

# **Promoting paired placements in initial teacher education.**

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## **Abstract**

The use of paired placements and collaborative practice is promoted by many university-school partnerships that train teachers in England. This article reviews the recent literature on the subject and then focuses on some small scale research within initial teacher education in one large university-school partnership. That partnership works with over 250 schools training teachers in secondary schools where pupils are aged 11-18. During 2004-6, trainees, school mentors and university tutors from a range of subjects were surveyed and interviewed to gain an understanding of how paired placements work in practice. Then the research focused on one subject, geography, for an in depth study and in order to develop a model of best practice. Key benefits and issues have been identified from the research findings and guidance on how paired placements can be made to work more effectively has been developed.

Though there are undoubted benefits to pupils, trainees, schools and universities it is clear that current practice is not sufficiently understood or developed by all stakeholders. The findings indicate that university partnership management teams must take a greater role in raising the quality of this collaborative work but where it is well understood and the trainees are supported to make use of their situation, then paired placements have a great deal to offer initial teacher education.

## **Keywords**

Paired placements – collaboration – initial teacher education – secondary PGCE

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## **Introduction**

Since a change in government policy (DfE 1992) initial teacher education in England has emphasised school-based practice. In order to qualify to teach in English schools the government requires trainees to be assessed against a set of statements, known as Standards for Qualified Teacher Status. (Training and Development Agency for Schools website 2006) These Standards, which are about to be updated in 2006, state what a teacher must know, understand and be able to do. The majority of English secondary teachers, i.e. those teaching pupils aged 11-18, train to teach through a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course and they spend two thirds of their time, i.e. 120 days, in schools. That time is usually split between two different schools so that a contrasting experience is gained. A more theoretical and critical perspective is promoted during university-based sessions; a pattern of teacher education which is similar to that adopted by most other countries.

Most trainees, including those training to teach geography, are placed alone within a school department, though often there will be additional trainees in other subject departments from the same or other higher education institutions (HEIs). The tradition of placing trainees singly within a department has historically stemmed from the idea that in order to become effective teachers at the end of their course, trainees need to be alone in a class for a significant amount of time, as will be the case when they take up their first teaching post. Some schools limit their overall numbers of trainee teachers in a year because they fear that pupils taught by too many trainee teachers will reduce pupils' examination performance. Some school mentors are concerned that two trainees would double their workload and that they would not be able to support the trainees adequately.

This article explores the practice of placing two trainees in what I will refer to as a 'paired placement'. The use of the term 'paired placements' within this article includes an experience where trainees work together 'in the same classroom, receiving joint mentoring, whilst sharing the timetable and collaborating on planning, teaching and assessing pupils' work' (Carter 2004). The first part of this paper draws on the literature associated with collaborative practice and paired placements, particularly in England and identifies current practice and the more theoretical background underpinning this work. The next section outlines the research methodology and identifies benefits and issues from the research outcomes. Finally a summary of the findings and the resulting guidance which is now issued to university tutors, school mentors and trainees is described.

## **The use of paired placements in England**

In recent years there has been a trend for English higher education institutions to place pairs of trainees together within one school department and a number of articles and reports have appeared which document specific schemes: (Sorensen et al 2004, Fursland 2004, Clemitshaw 2004 and Murphy and Gompertz 2004, Sorensen 2004 and Wynn and Kromery 1999 and Bullough et al 2003.) One of the earliest schemes in England was the Oxford Internship, based at Oxford University. (Benton, 1990). A systematic review funded by the Teacher Training Agency, (TTA) the government body responsible for ensuring sufficient qualified teachers are trained, concluded that the skills developed through pairing trainees were; 'organisation and management, compromise, communication, problem-solving, sharing tasks and teamwork' although it acknowledged greater research in this area was needed before firm conclusions could be made. (EPPI 2004). To encourage capacity building the Teacher Training Agency (2004-5) funded a working group to develop case studies of paired placements within London and to attempt to establish a protocol of working with paired placements which London schools might adopt. A number of small, more innovative schemes have been piloted during the last few years. For example, at the Institute of Education, University of London, one school department hosted 5

history trainees and at St. Martin's College, Lancaster some trainees in modern foreign languages are placed in groups of four. (Sears 2004)

