagogy) and later from three or more components (subject matter, environmental context, and general pedagogical knowledge).

Student Teaching in Triad Placements

In the student teaching experience, a CoP may develop when the triad placement model is utilized. Bullough et al. (2003) published one of the initial studies examining the use of the triad placement student teaching model as an alternative to the traditional model of one student teacher working with a cooperating teacher. Findings indicated that the use of triads provided the advantages of increased support, opportunity for ongoing conversation about teaching, and learning how to collaborate to improve practice (Bullough et al., 2003).

Similarly, Nokes et al. (2008) studied the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the triad model with secondary teacher education students. Findings indicated that student teachers participating in the

triads enjoyed a rich learning experience due to the dialogue, tensions, and reflections of being placed with a peer.

Goodnough et al. (2009) examined the benefits and challenges for student teachers and cooperating teachers who participate in a triad model. They also described the coteaching models that emerged during the experience. Findings indicated several strengths of the triad model as learning from each other, professional support, outcomes for K–12 students, comprehensive feedback about teaching and classroom practice, and preservice teacher confidence. Martin (1977), however, pointed out that mentoring is idiosyncratic and often unpredictable. Therefore, the present mentor teachers, although required to participate in the triad interactions, were encouraged to develop their own way of working with the student teachers to create a beneficial experience. Concerns and challenges included dependency, confusion with classroom management issues, loss of individuality, and competition between the preservice teachers (Martin, 1977).

The use of triad student teaching placements appears to have the potential to overlap nicely with Wenger's (1998) theory of CoP and its key elements, along with collaborative action-based strategies. There is limited published research on triad placements operating as CoPs within physical education. Therefore, this study explored the perceptions of student teachers in a triad placement in physical education and the extent to which the elements of a CoP are evident.

Method

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a private university in the Western United States with institutional review board approval. In the last semester of the PETE program at the university, student teachers were placed in a triad for a 14-week student teaching experience. Twenty-two PETE students were assigned as pairs in six high schools, five junior high schools, and one elementary school, in three school districts. The one exception was a pair that worked for 7 weeks at an elementary school and then for 7 weeks at a junior high school, thus having two mentor teachers and participating in two triads. Students were assigned into triads based on perceived common attributes, personalities, and values, as well as on the context of the schools in

which and teachers with whom they were placed. There were seven all-female triads and four all-male triads. Five university supervisors were assigned to oversee the student teaching triads based on personalities and experience. Because this is a cohort PETE program, the student teachers all knew one another and had previously taught in pairs.

Twelve mentor teachers participated in the study. All of the mentor teachers had a minimum of 3 years of experience as physical educators. All of the mentor teachers except two had served in the role of mentor in the past for this PETE program. All students and mentor teachers read and signed letters of informed consent to participate in this study.

Procedures

In a half-day orientation meeting held the day before the beginning of the semester, student teachers received the following instructions to be followed during the student teaching experience: (a) coplanning (b) individual teaching (alternately teaching a lesson while the partner observed), and (c) peer coaching. Of primacy to this study was whether individual teaching, coplanning, and peer coaching would exhibit the characteristics of a CoP for triad members.

Student teachers were required to plan lessons with their partner (Nokes et al., 2008), teach a lesson individually, followed by an evaluation session and peer-coaching (Goodnough et al., 2009; Roth & Tobin, 2005). The full triad was required to meet daily for cogenerative dialoguing (Roth & Tobin, 2005).

University supervisors observed their students teach at least every 2 weeks. While one student taught, the supervisor observed the lesson alongside the other student while engaging in evaluative dialogue. The same procedure was followed in the next lesson, when the students reversed roles. After both lessons, the supervisor met individually with each student and then with the triad to discuss their observations, including ways students could help each other in planning and evaluating each other's teaching, as well as giving suggestions for working effectively with each triad member. Supervisors took field notes of their observations during these experiences.

