

Paired ITE teaching placements: Implications for partnership development

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This paper describes outcomes from a project designed to maximise the potential of paired placements for secondary mathematics ITE students¹. We explore the development of models for effective pairings and provide the rationale for these models. Evidence is offered from interview data from paired students, analysed against Maslow's hierarchy of needs, from one of the institutions and from evaluations from paired students from the other institution. Practical implications of managing paired placements are identified and discussed.

Keywords: pre-service teacher training, paired placements, team teaching, shared classes, collaboration, driver/navigator model

Background

In 2007, the Teacher Training Agency (now the Teacher Development Agency, TDA) began a project to develop and improve approaches to multiple placements in secondary mathematics and science (Menendez and Oulton 2007). University College Plymouth and the University of Southampton were involved in both the 2007 and 2008 phases. Prior to our involvement in this project we had each placed some of our students in pairs within our respective partnership schools. Many of these pairings were effectively two single placements, with two separate teaching timetables, rather than a collaborative working relationship. Inevitably, these pairings impacted on the students' learning experiences, though this aspect was not explicitly developed, at the time, within our programmes. The Multiple Placements Project (MPP) offered us the opportunity to evaluate, more systematically, the impact of pairings on student development and their learning experiences.

Smith's (2004) work on models of pre-service teaching placements and the work of Sorensen *et al* (2002), Sorensen (2004) and Sorensen *et al* (2006) which identified the potential benefits arising from students' paired working were influential in the initial development of paired placements within our school partnerships. Smith's (*ibid*) model of placement emphasises that both students should contribute to paired lessons, regardless of which student is leading the class at the time. He uses the analogy of riding a tandem bicycle to illustrate this way of working. The *riders* may alternate and share the responsibility for *steering* at different times, but both must *pedal* together all of the time in order to make good progress. Sorensen (2004) considered the impact of paired placements and argued that well-managed pairings conferred benefits to the students, the pupils they teach, the colleagues they work with, and the schools which host the placements. In our study, we sought to examine these claims in relation to our respective partnerships.

¹ Throughout, we use the term 'student' for a pre-service teacher undertaking a one-year secondary mathematics Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme, and the term 'pupil' for the 11-18 year-olds in lessons taught by these pre-service teachers.

In the early stages of the Multiple Placement Project, the partnership schools with each of our institutions experimented with models of paired work with classes. Amongst the approaches used were:

- team teaching;
- alternating the lead over a series of lessons or a topic;
- designating one of the students as the lead teacher and the other as the teaching assistant for all lessons with a particular class;
- alternating the roles of lead teacher and teaching assistant, lesson by lesson;
- solo teaching parallel classes in a year group to enable joint planning;
- solo teaching widely differently-attaining classes of pupils of the same age, then swapping classes half-way through the placement, requiring students to exchange significant levels of information about teaching, learning and assessment of each of these classes.

The study

Data was collected from classroom observations and both formal and informal evaluations of students' experiences of paired placements at University College Plymouth and from semi-structured interviews with students at the University of Southampton about their experiences of paired placements. Interviews were also undertaken with University of Southampton mathematics mentors of these paired trainees.

An interpretive analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2003) of the qualitative evaluation data and observations was undertaken at University College Plymouth. Similarly, transcribed interview data at the University of Southampton were analysed interpretively using Maslow's (1970) model of a hierarchy of needs. This model structures human needs in three tiers: physiological and emotional, intellectual and aesthetic, and meta-cognitive self-realisation and transcendence.

Maslow associated these needs with both the personal and professional lives of individuals. In the analysis described here, only the professional aspects are reported, for ethical reasons. At the lowest tier (physiological and emotional), Maslow considered professional aspects to be related to the sense of security and to the individual's need to be acknowledged. At the second tier, students' professional needs are more evident in the need for knowledge and understanding, an essential factor for the development of students' teaching skills.