From the literature there are good professional and educational reasons why paired placements should be promoted but there are two additional reasons. There is a need to increase capacity; to provide more high quality training places for trainees and this can be achieved through doubling the number of trainees in good departments. Another reason, and a more cynical one perhaps, is economic; to reduce high cost bureaucracy in under funded courses and reduce the cost of expensive 'academic time' tutors spend travelling between schools to supervise trainees.

## **The Theoretical Background**

One of the key arguments for trainees working collegially stems from Vygotsky's work with children but which is equally applicable here. His belief was that cooperation and interactions between learners forms the basis of *deep* learning. (Vygotsky 1987). Many teacher training courses in England ask their trainees to become 'reflective practitioners' (Schon 1983) and common sense suggests that this is likely to happen if trainees share and discuss their experience. Knowing about effective teaching and learning is more than simply observing classes, "having a go" at teaching and then reflecting on outcomes. It includes extensive dialogue; talking with, and listening to, colleagues.

Many English schools, realising the value of peers learning together, have started to change the continuing professional development of their teaching staff from off-site, day long, in-service training courses to peer-facilitated observation, sharing and learning. Mullen and Lick (1999) describe a 'culture of synergy' in effective schools while MacGilchrist et al (1997) use the term to 'share a culture of collaboration' and Fullen (1999) 'professional learning communities'. Le Cornu (2005) suggests that new communities have been established that 'promote professional dialogue, which aims to enable teachers to ultimately change practices and social relationships in classrooms and schools, so that learning outcomes are maximised for all learners'. These suggest that professional dialogue between teachers is important to teachers' learning and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that the more that this can be embedded during initial training, the more likely it is to continue into the future. My experience of more than 20 years in classrooms suggests that this professional dialogue and focus on pupil learning is not always demonstrated by experienced teachers. My role in overseeing mentoring across more than 500 school departments suggest that that many mentors find it impossible to create the time to do the job they are asked to do.

There have been a number of research studies which focused on the collaborative gains in the mentor-trainee relationship: Field and Philpott 2000 write from the English point of view, Gilles and Wilson 2004 from that of the USA while Hastings 2004 describes the Australian perspective.

## **Aims and context of the research**

The aim of this research was to provide evidence to inform management decisions on whether paired placements should be promoted and if they should, about what guidance should be given to trainees and mentors to facilitate best practice. Currently, because of a shortage of high quality school placement offers we have to place some trainees in challenging and less well supported schools. One solution is to develop strategies to concentrate training into fewer schools with higher quality training. Promoting paired placements could be one such strategy.

I therefore wished to investigate how pairs worked together and in particular to see if any support, challenge and learning was taking place that could not go on where there was only one trainee in a department. No such systematic research had been done within my institution. This paper documents one case study and from it makes suggestions to improve the paired placement process and trainee experience. The research is now forming the basis for the writing of support and guidance materials. The intended audiences are university tutors, school mentors and the trainees. It is also being used by a group of other London university providers of initial teacher education and will form part of their materials.

Initial questionnaire data from the whole course (2002-3) was supplemented by repeat questionnaire data and more focused data collected from semi-structured interviews on geography trainees only (2003-4 and 4-5). The focus on one subject only made it easier to have reliable data because the trainees and the school mentors have been trained by a small team of four university geography tutors. This minimised the variability of approach from different tutors.

In England over 85 per cent of new secondary teachers (for pupils aged 11-18) train through a university-linked, ten month course known as the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Each year over 800 new teachers train at the Institute of Education, University of London and over 75 of these are new geography teachers. The geography department is very successful as confirmed when Ofsted (the English inspectorate), awarded the geography PGCE course the highest possible grades in each inspected section. (Ofsted 2005).