Twice monthly, student teachers met at the university for a 2-hr seminar conducted by a PETE faculty member serving as the student

teaching coordinator. In these sessions, they received information to help them with the student teaching experience and to help prepare them for teaching employment after graduation. The first 15 min of these seminars consisted of reflections and debriefing in which student teachers discussed their teaching successes and challenges. The remainder of the session focused on the following topics: (a) modifying unit plans they had created in teaching methods courses to make them more appropriate for their current K–12 students, (b) gathering assessment data for the unit plan, (c) creating a résumé, (d) uploading and evaluating film footage of their teaching to help improve teaching skills and then using digital video editing software to database desired competencies to fulfill a university assignment, (e) preparing an employment portfolio, (f) developing and practicing interviewing skills with a peer and receiving feedback from the student teaching coordinator, (g) participating in mock interviews with an administrator and physical education teacher from one of the local school districts, and (h) a self-assessment of their fitness levels.

Data Collection

Semistructured Interviews at the End of Student Teaching

Four researchers not involved with the students during their student teaching conducted individual 45-min interviews with the student teachers and mentor teachers. Questions from the protocols created by Nokes et al. (2008) were used for these interviews (e.g., "Describe the nature of your relationships in your triad"). Interviewers were given the same instructions on how to conduct the interviews to standardize their approach and minimize bias. Triad members were interviewed by the same individual. All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed.

Field Notes of School Visits

Two members of the research team, Todd Pennington and Carol Wilkinson, were university supervisors of the student teachers. During their visits (minimum of six) to the schools to observe the students' teaching, they took field notes of their observations regarding triad relationships.

Semistructured Interviews of the Interviewers

The interviewers, Erin Whiting, Melissa Newberry, Erika Feinauer, and Janet Losser, took field notes of their observations during the interviews with the student teachers and mentor teachers. They were in turn interviewed as a group by Pennington and Carol Wilkinson, for further insight into the nature of triad relationships and subsequent effects of those relationships. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

To identify the perceptions of the triad student teaching placement model of the participants and the possible relationship, if any, to the key elements of CoP, we utilized an inductive content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to analyze the qualitative data generated from the in-depth interview transcripts of the triads, university supervisors field notes, and the interview transcripts of the semistructured interviews of the interviewers.

We used the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which has been described as a process of categorizing (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), to compare and contrast each unit of information with all other units of information, as well as to unite those with similar meaning and to separate those with different meanings (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1980). These units of information were extrapolated from the raw data, consisting of a few words in a sentence to an extended paragraph. The categories that emerged containing similar units of information were cut and pasted into a computer file as well as printed out and placed on large poster boards for further analysis. As a result of this process, categories were established, and subsequently, the benefits and drawbacks of the triad experience, along with possible relationships to CoP, emerged from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking, or respondent validation (Creswell, 2007), corroborated the research findings with feedback gathered from the research participants during the interview process and after the conclusion of the study (via phone or email), increasing the credibility and validity of the study. For anonymity, we used pseudonyms for mentor teacher and student teacher names reported in the data. The

transcript data from the interviews and field notes were analyzed via inductive content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The use of a peer-debriefer was also a technique employed, establishing credibility and validity. Keven Prusak was not involved in the initial analysis and assumed the role of peer-debriefer to help clarify Pennington's and Wilkinson's interpretation of the data, explore possible biases, discuss research notes, and play the role of devil's advocate (Hanson & Newburg, 1992).

To increase credibility and manage researcher bias, we engaged in reflexivity: reflecting on our own points of view by keeping field notes and engaging in dialogue with peers (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). We also used triangulation strategies to ensure credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). First, we triangulated using various forms of data collection, including interviews and field notes, and asked student teachers and mentor teachers similar interview questions that had been used in a previous study (Nokes et al., 2008). Second, we triangulated by involving several researchers in data collection and analysis, which provided multiple perspectives and thus reduced the likelihood of data misinterpretation.

To give the study credibility, we performed an inquiry audit. For the inquiry audit to occur, Pennington, who was the researcher primarily responsible for data analysis, prepared and maintained an audit trail. This audit trail consisted of four categories: (a) gathering raw data, (b) data reduction and analysis products, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, and (d) process notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Amber Hanson and Liz Haslem, researchers who had no prior involvement in the study, performed the inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and independently assessed the findings.

Results

The raw data for this study consisted of the 33 participants' transcribed interviews (from the 11 triads), observation notes, field notes, and weekly planning logs. These data points ranged from a short phrase in a sentence to an extended paragraph. As a result of the inductive content analysis, two global themes, the benefits and drawbacks of paired student teaching, emerged from the data related to the overall triad experience in student teaching.