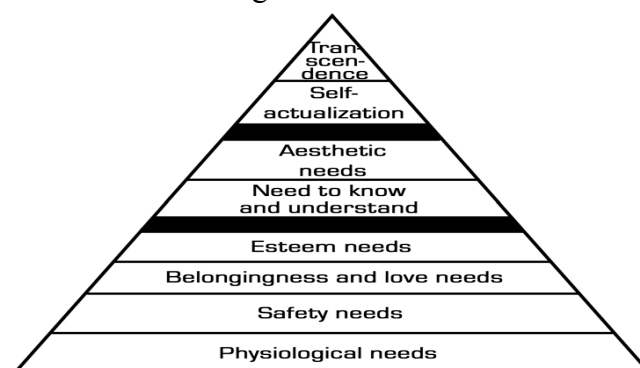


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
(From: Ventegodt, S, J. Merrick & N. Andersen 2003)

Also at level two, aesthetic needs in using knowledge and creative talents in productive endeavour relate directly to the work of teaching. For the highest tier,

abstraction of the previous needs to understand the self sufficiently to recognise the contribution that the individual is able to play in the immediate, and wider, community, lends itself to students' understanding of the quality of self-reflection required to develop effectively as teachers.

Findings

During the first phase of the MPP (2007), a strong consensus emerged within the University College Plymouth partnership for working with the same designated student lead and student support teacher for all lessons with a particular class. By the time the project moved into its second phase (2008), common practices in allocating classes to students had emerged across the partnership. This led to the development of the *driver-navigator* model, discussed later, to explain the partnership's approach to collaborative work. In contrast, the University of Southampton partnership reflected a lack of consensus about a particular model of practice. Ways of working evolved around the particular personalities of the students involved in the pairing. Whilst the *driver-navigator* model was evident in a few schools, and the alternation of these roles lesson-by-lesson in other schools, some of the pairings opted to develop a shared leadership role in which both students had equal responsibility for *steering* the lesson, though the timing of this was sometimes allocated sequentially between the students.

From classroom observations, we found that, in classes where the lead alternated between the two students, whether over a series of lessons or lesson-by-lesson, pupils tended to defer to the student they perceived to be the stronger, rather than the student who was leading the lesson at a particular time. This feature was less evident in classrooms where students shared the lead.

We now turn to address three general areas related to partnership models of paired placements: compatibility of the paired partners, the balance of paired and solo teaching, and mentor support.

Compatibility of paired students

Evaluations from University College Plymouth students, both formal and informal, identified compatibility of the paired partners as the most important factor in the success of a pairing. This finding was echoed in the interview data at the University of Southampton and was unrelated to the strength of each student as a potential teacher. Indeed, a strong student reflected on her paired experience with a weaker student (who subsequently withdrew from the programme), indicating that the pairing had forced her to focus her reflective practice more efficiently. She believed that it was this process which enabled her to complete the programme with the highest grading against the Standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (TDA 2008).

In assigning pairings to partnership schools, we rejected the argument that, since pre-service teachers are required to work collaboratively with colleagues under the new QTS Standards, careful matching of pairings is only an important consideration where there is a significant lack of empathy. We believed that students often feel particularly vulnerable on teaching placements, and fundamentally more vulnerable than established teachers. The interviews confirmed this assertion, suggesting that security, belongingness and esteem were essential elements for students to begin to establish themselves as developing teachers. One student said that one of the benefits of experiencing a paired placement was having "someone to share problems in a very similar situation because experienced teachers are very different".

There was unanimous agreement amongst the students that being with someone experiencing the same situations had a positive effect on their engagement with teaching. The term “in the same boat” recurred throughout the interviews, in reference to shared experiences.

One of the factors the University of Southampton takes into account, when assigning pairings, is the logistics of travelling to schools. We may place two compatible students together, one of whom is able to transport the other to the school. Such pairings reported the benefits of being able to overcome nerves on the journey to school and ‘off-load’ about disappointments/issues/frustrations on the journey home. They asserted that this enabled them to concentrate more efficiently on planning for the next day (while sharing the financial burden of travelling to placements), thus supporting Maslow’s claim that unless the lower level human needs of security and belongingness are met, humans will be unable to develop their potential as effectively. Some of the pairings indicated that the professional relationship established in an early pairing was maintained throughout the duration of the programme, even when in solo teaching placements. For these students, the importance of belongingness provided a fundamental basis upon which to develop as teachers. We have anecdotal evidence of these supportive professional relationships extending into the early years of teaching.

In comparison with solo placements, other benefits of paired placements identified by students, at Maslow’s level one, included being able to adapt to a new environment more easily, and quickly establishing professional relationships with experienced teachers, both within the mathematics department and in the wider school. Organisation, record-keeping and necessary paperwork were also acknowledged, by both students and mathematics mentors, as being more efficient because of the pairing of students. Working closely together often required students to ‘think on their feet’, thus developing higher level teaching skills, representing needs at Maslow’s level two.