A team of four experienced geography tutors work in partnership with around 75 schools each year and most schools request trainees year on year. The table below shows the numbers of geography trainees placed in pairs during the last three years and it can be seen that over that time period there has been a slow increase.

	<b>School Placement 1-Oct-Jan Geography</b>	<b>School placement 2 - Feb-May Geography</b>
<b>2001/2</b>	4 schools – 8 trainees	3 schools – 6 trainees
<b>2002/3</b>	8 schools – 16 trainees	4 schools – 8 trainees
<b>2003/4</b>	12 schools - 24 trainees	4 schools – 8 trainees
<b>2004/5</b>	16 schools – 32 trainees	10 schools – 20 trainees

Many London schools have a high turnover of teachers and not surprisingly there are a number of new geography mentors each year as existing mentors gain promotion, move schools or leave the teaching profession. These geography mentors are teachers, usually with at least three years' teaching experience. They support and challenge the trainees during their time in the school, have day to day supervision of the trainee's work and they meet with the trainee for around an hour a week for a more formal training session. Many London school geography departments are staffed by at least one Institute of Education-trained geography teacher who is very familiar with the Institute's programme and this helps to maintain consistency of mentoring and therefore a higher level of trainee experience.

## **Methodology**

The research began in 2002-3 and has continued for three years. After initially piloting questionnaires with a sample of 10 trainees, 76 trainees who had been in paired placements across a range of subjects completed questionnaires. The questionnaires contained a mixture of open and closed responses. To gain an immediate gut reaction to their paired placement, without being led by

targeted questions using specific vocabulary, trainees were initially asked to write down three statements that describe their experience of, and feelings about, the paired placement'. Their comments were collated and placed into categories.

The second questions required trainees to respond (agree/disagree/unsure) to a series of specific statements which aimed to provide more focus and reflection in their answers. Trainees were then asked open questions such as what advice they would give to other trainees who were being placed in a paired placement and what advice to mentors who would support the pairs of trainees. In the final, open ended questions I asked for comments on how their time-tables and lessons were arranged; that is, in lessons where both trainees were in the same classroom, who took the lead? and I asked them to clarify roles for each shared lesson.

In order to gain more reliable data I repeated the same questionnaire over time; with 35 geography trainees in the 2004-5 co-hort and 50 more geography trainees in 2005-6. After the initial year I found that though the questionnaires presented a statistical and factual overview I needed to follow up some of the observations that trainees were making. In year 2 (2004-5) I therefore conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 geography trainees and in year 3 (2005-6) with 7 geography trainees. The value of open discussions with the trainees enabled case studies to be built and a better understanding of any complexities in the relationship to be gained. No pairs of trainees were interviewed together so that if there were inter-personal tensions within the pairing the interviewees were not hampered by each other's presence. In addition, during 2004-5 I conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 geography school mentors and 3 geography tutors based at the Institute of Education.

### **The reliability, validity and robustness of the data.**

In 2002-3 questionnaires were given to all the trainees in paired placements. Responses were generally good with over a return of 82%. The questionnaire was relatively quick and easy to complete and completed responses could be mailed internally, handed to tutors or pushed under my office door. Each trainee in a pair completed the form individually. In both the questionnaires and all of the interviews I stressed that the reasons for conducting the research was to establish whether paired placements offered advantages over single placements and if so, how the partnership might develop them. My impression was that trainees saw this research as a sincere and real opportunity to make a difference and have a direct influence on the quality of the course. Certainly the response rate was good and all of the trainees, mentors and tutors that I asked, agreed to be interviewed. I therefore had some trainees who were very enthusiastic and others whose experience was not good and would not wish to have others go through the same experience. Mentors were selected for interview because of their experience, either with a pair that had worked effectively or ones which had not.