Benefits of the Triad Experience

The global theme describing the benefits of this triad experience was made up of three categories: (a) quality feedback, (b) support, and (c) collaboration. This section describes the categories that make up the global theme of benefits.

Quality Feedback

Student teachers frequently described the benefits of having another student teacher as a partner observing and receiving immediate feedback about their lesson. Rebecca, a student teacher, described her experience:

> Partner feedback was actually very helpful. Because when you're just teaching by yourself, who knows if you're doing the right thing? And when we talked with each other they have this whole new opinion that you didn't even think of. They see it from a different point of view. So that was really, really helpful to talk it over. And even just watching each other's lessons, you can tell, "Oh theirs went better than mine because they did this," and then I change it for my next class just instantly.

Support

Student teachers said that having a partner, or sharing the experience, seemed to reduce their stress, to reduce their feelings of being overwhelmed, or to reduce their feeling of being alone. Jason, a student teacher, put it this way:

> Going into the student teaching situation, teaching, was a lot more comfortable because I knew there was someone in the exact same boat as me and because we knew each other from the same program we had similar styles, it made it a lot less stressful.

Collaboration

Student teaching partners were encouraged to plan lessons together and include their mentor teacher in this collaborative planning process. A benefit from this process was highlighted when mentor teachers said they felt able to learn new ideas, activities, and

creative ways to teach content. One of the more experienced mentor teachers, Kent, talked about this notion:

> I really liked having two student teachers . . . One of the things I've appreciated about this university program is that they bring fresh ideas. I've been out teaching a long time, I went to the same program but it's changed dramatically since. The kids are so much better prepared now than when I went through; that is, the biggest benefit is we collaborate and create new fun ideas . . . it just keeps me fresh.

Not only the mentor teachers benefited from the collaborative process regarding planning innovative quality lessons, but also the student teachers. Additionally, they experienced the emotional benefit of collaboration. A majority of triads mentioned that this collaborative process brought synergy to the group and that synergy in turn translated into greater enthusiasm in their teaching.

Drawbacks of the Triad Experience

The global theme describing the drawbacks of this triad experience was made up of four categories: (a) unrealistic experience, (b) laziness in preparation, (c) lack of quality feedback, and (d) personality mismatch. This section describes the categories that make up the global theme of drawbacks.

Unrealistic Experience

Several of the triads reported that the experience of rotating teachers every other class period and having a partner to help set up and take down equipment was not very realistic in preparing them for their first year of teaching alone. Bridget, a student teacher, reflected on this idea:

> When you've got two student teachers things usually just worked out, but in real life you aren't going to have that extra person always helping you . . . because we collaborated so much we didn't get a lot of planning and organization on our own, which we didn't necessarily get that experience of doing.

Laziness in Preparation

In some triads, it appeared that an alternating teaching schedule led to a few student teachers procrastinating in their planning because they knew they had plenty of time to prepare. This was clear in comments by Wes, who described his experience:

> I think having a student teaching partner could be bad because you get in the habit of having too much time . . . sometimes you don't think about prepping a day in advance. You say, "Oh well [my teaching partner] has first period so I can prep for second period during first period." This is something you probably have as a teacher. So I can see that becoming a bad habit.

In two of the triads, another challenge surfaced regarding laziness in preparation. One of the student teaching partners began to rely on what they perceived was a stronger partner when it came to planning and therefore did not carry equal load in the collaborative planning process. This led to frustration and discontent in the triad.

Lack of Quality Feedback

One challenge of the alternating teaching schedule was that student teachers had too much time to observe and became bored. As a result, several triads reported that as the semester wore on both their partner and mentor teacher provided less and less feedback when they taught. Danielle, a student teacher, described this lack of feedback in her triad:

> After about a week and a half of teaching [my mentor teacher] stopped coming into observe and spent time in her office working on other responsibilities. She's the head basketball coach, was working on organizing a school 5K run, or was in the teachers' lounge working on other things . . . the way paired student teaching was originally explained to me was there was supposed to be constant collaboration with our partner and when we turn in lesson plans to sit down and say, what are you doing, what am I doing, and observe each other . . . My partner and I are not that way . . . it was really stressful for us, so we just stopped doing it . . . we just worked on grading and other things while the other one taught.

