

## The Triad Experience: Benefits and Drawbacks of the Paired Placement of Student Teachers in Physical Education

**Authors :** Todd Pennington, Carol Wilkinson, Keven Prusak

**Abstract :** Traditional models of student teaching practices typically involve the placement of a student teacher with an experienced mentor teacher. However, due to the ever-decreasing number of quality placements, an alternative triad approach is the paired placement of student teachers with one mentor teacher in a community of practice. This study examined the paired-placement of student teachers in physical education to determine the benefits and drawbacks after a 14-week student teaching experience. PETE students (N = 22) at a university in the United States were assigned to work in a triad with a student teaching partner and a mentor teacher, making up eleven triads for the semester. The one exception was a pair that worked for seven weeks at an elementary school and then for seven weeks at a junior high school, thus having two mentor teachers and participating in two triads. A total of 12 mentor teachers participated in the study. All student teachers and mentor teachers volunteered and agreed to participate. The student teaching experience was structured so that students engaged in: (a) individual teaching (one teaching the lesson with the other observing), (b) co-planning, and (c) peer coaching. All students and mentor teachers were interviewed at the conclusion of the experience. Using interview data, field notes, and email response data, the qualitative data was analyzed using the constant comparative method. The benefits of the paired placement experience emerged into three categories (a) quality feedback, (b) support, and (c) collaboration. The drawbacks emerged into four categories (a) unrealistic experience, (b) laziness in preparation, (c) lack of quality feedback, and (d) personality mismatch. Recommendations include: providing in-service training prior to student teaching to optimize the triad experience, ongoing seminars throughout the experience specifically designed for triads, and a hybrid model of paired placement for the first half of student teaching followed by solo student teaching for the second half of the experience.

**Keywords :** community of practice, paired placement, physical education, student teaching

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