Balance of paired and solo teaching

Our partnerships took the view that, for students to derive the most benefit from a pairing, they should feel able to operate as *critical friends*, confident to trust and confide in each other in a positive and receptive manner. Students’ reflections on their experiences of paired placements, recorded in interviews, suggest that these students develop a mutually respectful relationship which supports their security needs at Maslow’s level one. One student reported her experience of working in a shared lead situation in the classroom: “Sometimes in the classroom, you think ‘Oh, what am I going to say now?’ and the other one steps in and automatically takes over.”

It is in the role of *critical friends* that Maslow’s level two needs are most evident. Students described situations in which their developing knowledge of each other’s strengths and weaknesses enabled each to understand better what they needed to do in order to improve their own skills as a teacher. These processes impinge on Maslow’s level three needs because students are beginning to reflect on knowledge and understanding in order to know themselves better.

Being able to mutually plan lessons and closely observe each other in the implementation of these plans in the classroom, allowed students to distinguish benchmark progress points towards the QTS Standards. Maslow’s level two needs were further demonstrated in their accounts of how their exchanges of information about classes reflected what each of the students needed, rather than what experienced

teachers offered them. Here, we reiterate what we asserted earlier, that students feel vulnerable on teaching placements, and this mutual level of communication supports their confidence in being able to access the necessary information at appropriate times in their development of teaching skills.

Alongside the idea of students working as *critical friends*, our partnerships also reflected a strong view that the students should have a distinctive element of *solo* teaching, in preparation for the solo teaching that will be expected of them in their first year of teaching. Both our partnership guidance recommends that every student should have *sole* responsibility for at one least class in every placement and offers several different models of allocation of classes.

Mentor support

To address concerns about extra load, in terms of time and energy, being placed on mathematics mentors, the University College Plymouth partnership suggests a ‘sandwich’ model for joint tutorials with students:

Student A 10 mins	Students A & B 40 minutes	Student B 10 mins
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The partnership developed guidance for mentors and students including an outline of the *driver-navigator* model, a development of Smith’s (*ibid*) tandem bicycle model, emphasising the importance of both partners taking active and collaborative responsibility for the lesson. Important elements of paired work are also identified as:

- Shared responsibility for planning for the class;
- Clearly defined roles for each of the paired partners;
- Collaborative planning as part of the planning and evaluation cycle (including roles and responsibilities in feeding back);
- Development of assessment approaches (the navigator has a major role in assessment of learning);
- Agreed peer-evaluation mechanisms.

Support for mathematics mentors who are supervising paired placements within the University of Southampton partnership is generated through mutual mentor support structures embedded in formal mentor training meetings. This allows for the proliferation of models of working identified earlier.

Summary

During the course of the MPP our experiences have highlighted several practical considerations affecting the management of paired placements. The first is the careful construction of the pairings, based on mutual empathy, trust and confidence. We recognise a continuum of collaborative practice across different pairings, ranging from mutually supportive, but essentially ‘solo’, placements, to the *driver-navigator* partnership model, and including situations where the classroom lead is mutually shared. A strategic outcome of the MPP is the identification of the need for students to have specific preparation, training and support in developing their paired practice. Given the focus on preparing students to be the sole teacher of a class, it is unwise to assume that students will adapt these solo teaching approaches for their paired work without targeted support. Both our institutions are actively addressing this need.

In support of Sorensen's (2004) claims, our evidence from evaluations and interviews also suggests that collaborative placements offer substantial benefits for pupils, students and schools. Students (and mathematics mentors) indicated that a student pair provides pupils with more individual attention; there is more expertise in the classroom for pupils to draw upon, and classroom management is improved. Students benefit from mutual support, both emotional and professionally developmental. Classroom observations of students indicate that risk-taking is increased, both in the paired situation and solo placement, if this is subsequent to the pairing. Students reported in interviews that the pairing offered them the security to step out of the 'known' and explore situations that they might not have explored on their own. We argue that this allows them to engage with needs at Maslow's level three, thus enabling them to access knowledge about themselves that is necessary for greater developmental progress as teachers.

In both the evaluation evidence and interview evidence, students supported this claim, indicating that the emphasis on the collaborative practice and the degree of reflection required of them had benefits for their individual professional development. Both mathematics mentors and professional (cross-subject whole school) mentors similarly reported benefits to the mathematics department and the school as a whole. These benefits were represented by the development of stronger collaborative working relationships amongst experienced teachers in mathematics departments, more sharing of information about teaching styles between experienced teachers, and allowing schools to effectively manage out-of-school visits which may not have previously been possible.

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