Reliability of the data was aided because the same questionnaire was repeated over the three years. Also, the focus on one subject limited the variability as to how school mentors had been trained or what resources had been given by university tutors. Questionnaire data were analysed and a content analysis made of the open parts of the questionnaires. An open-ended, initial question which gained an overview of the trainee's experience before they focused on specific aspects was; *'Write down three statements that describe your experience of, and feelings about, your paired placement. (Don't think too much here.... it's a gut reaction I'm after!)*' This was a question which did not easily lend itself to data analysis since the trainees wrote down a variety of comments but it served to gain a summary overview and it did provide a means of checking comparability and the reliability of the data in Tables 1 and 2. In order to report on these open ended responses the method described below was used.

From the 2002-3 pilot data of 10 questionnaires a number of statements were subjectively selected which encapsulated the writers' comments and provided categories into which other writers' comments could be included. This was method proved appropriate for the 2003-4 and 2004-5 surveys although three further statements had to be added. So in 2003-4 the statement '*Department not big enough for 2 trainees*' was added and in 2004-5 the statements '*Not treated as an individual*' and '*Mentor played one of us off against the other*' were added.

In summary then, the data described here was collected over three years, using the same questionnaire but including interviews in years two and three. Initial findings were reported at the International Geographical Union Conference, (King 2004). The data was seen as reliable because of the re-testing year on year and because several questions measured internal consistency by asking for similar information in different ways. For example an initial question asked for an immediate 'feeling' about the placement and subsequent questions checked this through a agree/disagree/unsure format.

## Findings

The trainees' responses within the questionnaires show a variety of experience. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the key findings from the questionnaires 2002-5, with a sample size of 161 questionnaires completed. Table 1 summarises and categorises the 'gut reactions' of trainees to their paired placement while Table 2 gives the responses of trainees to specific statements on a three point scale; agree/disagree/unsure.

Table 1: Summary of the responses to trainees' descriptions and feelings about the paired placement (2002-5). 161 trainee questionnaires were analysed and the comments classified as indicated below.

Positive comments	Numbers of trainee mentions	Negative comments	Numbers of trainee mentions
Worked well with other trainee/supportive/successful	76	Didn't work/Poor experience	11
Shared resources/subject knowledge	40	Less time from subject mentor	8
Shared problems/felt less alienated? Friendship	38	Daunted by other trainee being better	5
Sharing of views/expertise	32	Would have preferred a different BT	5
Learnt a lot from being in the other trainee's lessons	29	Team teaching didn't work	4
Good to compare how someone else deals with a situation/contrast styles	29	Department not big enough for 2 trainees.	4
Helped reflection/evaluation skills	6	Other trainee weak/had to carry other trainee	3
Motivated by other trainee	5	Mentor played one of us off against the other	1
Preferred it to being single	5	Not treated as an individual	1

Table 2 Key findings from the trainee questionnaire on paired placements 2002-5 ( Number of questionnaires returned and analysed = 161)

Statement	Agree %	Disagree %	Unsure %
I preferred being in a paired placement to being a single trainee.	84	8	8
We each gained by sharing resources	90	3	7
I felt the subject mentor was often comparing us	29	56	15
I learnt a lot from being in one (or more) of his/her lessons ( <i>this refers to the other pair of the placement</i> )	71	6	23
The weekly meetings were mostly held as a threesome	38	56	6
The subject mentor benefited from the paired placement <i>Add a reason here..</i>	35	21	44
I felt I gave more to the pairing than I got.	19	78	3
Being in a pair gave me more confidence	69	5	26
I worried before we began the placement that I would not be as effective a teacher as my pair	28	66	6

## Benefits

An endorsement of the paired placements is demonstrated through the 84% of trainees who said they preferred being in a pair than on their own. Trainees identified both social/emotional benefits (e.g. increased confidence, shared problems, felt less alienated) as well as professional benefits (e.g. shared resources and subject knowledge). 71% of trainees felt they had 'learnt a lot from being in lessons with another trainee'. Having another trainee with similar knowledge of the course and its procedures, assignments and deadlines was frequently an identified strength. *'We reminded each other of university deadlines and were able to check each other's work and make suggestions'*. Another frequently mentioned benefit was being able to share the highs and lows of the placement with a peer rather than a mentor or even another class teacher who would ultimately be the course assessor.