Personality Mismatch

There appeared to be a fairly cohesive working relationship among the student teachers and their mentor in all but a couple of the triads. These are described as personality mismatches, where either the two student teachers did not mesh well or they did not get along with their mentor. The triads that experienced these dynamics reported significant stress and a lack of support. Kate, a student teacher, put it this way:

> I feel like I get along with people pretty good in general, but I think that is why this is the hardest thing because both my mentor teacher and student teaching partner are like perfectionist to a "T." I'm kind of a laid-back person, so sometimes the little tiny details are really huge to them. And [since I am a laid-back person] my mentor teacher has a tendency to tell me I'm boring. I'm not a boring person . . . I had a hard time staying positive, thinking, UGH, if I could just do this my way . . . it's just been a frustrating environment. If I don't do it like [my mentor teacher] wants, then my student teaching partner gives me totally different feedback.

Similar feelings of frustration caused by personality mismatch also surfaced in the case of several triads where one of the student teachers was a much stronger teacher than their partner. These personality mismatches resulted in some degree of dysfunction in the form of cessation of collaborative planning, minimizing of interactions with each other or the mentor teacher, seeking isolation, and determination to just "teach in their own way."

Discussion

This study explored participant perceptions of the triad student teaching placement model with respect to the tenets of a CoP. Wenger (1998) suggested that teachers in a CoP develop personal meaning and identities depending on their varied engagement in the key elements and the interaction of these elements that make up a CoP. These key elements are (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. The results of this study indicate the benefits and drawbacks that triads experienced through a semester of student teaching. The discussion now focuses on how the benefits and drawbacks relate to Wenger's CoP and the pertinent literature.

Wenger (1998) suggested that mutual engagement is the meaning people negotiate with one another through shared experiences. Student teachers who felt supported in their triad experienced significantly reduced anxiety levels through the process of mutual engagement. This supports the findings of Bullough et al. (2003), who reported that increased support is one of the advantages of the triad student teaching model. Morgan et al. (1994) and Pierce and Miller (1994) also reported student teachers and preservice teachers experience a decrease in feelings of loneliness as a result of using peer coaching and coteaching, which were both implemented in this study.

There was certainly a continuum of the degree to which student teachers felt support, or the lack of, in their triad. Those who experienced feeling a lack of support from their mentor teacher and/or partner seemed to connect such experiences to the categories of lack of quality feedback and laziness in preparation. Student teachers not receiving enough quality feedback from their mentor teacher and/or their partner or feeling as though their partner was lazy and allowed them to do a majority of the planning and preparation led to a lack of mutual engagement, a key element in CoP. This finding is inconsistent with those in other studies on the use of triads in student teaching that reported student teachers experiencing a great deal of emotional support through working with a partner and mentor who they felt was desiring their ongoing success (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nokes et al., 2008). This notion of triads feeling supported leads to the key element of a joint enterprise within CoP.

Joint enterprise is a process in which teachers are in engaged and working toward common goals. It is the result of an ongoing process, not an event that is defined. Collaboration was the last category to emerge from the data as one of the benefits of a positive triad experience. Those triads who collaborated through lesson planning benefited from joint enterprise that produced new and creative ideas for both the student teaching partners and their mentors. Mentor teachers in the triads that created a joint enterprise reported a major benefit of learning fresh, creative, and innovative ideas. This supports one of the significant findings of Bullough et al. (2002), who found that triad models may revitalize mentor teachers who have lost some creativity through a lack of professional collaboration. Learning how

to collaborate to improve practice was also a significant finding of Bullough et al. (2003) and Nokes et al. (2008) in their studies of triads. The use of peer coaching in this study of triads further substantiates the value of such a strategy reported by Wynn and Kromrey (2000) to enhance preservice students' growth.

On the other hand, triads that experienced the drawback of having a personality mismatch may not have benefited from the key element of joint enterprise. In this study, two triads appeared to suffer from a significant personality mismatch. However, this does not necessarily mean that the triads did not benefit from the key element of joint enterprise unless they stopped observing and providing feedback, planning, and holding the daily triad evaluation meeting. Nokes et al. (2008) reported that without exception triads in their study experienced tension related to personalities, teaching philosophies, and discipline strategies. They further suggested that one of the keys to working through such periods of tension in a triad is dialogue between the student teachers. Working through tension and wrestling with difficult issues is all a part of triads learning to collaborate (Bransford et al., 2000; Mezirow, 2000).