In the structured interviews I pressed trainees to focus on the professional conversations and collaboration they had experienced rather than social/emotional benefits which were clearly identified in the questionnaire data. On doing so several thoughtful views were put forward. For example, one trainee said *'I often thought I'd done a great lesson plan and then talked it through with X only to find she'd spot something that might become a problem and she'd make suggestions of how I could improve a particular bit.'* Another said *'we'd spend hours after school talking about how our lessons had gone and how we could have made them better'*. After-school discussions

about what had gone wrong (or even right!) in the day's lessons were clearly happening on a regular basis between the pairs.

Words such as 'share' and 'support' were most frequently used and resource-sharing was very common with 90% of respondents agreeing with the statement that they *'both benefited from sharing resources'*. One particularly interesting comment came from a trainee who had unusually been paired in both placements believed she gained more in the second placement as she said she was more able to ask for a specific focus from the other trainee in her classroom. *'I'm more interested in why a lesson or activity has gone right now than why it went wrong. She helps me talk it through.'*

84% of trainees said they'd prefer to be in a paired placement than on their own. An interesting comment came from one female trainee who when asked if she could identify three people from her university geography tutorial group that she would 'hate to be paired with'. She said she could and explained why but she then surprisingly commented *'but if it was a matter of being on my own or with one of them I'd still rather it was in a pair.'* Trainees often referred to supporting each other with specific issues and mentioned the value of working with someone whose style was very different. For example: *'I learnt a lot about managing discipline from my partner – it was really useful as she had a different approach to me'* and *'we used each other as a sounding board and her ideas were often ones I hadn't thought of'*.

The high turn over of teaching staff in London means many mentors each year are new and learning the mentoring role. Some mentors have little or no time allocated to the mentoring role. Trainees and mentors frequently identified that paired placements helped the trainees to overcome these constraints because of the additional peer support. Trainees commented that *'(the paired experience) was very supportive – someone else to share the highs and lows with that wasn't making judgements or going to write a (job) reference for me.'* In one extreme case where the geography mentor was seen as unapproachable, one of the trainees wrote that *'the support given by the other trainee was extremely valuable and she (the other trainee) encouraged me not to give up but to complete the course'*.

The degree and type of interactivity between trainees varied. Three pairs mentioned taking a video of each others' lesson. One mentor videoed a lesson while the other observed and asked the trainee who had taught the lesson to watch the video and write up a lesson observation report and they then compared notes on their evaluations. Another mentor asked one trainee to observe and write the lesson plan as the other trainee taught. The expected and the actual plans were then compared.

University tutors identified two major benefits of their paired placements. First and as could have been expected, they talked about peer support and challenge that the trainees gave each other but a second comment was frequently the benefit of visiting a school (to assess the trainee and quality assure the placement) for a longer period of time. One tutor calculated that *'if I have even three pairs in my tutor group, that's six trainees out of twenty, then it's three fewer schools to work with and travel to.'* Since university tutors often perceive the amount of time they spend 'on the road' as one of the less satisfying parts of their work and this may account for the convenience element included in this view.

## **Issues**

29% of the trainees were unsure or disagreed with the statement that they had learnt a lot from being in the other trainees lesson. In the semi-structured interviews it transpired that two reasons

for this was that they had not been in sufficient lessons as observers or teaching assistants and that when they had been in classrooms together they had team taught; something which brought another set of issues, as described later in this section.

Comparisons between the two trainees was identified as a key issue, especially where the pairing was perceived as less successful. Several trainees felt that the mentor had a favourite trainee within the pair. For example one female trainee said that the mentor *'liked the other geography trainee more than me...as did the rest of the department'* but surprisingly then cheerfully went on to describe an overall positive experience. When trainees were asked what advice they would give other trainees starting on a paired placement, a large number mentioned the importance of them not to be too competitive with each other. One trainee mentioned how important it was for trainees to be told by university tutors *'not to worry about their reputation and just get on with being themselves and teaching the way they want'*. School mentors mentioned the lack of compatibility of a pair and they frequently used the terms *'strong'* and *'weak'* during the interviews when referring to the trainees. Mentors seemed quick to make value judgments and to refer to these early in the interview. One reason for this may be their requirement to assess the trainees. My initial interview question asked trainees and mentors to give an overall comment on their experience of pairings. While trainees usually responded by identifying the benefits of pairings, mentors frequently did the reverse and focused on any problems. Overall perceptions of the experience by the mentor and trainees occasionally differed. One mentor commented that a strong trainee had to *'carry the weaker one'* but when I later discussed the same placement with the strong trainee, the trainee said *'I gave more to the relationship but I also learnt a lot from working with her'*.

Throughout the research one consistent issue has been the extent to which team teaching is undertaken and how well it is understood by all the participants. By team teaching I mean two teachers (or in this case, trainee teachers), working together in one class, carrying equal roles and leading on different episodes or activities. The issue is that with both trainees responsible for one class it is all too easy for neither to take ownership and for the lines of responsibility to be blurred. Experienced teachers who have already developed professional relationships find team teaching challenging so it is not surprising that the following comments were made by trainees. *'It was difficult because the class didn't know who was boss'* and *'neither of us wanted to be dominant so we never really did our best lessons'* and *'we didn't do too much team teaching as we weren't comfortable with it. It's confusing and difficult to know who's in charge'*. However one trainee commented that *'team teaching occurred in a biogeography unit for Advanced Level Students (aged 17-18) and it was really successful. We had more confidence because we'd planned together and could really concentrate on the work we were delivering'*. It may be that the lack of issues with behaviour and classroom management for pupils of that age meant that the trainees could focus on subject matter and lesson planning.

In spite of any mentor training received by the school mentors they often had fixed ideas about what a paired placement might or might not mean. Since most of us tend to continue with traditions under which we grow up, or in this case, under which we trained as teachers ourselves this may explain their reluctance to innovate through accepting two trainees. No mentor that I spoke with had experienced paired placements, as described in this paper, when they themselves trained. Some mentors felt a paired placement might be acceptable for the first school placement when trainees are at their early stages of learning the craft of the classroom but they were less enthusiastic for the second school placement. Many had fixed views that trainees needed to teach only solo lessons in the second placement on the basis that this makes them a better teacher by the following September. As one mentor expressed it, the trainee *'needed to be alone to make her mistakes and not be propped up by the extra pair of hands (from the other trainee)'*. However another view came from a one trainee who saw this as a traditional view which may be *'too set in old images of what it is to be a teacher'*. A few mentors had not realised the benefits of or did not choose to use

collaborative strategies and simply had two trainees working completely independently within their department.

It is possible that a department might take on two trainees to gain extra funding but only one department cited this as a main reason. In England almost all university-school partnerships offer to pay schools a sum of money which, for the Institute of Education is currently £575 for a 60 day placement for each trainee teacher. This helps pay for a teacher mentor's time and for resources such as paper and photocopying. The financial situation with regard to money from the university reaching the geography departments varied. One geography department with four trainees had secured £2500 for the year but saw none of the money, not even for additional photocopying. Another used the additional money for some extra equipment in the staff resources room. Examples of responses to the question 'Why do you have a paired placement?' included; '*because we were asked*', '*because we thought it would double the chances of us finding a good member of staff for next year*', '*because we think we have a lot to offer*' and '*because we wanted to try it out*'.