One of the most commonly mentioned drawbacks was that the triad experience was unrealistic. Because of the alternating periods of teaching by the student teaching partners, many triads found they had a lot of time when they were not teaching, which led to boredom that translated into less mutual engagement, lack of support, and limited joint enterprise by the end of the experience. They felt less engaged because they wanted to spend more time teaching and less time in planning, observation, and reflection. Bullough et al. (2003) and Nokes et al. (2008) reported similar findings in their studies of triads and suggested it is a serious issue that the triad model may not address. Although the student teaching paired placement model may not be entirely realistic, it does allow for the development of a shared repertoire.

The key element of a shared repertoire is the way in which a learning community does things (e.g., tools, routines, common professional language). The category of quality feedback from peer to peer on each other's teaching and at least one formal evaluation each day with the mentor teacher produced a shared language, ideas to improve their teaching, and new ideas for the mentor teacher. This key element was evident in the triads that reported quality feedback

as one benefit of the experience. These findings provide additional evidence to Bullough et al.'s (2003) finding that an advantage to the triad student teaching placement concept is ongoing conversation about teaching and Nokes et al.'s (2008) finding that ongoing dialogue and quality reflections grow out of the triad experience. This finding specifically supports the action research strategy of implementing cogenerative dialogue as a part of the student teaching triad placement model reported by Roth and Tobin (2002) and Tobin and Roth (2005) as a part of coteaching.

However, in those triads that did not seem to develop much of a shared repertoire, there were concerns with the lack of quality feedback from their mentor teacher and there was a sense of competition with their student teaching partner, which thus compromised the value of their partner's feedback. Goodnough et al. (2009) reported competition as a limiting factor of the triad placement model. The finding in this study that student teachers lack quality feedback is consistent with the findings in both Bullough et al. (2002) and Bullough et al. (2003), who reported that student teachers in a triad situation desire more quality feedback from their mentor beyond the mechanics of planning together for the next day's lesson.

In conclusion, it appears that those triads that reported more of an overall positive relationship among the three members making up their CoP experienced greater meaning and stronger identities as teachers. On the other hand, those triads that reported a much less satisfying experience did not experience the same positive feelings in regard to enhanced meaning and strengthened teacher identities. The findings from this study indicate that triad placement of student teachers is certainly not perfect but that the benefits overall seem to outweigh the cited drawbacks. However, the findings from this study may lead to possible enhancements that minimize the cited drawbacks of the triad placement model.

The findings of this study have implications for university faculty who are engaged in teacher education, and the placement of student teachers, and possibly for future mentor teachers who are asked to participate in a triad student teaching experience. We make three recommendations.

First, we recommend a hybrid triad student teaching model based on the one implemented in this study. We recommend that student teachers spend the first half (7 weeks) of their student

teaching experience in a triad situation, benefiting from the reduced stress and workload while getting their feet wet teaching. This would be followed in the second half of the semester by a single placement situation, allowing them a more realistic experience as they teach a full day. This concept of balancing autonomy along with learning to collaborate successfully through such an experience is supported by Bullough et al. (2003) in their findings of the triad model.

Second, we highly recommend that teacher education faculty develop in-service training for mentor teachers and preservice teachers who are going to be in a triad experience. This in-service training would be held prior to the beginning of the student teaching experience. The in-service environment would allow triad members and university supervisors to discuss specific expectations regarding observation time, feedback quality and frequency, strategies for working through periods of tension, and in-school application of the key elements of a CoP.

Last, we recommend teacher education faculty and student teaching supervisors develop and participate in student teaching seminars that are ongoing over the course of the student teaching experience. The content of these seminars over the course of the semester would build on the expectations and topics discussed during the initial in-service training prior to the semester. We recommend a balance with some seminars for mentor teachers, some for student teachers, and some the entire triad. The use of such ongoing seminars could minimize the drawbacks identified in this study and therefore provide a rich professional experience for all members of the triads.

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