Two university tutors did not feel they gave sufficient guidance to schools and the response '*my own understanding about what works and doesn't work is just beginning to be established now*' shows that this work is still in its formative stages. Another tutor said her strategy had been to '*take a back seat and only intervene if issues or personality clashes arose*'.

## **Outcomes**

The outcomes from this research were used to establish best practice and produce guidance notes on how to make paired placements work effectively. From the findings of my research to date I have compiled Figure 1, a summary of advantages and issues for each of the stakeholders. These stakeholders include staff within the schools, subject mentors and university tutors as well as the trainees.

It was clear from these findings that university tutors need to have a shared vision of what constitutes best practice as well as the potential issues so that they are able to train their school mentors. These tutors are also responsible for assigning trainees into pairs and to appropriate schools so their role in minimising personality and ability clashes is crucial.

Figure 2 is guidance now issued to university tutors.

### **Figure 2 Guidance for University Tutors when setting up paired placements.**

- Ensure that you have a clear, precise understanding of best practice in paired placements and ensure that this understanding is shared with all participating mentors and trainees.
- Ensure guidance materials for school mentors and trainees explain the concept of paired placements in a simple, clear way.
- Develop activities at the beginning of the academic year that encourage and give practice in collaborative ways of working.
- Ensure that training in classroom observation includes the element of sensitive feedback and a professional approach.
- Have clear criteria for pairing trainees so that compatibility may be assured and be clear to both the trainees and the school mentors.
- Give clear guidance on how to establish constructive relationships before the placement begins.
- Create a culture of peer feedback before the placement begins. Explain why and how peer feedback can be useful.
- Ensure mentors are fully trained and aim to develop high quality collaboration. Ensure protocols are established with mentors when unbalanced pairings exist or when one trainee gains a post within the placement school.

- Guidance needs to be produced for situations where a pair’s relationships break down irreparably and they need to be ‘de-coupled’.

From the range of data gathered from the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews with trainees points of advice have been compiled as shown in Figure 3. These points form part of the materials now distributed to schools that are working with paired placements.

- Figure 3 Advice from trainees to school mentors working with paired placements.**
- Treat trainees as individuals not one pair
  - Be sensitive about criticising or praising one trainee in front of the other
  - Do ensure each trainee has time as classroom support assistant/back-up teacher
  - Beware of team teaching!
  - Give each trainee at least one ‘topic’ they have to teach on their own.
  - Timetable one specific joint planning period for trainees to work together
  - Give specific advice individually and more general advice together
  - Try not to show you have a ‘favourite!’

The lack of mentors’ understanding about the activities that paired trainees should be engaged in showed the need to describe best practice and timetable models such as that in Figure 4. In this example two trainees are expected to have the equivalent of one and a half, rather than two, timetables and it sets clear expectations as to who is responsible for each class and what any supporting role might involve. At the next level mentors would advise trainees on what the support role might be. For example, it may involve the support trainee working with selected pupils with specific learning needs, helping with behaviour and classroom management or being a non-participant observer, monitoring particular aspects of the lesson such as how the trainee involves all pupils in the lesson. One trainee said of her support role *‘it helped me get to know SEN pupils (pupils with special educational needs) and what they could do.’* Another, recognising the role that teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff increasingly play in English classrooms said *‘by being one, it taught me what I need to know to work with teaching assistants in the future’*.

**Figure 4 Sample timetable for a paired placement in geography.**

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Monday	7Y Settlements (teaching on own)			7F Settlements (Act as Teacher Support)	Training meeting with Geography Mentor with other trainee
Tuesday		12 A level Urban Issues (With head of department) *	10C Globalisation (Act as Teacher Support)		10A Hydrology (teaching on own)
Wednesday	PSHE with form (sometimes lead)	8X Population (teaching on own)		Weekly Professional Studies meeting with school senior mentor and Trainees in other subjects and from other providers of ITE.	

Thursday	10A Hydrology (teaching on own)		Time set aside for coursework tasks		
Friday	10C Globalisation (Act as Teacher Support)	7D Settlements (Other trainee acts as support teacher)		9D Hazards (Support teacher for other trainee)	9X Hazards (teaching on own)
* In this A level lesson the trainee will plan and teach episodes and occasional whole lessons and mark some pieces of work. The trainee will plan and be involved in the teaching of a fieldwork day.					

## Conclusions

From both questionnaires and interviews it was clear that paired placements brought numerous benefits to trainees as well as to other stakeholders but that a significant number of issues need to be addressed to maximize the experience for all. It is clear that work in our current school partnership is not yet sufficiently well defined nor are university tutors and school mentors sufficiently clear about how they can be used creatively and effectively. Sorrensen et al, (2002) identified a similar lack of training throughout the partnerships they investigated as well as a lack of evaluative practice.

If paired placements are to increase and perhaps to become the expected norm then clearly there is work to do in promoting the opportunities and benefits that they bring. One reason this is necessary is that most mentors were not themselves trained through collaborative practice and so have fixed views about how much time a trainee needs to teach, and teach alone, before they are equipped for the 'real' job. A second reason is that because there are potential issues with paired placements, mentors must be trained to deal with them and in particular to be proactive in fostering good working relations between the two trainees. This might involve celebrating differences between their ways of working or setting up personalised tasks or situations where individual learning goals might be different for each of the pair.

In a minority of departments the trainees had a predominantly separate experience; working independently within a department and having separate mentors and training sessions. Any collaboration is then limited to discussion of planning and sharing of resources. Sometimes this may be for good reason. In one case two trainees had a personality clash and it was decided to treat them as separate single placements.

The research showed that where the joint placement worked well, trainees collaborated in many aspects of their work, often adopted peer-coaching skills and refined their observation and feedback skills. One mentor commented that the pair had continued to discuss the whole range of professional practice throughout the placement and this included *'chat about pupil behaviour, managing class resources, pupils with particular learning issues and the extent to which the pupils had understood (the topic).'* Another mentor commented that *'the trainees took more risks than I think they would have done on their own.'* Another trainee said, *'in one thinking skills activity the other trainee was there to help out and they planned it really carefully and then I heard them talking about it way after the lesson, and the day, had finished!'* Such practice usually happened in

departments and schools where the culture was described as one of learning, collaboration and open dialogue and the trainees were encouraged to work in this way.

### **Next Steps.**

The research identified mutual support at a practical and emotional level as most valued by trainees and further work is likely into how this peer-coaching might be developed. It may be difficult for trainees and even mentors to identify whether a higher level of professional dialogue is taking place or whether lesson planning is more thorough or ideas generation more prolific or creative. Greater in-depth research and analysis of trainees working together from the start to the end of a practical teaching experience is needed and with adequate training either mentors or the students themselves (using action research procedures) may be best placed to do this. For the next stage in the research I aim to find situations in which this can happen through identifying mentors who have the knowledge, experience and time to enable it to take place.

This research has shown that if we are to continue to promote paired placements within the Institute of Education's geography PGCE course and on the PGCE course as a whole, there is clearly more work to be done. The training and preparation of university tutors, school mentors and trainees for paired placements is crucial and best practice has not yet been identified and spread to all. There is a need to learn from schools and departments where best practice takes place, such as those that form part of learning communities and learning networks. (Senge 1990) While there are many partnership schools that value and use initial teacher education as part of whole school improvement plans, our partnership hasn't the spare capacity to de-select those that don't. Promoting paired placements may therefore help to build capacity by placing more trainees in quality schools but this research suggests that it can also be an effective means of peer support and an additional tool for trainees in weaker school placements.

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